

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI GENOVA

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne

Dottorato di Ricerca in Digital Humanities

Tecnologie digitali, arti, lingue, culture e comunicazione

Curriculum di Linguaggi, Letterature, Culture Straniere e Tecnologie

GSD 10/ANGL-01 Anglistica e Anglo Americanistica

SSD ANGL-01/A Letteratura Inglese

Ciclo XXXVI

TESI DI DOTTORATO

THE NEW DIGITAL AVANT-GARDE

CURRENT POSTCOLONIAL MIGRATION NARRATIVES

Candidata: Maria Festa

Tutor: Prof.ssa Carmen Concilio

Anni Accademici 2021/2022/2023

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	ii-xix
1.1 Note About the Citation Style	xx
2 Postcolonial Digital Humanities as Contemporary Manifestos	1
3 The Literary/Digital Case of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	
Algorithm # 1: From Blogging in the Novel to the Weblog	21
3.1 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: A Digital Celebrity	22
3.2 Contextualising <i>Americanah</i> and the Blog	38
3.3 Overturning the Canon: Blogging the Novel	54
3.4 The Digital Storyline	77
4 The Digital/Literary Case of Reni Eddo-Lodge	
Algorithm # 2: From Blog to One Million Copies-worth of Essays	89
4.1 Reni Eddo-Lodge: A Digital Native	90
4.2 From Digital to Print Media: A Quantum Leap	101
5 The Literary/Digital Case of Warsan Shire	
Algorithm # 3: From one Short Story Published to Video Collage to Published Poetry	115
5.1 Warsan Shire: A Digital Poet	116
5.2 Contextualising “Home” in the Digital Environment	125
5.3 The Video Collage as “Digital Storytelling”	134
6 The Digital/Literary Case of the “Refugee Tales” Project	
Algorithm # 4: From the Website to “Walks in Solidarity” to Published Tales	152
6.1 The “Refugee Tales” Project on the Web	153
6.2 Crossing Digital and Political Borders	161
6.3 The Published Storytelling from DigiLit to the Page	180
7 Conclusion	192
8 Works cited	202

1 Introduction

This work is a study of current migration narratives within the disciplines of Anglophone Postcolonial Literature and Digital Humanities. Global culture, the proliferation and pervasiveness of telecommunication technologies and new media, particularly the Internet, have substantially affected the act of narrating. The replacement of traditional written language as the primary means of conveying narrative and storytelling is a distinctive feature in the examples selected for this research. The four case studies are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013); Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017); Warsan Shire's "Home" (2011, 2016, 2017, 2022) and the narratives produced within the "Refugee Tales" project. These literary and digital projects might well be considered avant-garde manifestos against racism, in favour of gender equality and female empowerment and promoting hospitality towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. They all contribute to a redefinition and acknowledgement of the Other.

On this premise, this study sheds light on the evolution of stylistic and writing techniques in Anglophone Postcolonial Literature over the last two decades, and how these narratives have combined and incorporated existing and emerging models of multimodal textual forms along with the interaction with multimedia content. In this particular case, this work deals with current migration narratives produced in English with a specific focus on racism, gender and or refugees' and asylum seekers' narrations.

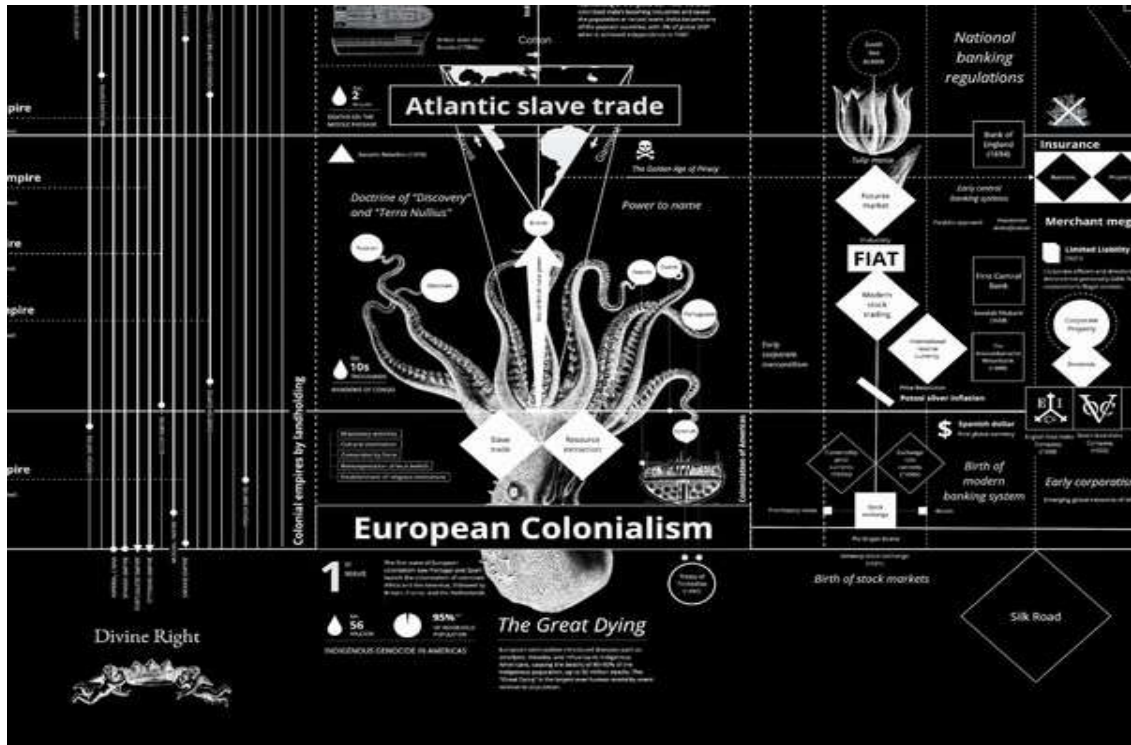
The critical and theoretical investigation is based on the connection and interaction among current migration narratives in English and Digital Humanities. As digital technologies have penetrated and affected the scholarly activity of the Humanities, it was therefore considered appropriate to begin with historical and socio-cultural details useful to illustrate the connection, intertwining and interaction among Anglophone Postcolonial Literature and Digital Humanities discourses.

Chapter 2 "Postcolonial Digital Humanities as Contemporary Manifestos" focuses on the twentieth-century historical and socio-cultural context. Australian scholar in political philosophy, author of works on postcolonialism and political theory, Duncan Ivison has contributed to *Encyclopædia Britannica* with his reflections on British and European political and economic developments in the last century. The aftermath of

World War I brought about significant and global consequences. From a general, historical perspective, the last century was defined and shaped by persistent ideas about empire, civilisation and race; by the spread of decolonisation and economic nationalism across the globe; by new ideas about human rights; by the radical transformation of attitudes towards new and old models of international co-operation; and, ultimately, by the mass movement of people.

In regard to the spread of decolonisation, the Ghanaian-American literary critic Ato Quayson reminds us that postcolonialism “has to be seen [...] in terms of a long process” (2). Furthermore, in the wake of the independence gained from the British Empire, former subjugated peoples realised that their histories, past events and cultures had been excluded from the mainstream narration of Western History. The long process of decolonisation also implies a comprehensive and less Eurocentric understanding of History which includes the presence of voices that had been absent, and, as put forth by Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), relieving “the dead” from the burden of their unfair fate (4). The wholistic, non-linear understanding of History offered by the German philosopher, is helpful in perceiving the connection among Postcolonial and Digital Humanities studies.

Visual evidence of this connection can be found for instance in one of the maps produced for “Calculating Empires: A Genealogy of Technology and Power, 1500-2025”, an art installation that took place in Milan (November 23, 2023-January 29, 2024) at Fondazione Prada:



Kate Crawford e Vladan Joler, map extracts from Calculating Empires | Courtesy Osservatorio Prada

The exhibition was conceived by Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler and charted “our technological present by depicting how power, European expansion and technology have been intertwined since 1500” (www.fondazioneprada.org/project/calculating-empires).

In a podcast “Calculating Empires”, released for the occasion, Crawford and Joler as curators of the art installation describe their project as follows:

this is a visual manifesto about the fact that empires have always used technology to centralise power and we have seen that pattern over and over again in different ways and different locations with different communities (00:15 - 00:37) [...] the history of technology is the history of empire and the history of empire is the history of us. (02:01-02:09)

In addition, in the video uploaded on the Fondazione Prada YouTube page, Crawford expands her reflections, asserting that

Calculating Empires is a visual Manifesto, we are offering people a map to help translate, to help locate, where they are in these systems and what is happening at this deeper level [...] beginning in the 1500s we see this extraordinary interlacing of the ways that empires have used technology to centralise power. For us the question here is not what kind of worlds can technology build, but, what kind of

world do we want to live in? [...] this is a question of nature, humanity, and how we deal with technology. (00:23 - 01:10)

Technology in terms of the application of science, especially to industrial or commercial objectives, was largely used by British colonisers during their colonial past. When, for example, the Jamaican born Marxist sociologist and political activist, Stuart Hall, reminds his audience he is “the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea [and] thousands of others beside [him] are [...] the cup of tea itself” (78),¹ he is referring to the invisibilisation of local populations and denouncing the exploitive practices of economic production that employ the tools of industrial, technological progress to exponentially increase the harvesting, mass-production, manufacture, transportation of goods for the exclusive benefit of a faraway metropolitan élite.²

Technology in terms of representing the group of electronic or digital products and systems can and is also being used in response to the consequences of colonialism along with restoring human agency to all those populations that have been silenced and excluded by the mainstream narration of Western History.

It is to a large extent this intertwining and cooperation among Postcolonial and Digital Humanities discourses that confers distinguishing qualities to the literary works selected for this study. Relying on and exploiting the potentialities offered by up-to-date technologies and new media, the literary productions explored in this work have trespassed and expanded the traditional literary canon; the boundaries of writing are being retraced by an emerging, evolving network of multiple relationships via the World Wide Web. Through practices of taking a stand and expressing opposition to injustice through forms of activism and artivism, current migration narratives have given rise to a digital avant-garde postcolonial literature.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*; Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*; Warsan Shire’s “Home” and the narrative produced within the “Refugee Tales” project are well-known and popular examples of digital avant-garde literature and artivism. Their analysis focuses on the narratology –

¹ In his essay “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” (1991) Hall focuses chiefly on the question of identity. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned metaphor simultaneously reveals connections among the application of science, especially to industrial or commercial objectives, and colonial practices of exploitations for British economic growth and political prestige.

² A great deal of literary production of the second half of the last century clearly denounces these practices of exploitation and simultaneous control of subjugated peoples.

qualitative and comparative – of such forms of “augmented” texts by adopting and adapting a metaphor elaborated by a Russian group of scholars in the field of film studies. In their case the so-called ‘algorithm’³ serves to synthesise and visualise various possibilities and combinations of transposition from literary text to cinematographic production and vice versa (Zinnatullina *et al.* 357-369).

In their essay on “Literature and Cinema: Ways of Interaction in the 21st Century”, Zulfia Zinnatullina, Diana Davletbaeva and Reseda Mukhametshina discuss and stress the interdependence existing between literature and cinema as well as cinema and literature. The three Russian scholars sustain that “today any form of art does not develop separately they interpenetrate, influence each other.” According to these critics, the twenty-first century may be envisioned as a breeding ground that enables new ways of interactions (357).

Until the last century, cinema played a minor role when compared to literature in the sense that while literary works were regularly adapted for cinematic versions, cinematic productions did not have a significant impact on the creation of literary texts. Consequently, what they call “algorithm of interaction” could be expressed only in the sequence of “literary work-scenario-screen version.” Nevertheless, present-day technologies facilitate “cinema [...] setting new trends in literature” thus expanding the algorithm of interaction. Because of a “convergence culture” (Perdikaki qtd. in Zinnatullina *et al.* 360) which is based on circulation and remediation of texts, images, media and the concomitant communicated messages, a novel can be created on the basis of some elements of the movie. This is the case of the Harry Potter film series based on J.K. Rowling’s literary production. In point of fact, only the first novel was at first published and later adapted for the cinematic version. In regard to the following novels, “the moment of a release of the first movie – *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (2001) – coincided with the time of writing of the fifth book – *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003)”. In this novel, some minor characters are depicted according to the actors’ physical features who took part in the first movie. These transpositions generate a new algorithm: “literary work – scenario – screen version – literary work”.

³ In this study the term “algorithm” is employed and understood as a string of changes a literary text goes through to achieve a certain goal by the agency of new media and the Internet.

Likewise, television series, such as for instance *Lost in Austen* based on Jane Austen's novels, transfer the main idea on the screen simultaneously adding something new to the narrative that is published after the broadcasting of the show. This sequence of transpositions gives rise to another algorithm: "scenario – movie – literary work" (358-360).

Moreover, Zinnatullina, Davletbaeva and Mukhametshina introduce a further form of interaction called "hybrid", as it often is a combination of film, literature, screenplay, and photography (Van Parys qtd. in Zinnatullina *et. al* 362).

In this study, in a similar manner, the algorithm has been modelled to chart a variety of transpositions among a combination of digital media and Internet platforms in relation to recent postcolonial migration narratives. Specifically, the algorithm has to be understood as a metaphor employed to follow and trace the transpositions that the above-mentioned literary works have gone through.

The third chapter focuses on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, whose novel is explored through the algorithm: **Blogging in the Novel versus the Weblog**. In truth, in the field of postcolonial literature, this is not the only novel that introduces and embeds digital writing. Evidence of these multimodal textualities can be found, for instance, in Zena El Khalil's *Beirut, I love you* (2009),⁴ in A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* (2016), in Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2020), among others. Nonetheless, *Americanah* differentiates itself from these novels in that one of the blogs contained in the narration has crossed print media to find new life on Adichie's website. The Nigerian-American author relies on cross-media communication strategies to play the role of the native informant and fulfil the role of "the novelist as a teacher" following Chinua Achebe's path.

Adichie's third novel chiefly deals with the concepts of home and migration in this globalised world. The notion of globalisation has been introduced and explored relying on Toni Morrison's and Arjun Appadurai's reflections and theories. In 2016, during a lecture delivered at the University of Harvard, Morrison shares with her audience her reflections on History emphasising the hold it still has on the black community

⁴ Cf. Concilio, Carmen. "New York: A Woman's Dream". Edited by Tiziana Caponio *et al.* *World Wide Women: Globalizzazione, Generi, Linguaggi*, Vol. 3, CIRSDe, 2011, pp. 77-85.

Concilio, Carmen. "Riscritture del Mediterraneo: Beirut I love You: A Memoir di Zena El Khalil". Edited by Cavone and Pontradolfo. *La scrittura romanzesca nella letteratura inglese*, Longo, 2012, pp. 55-67.

worldwide. She argues that over the centuries the Western world has been carrying out forms of political and economic control of large parts of the world including domination over African peoples. After the fall of the British Empire, and in spite of changes in Western political conditions, forms of control and pressure did not disappear, and Morrison traces them in the ongoing form of control known and understood as globalisation (96). Morrison's analysis of globalisation functions as a seismograph that reveals and records the real implications concealed behind the deceptive idea of an "historically progressive, enhancing, unifying, utopian and destined" (96) order which in reality masks unbalanced relationship between the global North and the global South.

To some extent, Morrison's view on globalisation reflects Arjun Appadurai's theory on the same phenomenon. The Indian-American anthropologist argues that the one interconnected, metaphorical global village, as epiphanically envisioned by Marshall McLuhan, is primarily disjunctive and depicts

the world we live in now [as] schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other. (27)

According to Appadurai, human agglomerations are now occurring virtually, often independent of a shared physical location: "we are now aware that with media, each time we are tempted to speak of the global village, we must be reminded that media create communities with no sense of place" (29). From an anthropological perspective, as extrapolated from Appadurai's theory on globalisation, this "no sense of place" is accompanied by a diminishing, even an absence of, a sense of belonging or the emotive bonds and attachments human beings develop or experience in particular locations and environments, at scales ranging from home to nation. This development of location-removed communities made possible by electronic and digital technology that affects current cultural processes is counterbalanced by the agency of "imaginary landscapes" (31).

These "imaginary landscapes" can be found in Adichie's *Americanah*, especially in the narration related to Obinze, the young Nigerian who envisages and refers to America as the land of opportunities and the place where he earnestly believes he is meant to be. The theme of "illegal migration" is explored in Obinze's time in the United

Kingdom, a time dominated by fear, of being repatriated because of his status as illegal immigrant and his increasingly desperate efforts to make his move a success. To Obinze the United Kingdom should have been the shortcut to his ultimate goal: a life in America.

The female character in the novel – Ifemelu – manages to spend thirteen years in the land of opportunities. In the U.S., Ifemelu discovers and experiences racism and discrimination. In order to assert her voice in the white American community she starts “an anonymous blog called *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*” (Adichie 4 emphasis in the original). In this virtual space, she can “raise and amplify” (Dunford and Jenkins 7) her voice and analyse the ways in which her posts affect her digital audience. Digital stories can be used as advocacy tools for a cause (McPherson 137), and Ifemelu’s blog becomes a virtual container that holds open questions and potential suggestions to address racial biases affecting U.S. society. However, the American blog proves to be a failure, in terms of participatory communication as the blogger Ifemelu does not engage in digital conversation. This sort of detachment is experienced also on an emotional level as she does not manage to find a balance, or at least to negotiate an acceptable middle-ground between African and American culture. Social media and Nigerian websites fuel her desire to move back home where she belongs. In Nigeria she starts a new blog: “*The Small Redemptions of Lagos*” with a “dreamy photograph of an abandoned colonial house on its masthead” (Adichie 519). Differently from her American blogposts, her Nigerian blogposts observe everyday Lagosian life. In contrast with her American blog, Ifemelu not only reads her Lagos digital audience’s responses, but she intervenes and edits their replies, as the narrating voice informs readers. The “dreamy photograph” referred to in *Americanah* is a real photograph and is visible on Adichie’s website. What is more, the author’s official website provides a link to “IFEMELU’S BLOG”. It is as if the character has become a living individual who has continued her blogging in the author’s digital space, or it is as if Adichie has identified with Ifemelu and decides to continue her digital writing.

Adichie can also be regarded as a digital celebrity. Since the early two-thousands, she has been taking advantage of the possibilities offered by different social media platforms and the Internet. On the YouTube platform, videos about her are numerous, be they about speeches delivered at TED events, or lectures delivered at prestigious North

American universities, or interviews, or appearances on television shows. On almost any occasion, Adichie plays the role of “the novelist as a teacher.” The content of these videos deals with questions and concerns about racism, discrimination, feminism, universal fair and just treatment. While watching Adichie on a screen, the audience clearly perceive her as being at ease in front of the camera; whereas her carefully chosen outfits attest her Nigerian-American identity.

As an indication of a “convergence culture” (Perdikaki qtd. in Zinnatullina *et al.* 360), *Americanah* has become the source of inspiration for Ayoinmotion – song writer – whose music video *Americanah (Ifemelu)* expands Adichie’s narrative from Obinze’s point of view. Furthermore, in late 2016, American producer Dennis Schmitz along with screenwriter and film director, Uche Aguh adapted Adichie’s novel for a short film. They uploaded on the YouTube platform what they define as a concept trailer or a three-minute video that advertises and anticipates the 2017 full concept film, which has never been produced.

The fourth chapter focuses on Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, whose collection of essays is explored through the algorithm: **Blog versus One Million Copy Collection of Essays.**

Born to a Nigerian mother, the London-based journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge’s digital activity, similarly to Adichie, can be traced to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Analogous to Adichie, Eddo-Lodge employs the latest social media tools to give herself a greater presence in the digital sphere becoming in turn a well-known author on the Internet. Since the age of nineteen, Eddo-Lodge has been communicating and relating first-hand experiences and political discourses on the Internet through her website, her blog, and her social media accounts. Differently from Ifemelu – Adichie’s character – who started her blog with the intent to fill a cultural void and feel included in the host country, Eddo-Lodge generated her blog in her home country focusing on feminism and exposing structural racism and thus engaging in digital conversations with her audience. Also, unlike Ifemelu’s American fictional blog, which offered commentary and the opportunity for discussion among the blog’s readers, Eddo-Lodge’s blog is a filter-type web page that directs her audience to her Instagram and X(Twitter) accounts as well as to other blogs and websites on the Internet, generating in this manner a hypertext discourse.

The Turkish scholar in media and literature Melih Kökcü adapts Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere to the digital environment. The blogosphere allows participation in public debates to all kinds of citizens, who can now access social platforms along with the World Wide Web and find their voices within these spaces (1).

These public discussions that occur online exist by means of digital media in written form, and because of this fact, José Ángel García Landa defines them as "networked literature" (11). The Spanish senior lecturer in English argues that "there are many ways in which the specificity of the Internet as a medium may develop new literary genres" (11). Internet as a medium also allows participation in digital writing, and the product of these endeavours are defined by García Landa as "collaborative intertext" (11) that do not occur only in written public discussions. He expands his reflections stating that blogs still represent, more than twenty years after their first appearance on the web, a virtual space that hosts products of collaborative intertext and

in this sense the blogs provide the best example of Roland Barthes' dichotomies in "From Work to Text" and "The Death of the Author" [...] Blogs work through references to posts in other blogs, through the exchange, referencing, commentary and transformation of information, not so much through supposed originality in authorship: and what is paradoxical is that there is probably just as much originality in blog writing as in any other kind of writing. (12)

As inferred from García Landa's statement, in opposition to Barthes's enunciation on the death of the author, as soon as the blogpost is posted online, it establishes a close connection between the author/creator and the blogger's general audience, a sort of affiliation that encourages a stable relationship and the phenomenon of followers, or in other words, a manner to attract and build blog readers' loyalty. In addition, blogs represent also an example of Henry Jenkins' participatory culture, and Eddo-Lodge's blog is clear evidence of this.

Eddo-Lodge's widely viewed blogpost "Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race" attracted the publishing industry. She shifted her digital social engagement and writing from the blogosphere to print media to great success as her collection of essays sold one million copies. Eddo-Lodge's blog represents an interesting example of the interconnections among traditional and current forms of literature that are influenced and made possible by the pervasiveness of the Internet in our daily life.

Although the title of the post “Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race” is still visible on her website, the text itself is not available, so it is difficult to verify if the printed Bloomsbury version is completely identical in length, phrasing or structure to the original. This is evidence of the feature of ephemerality that characterises the digital environment.

The definition of blog and its multiple functions are discussed by the American political theorist Jodi Dean in her work *Blog Theory* (2010). Dean ascribes to blogging the features of networked communications, democratic practices, and, for those blogs created with commercial purposes in mind, a capacity for influencing consumer choices.

In addition, blogs can also be containers of digital activism, as put forth by Brian Alleyne in his work *Radicals Against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics* (2002). The English scholar in social anthropology and communication acknowledges the crucial role played by new, advanced technologies in current social movements. Evidence of the latter is manifested in Eddo-Lodge’s blogposts written to denounce and take a stand against the American police officers who brutally assassinated George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

A time *minutiae* that pools Eddo-Lodge and the author analysed in the following chapter is their being digital natives. The American writer Marc Prensky coined the term “digital natives” (2) in his 2001 article, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants.” For digital natives new technologies represent a real extension of their social sphere with which they can connect to the world, share their experiences and daily moments as well as operate at various levels both at workplace and on their own time to the point they rely on the Internet as the main means of establishing relationships. On the Internet and with the Internet everything happens in a multitasking mode. This means that different tasks and or activities can be done concurrently, often collaboratively with others, thanks to an ever-growing catalogue of user-friendly software and applications. It is possible to listen to music while surfing the Internet and enjoying multimedia content such as videos and photographs. Furthermore, one can download a movie or a book or contribute to social media traffic by posting photographs, short videos, thoughts and simultaneously chatting with followers, and this contribution can occur literally almost everywhere. It follows that for digital natives interacting with new media, or the latest advanced technologies, is natural, spontaneous and casual (Prensky 2-3).

Prensky sets 1985 as the year of the great technological breakthrough when a large diffusion of personal computers with a graphic interface and Windows operating systems started. As a consequence, 1985 marked the beginning of information technology that has radically contributed to societal changes, lifestyles, influenced human beings' relationship with their peers and transformed behaviours and values. Digital natives live harmoniously and symbiotically with new technologies, they master their tools and methods and immediately adopt anything new that is placed on the market: they have effortlessly switched from iPods to smartphones, from tablets to augmented reality headsets, from smart TVs to wearable computers (Prensky 4-6).

The fifth chapter focuses on Warsan Shire's "Home" that is analysed through the algorithm: **Published Short Story versus Video Collage versus Published Poetry**.

Born to Somali parents in Kenya, she migrated with her family to the United Kingdom when she was one year old. Shire embodies the typical digital native citizen, which is another way of saying that all details on her private, public and social life are traceable on the author's social media accounts, interviews given to international online magazines, videos posted on the Internet platforms and/or podcasts. Like Eddo-Lodge, Shire engages in political discourse on the issues of migrations and gender inequalities.

Shire's digital, social and political engagement does not exempt her from exploring alternative ways of storytelling. Her literary production has been composed for a variety of media, ranging from print distribution to audio recordings to online circulation. In late 2013, the popularity she had gained on the Internet led to her appointment as "London's Youth Poet Laureate." Shire relies on poetry to raise awareness on matters of migration, war, trauma, patriarchal violence, racism and language from a feminist point of view.

Her text "Home" has gone through different adaptations over a span of time of ten years. It was originally included in her first published pamphlet *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (2011), under the title *Conversation About Home (at the Deportation Centre)*; in 2017, "Home" was elaborated by a group of YouTubers and uploaded on the YouTube platform as a video collage;⁵ in 2022 it was included in her first collection of

⁵ By video collage it is meant a series of drawings, animations, music, and pre-recorded poetry reading put together in a visually way.

poems – *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* – under the same title but, again, with a different structure.

“Home” is an obvious example of the junction between literature and new media. This observation finds evidence in *Digital Storytelling, Format and Content* (2017) edited by Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins. According to the two media scholars, the above-mentioned junction involves storytelling and technology that meet and subsequently point in a new direction enabling authors to craft personal stories using imagery, text and the spoken word (4).

The video collage “Home” is a spoken narrative which is less rigorously marked by formal poetic conventions of meter and line construction. Nonetheless, this text relies on counterpoising images and words. These are jointly employed, in a participatory visual-auditory act of narrating conveying the same, but amplified, message that can be heard and seen on the screen of an electronic device repeatedly. These features make “Home” an example of digital literature.

In his study on *Electronic Literature* (2019), the American, digital artist and scholar of literary and aesthetic studies Scott Rettberg illustrates the difficulties encountered in providing a clear and unambiguous definition of literary works produced in conjunction with new media and advanced technologies after the 1990s. At the end of the last century, the term “electronic literature” started to catch on and circulate. However, as Rettberg points out, the definition is imprecise and general. This difficulty in conferring a fixed and comprehensive definition is chiefly due to always evolving technologies and the speed at which they are replaced. As a consequence, literary works that have just been produced and delivered to an audience in a given moment are likely to become obsolete within a short time rendering categorisation difficult (3-4).

As Rettberg emphasises, “these forms of digital poetry have rich relationships with antecedent movements, particularly those that are concerned with the materiality of the text as image, with the granularity of language, and with the relationship between poetry, sound and music” (118). Due to these features, Shire’s text transformed into a web poem could be viewed as kinetic poetry.

The amplified messages conveyed in the kinetic poetry of “Home” have been analysed from postcolonial and visual-aural perspectives. The audience carefully listening to Shire’s spoken word is able to perceive what Mladen Dolar calls “the drama

of the voice” (28). The images visible on the screen of an electronic device echo, for instance, Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Emmanuel Lévinas’s *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) and *Alterity and Transcendence* (1995). The drawings that accompany Shire’s voice are a reminder of first postcolonial theorisations such as for instance the act of writing back to the Empire.

Shire’s re-elaborated text as a video collage started to circulate among the Italian digital audience after February 26, 2023 and in response to the extreme right parties’ intent to remove protection statuses from national law. A wooden sailing boat carrying migrants to Europe crashed against rocks near the southern Italian coast of Cutro. On that tragic event, more than one hundred people died, including children (Armellini).

The sixth chapter focuses on the “Refugee Tales” project that is analysed through the algorithm: **Website versus “Walks in Solidarity” versus Published Tales.**

Present-day migrations are often characterised by political and or economic crises occurring as a direct result of colonial rule, neo-colonialism, or decolonisation. Mass movements of people that defined and shaped last century are still the main concern in what Ruben Andersson defines as “Fortress Europe” (2) where fences, walls, borders attempt to arouse nationalistic passions against the foreigner or “the Other”.

In this globalised world, the concept of borders, especially from a political perspective are analysed relying on Thomas Nail’s *The Figure of the Migrant* (2015) and *Theory of the Border* (2016).

In 1995, “in response to the UK Immigration Services as it began to detain people at a small holding centre near Gatwick Airport”, was established the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (GDWG). This is an online organization that instantly exhibited its militant and activist agency. The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group is a non-party organization that made itself known chiefly on the Internet and whose well-designed website is a recipient that gathers practical and legal information for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, updated news, links to social media such as Facebook and X (Twitter), along with other helpful contact channels.

The website reflects the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s organisation, their services and ultimately their social and political commitment. The website is a well-functioning example of interactivity and applications of hypermedia. As George P. Landow puts forth, the introduction of the Internet with its “egalitarian chaotic system”

that has also radically reconfigured the cultural construction of learning by freeing readers from a subordinate relation to a particular expert in the field, has empowered users of the Internet both as producers and receivers of digital contents (321).

Over the years, thanks to their website, the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group has managed to reach migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and to support them especially during their time facing detention. On May 25, 2012, Theresa May coined the phrase “hostile environment”, and as she explained, the government’s intent was, and still is, to create in Britain a hostile environment for illegal immigrants.

In 2014, David Herd – poet, professor of modern literature, activist – and Anna Pincus – director of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group – launched a wider campaign in defence of migrants’ rights which is “an outreach project of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group inspired by the experiences of men held in immigration detention at Gatwick and the work of the group in 20 years of visiting” (<https://www.gdwg.org.uk/>).

Herd and Pincus increased the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s commitment to support people affected by immigration detention and expanded the original website by adding a new link to another project of humanitarian activism named “Refugee Tales”, which draws on Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1388) for inspiration. Since 2015, every summer, “walks of solidarity”, as defined by Herd (2016, 133), take place over several days of trekking and telling stories through the English countryside. The storytelling that occurs during the event is then turned into a collection of stories published by Comma Press, a not-for-profit, Manchester based publisher and development agency. Herd and Pincus have so far edited four volumes titled *Refugee Tales* (2016, 2017, 2019, 2021).

Furthermore, in 2018, the “Refugee Tales” project launched a campaign to call for an end to the practice of indefinite detention of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. They produced a video – “The Refugee Tales Statement” – uploaded both on the 28for28.org website (which was created for the occasion) and on the YouTube platform. The video runs two minutes and forty-seven seconds and in this frame of time, well known activist writers and actors who have about five/six seconds each join together to spread the voice of the often-voiceless Others. Concurrently with the launch of the campaign, each day for twenty-eight days a tale was released, posted on their website

whose opening lines read: “Come back each day to hear why the law must change. End indefinite detention.”

These series of digital actions show how the pervasiveness of new media affects storytelling and literature. The synergy involved among disciplines that gives rise to a new, accessible and inclusive literature, which also opens the canon to new forms of writing, is increasingly emphasised in the contemporary phenomenon known as transmedia storytelling. This is a concept coined by media scholar Henry Jenkins. Transmedia storytelling (also known as transmedia narrative or multiplatform storytelling) is the technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies. This concept focuses on how transmedia extends to attract larger audiences (Jenkins 2007).

Migration narratives are rediscovering and exploiting the audible but above all visible dimensions of storytelling. Websites and Internet platforms such as YouTube, for instance, become a safe, welcoming site where migration narratives are delivered by means of visual communication. This visual-digital narration is a manifestation of the German, cultural historian and philosopher Thomas Macho’s ideas on contemporary societies, that were elaborated in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Macho argues that constantly updated technologies have facilitated the shifting into “facial societies” which primarily act through the recognisability and representation of faces (90). The Internet and social media platforms have created a culture of extreme visibility, this means that the human face has an agency and has become a significant interface for human communication.

In response to these arguments, it must be underlined that the four case studies concisely introduced here are certainly open to both a broader postcolonial analysis as well as to the possibility of being explored and discussed separately. However, the main intent of this study is to shed light on the pervasiveness of new media, especially the Internet, and how these media have affected current migration narratives at each stage of their production, distribution, and dissemination.

Taking all of the above into consideration, the choice to focus on *Americanah*, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, “Home” and the “Refugee Tales” project resides in the fact that the works in questions represent a diversity of approaches to the emergence and integration of new communications technologies in

literary texts while continuing to explore themes and concerns that are central to contemporary postcolonial literature. Although, the authors in question have manipulated traditional codified forms of expression to adapt to and/or merge them into digitalised expressive codes, these current migration narratives also mirror two out of three macro-literary genres: prose and poetry. This motivated the order in which they are introduced and analysed in this study. Adichie's novel and Eddo-Lodge's blogpost, which was later published as a collection of essays, demonstrate how the literary genre of prose intermixes with or detaches from or goes in tandem with electronic literature. To a certain degree, "Home" and the "Refugee Tales" project prove the same. They exhibit the versatility of orality, whether it be related to poetry or to storytelling, which is then transcribed in written word or filmed/recorded as a video document. In this sense, "Home" and the "Refugee Tales" project border on performance art. Nevertheless, they cannot be easily reduced to a particular category of creative expression in that they also contain references to literature, film, music and graphic design.

The pervasiveness of new media, especially the Internet, has not only had an impact on current migration narratives in terms of literary production. The virtual space created by digital connectivity offers the opportunity to temporarily erase national borders simultaneously catalysing feelings of belonging and longing for home. This provides in return a sense of digital citizenship at a time when effective citizenship is often denied by European countries. Although, even if only in a virtual and temporary manner, new media can help to restore a sense of humanity, the same digital technologies "also empower surveillance", as postcolonial scholars Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpiani point out, "and the technologically enhanced shading of clear-cut territorial perimeters can very well serve, not a deterritorialization of Europeanness, but rather its coercive reterritorialization" of Europe (2016, 18).

Moreover, this virtual space which functions as the migrant's ephemeral, but inclusive, safe site also simulates a highly sophisticated laboratory for understanding and promoting social and collective engagement. The selected four case studies are also an example of digital activism or a form of activism that uses the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilisation and political action. This is notably evident in the "Refugee Tales" project, for instance, which not only continues to raise awareness of the "hostile environment" policy implemented by the British Conservative Party to deter

immigration into the United Kingdom, but actively campaigns to end indefinite detention for migrants.

As Ponzanesi suggests “digital stories can allow for extensions of performativity and affect as political forces of change: capable of disrupting and resisting norms of whiteness to create alternative realities of everyday multiculturalism detached from racialisation” (2020, xi). The hybrid literary production (printed, digital or both) analysed in the following pages, the multimodal and multimedia storytelling, the growing public awareness, writers’ commitment to disseminate real life experiences along with their criticism of the mainstream narration of mass migration movements, all of these together are features of a fresh, politically and socially active literature, or to put it in other words, the new digital avant-garde literature.

1.1 Note About the Citation Style

In regard to the citation style used in this work, quotations and explicit references to a source for substantiation rely on the MLA 9 format that follows the author-page method of in-text citation:

- the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation or paraphrase is taken appear in the text, and a complete reference appears on the Works Cited page. If the author's name appears in the sentence, then, only the page number(s) appear in the parentheses;
- in the case of different works by the same author, then the year of publication followed by the page number(s) appear in the parentheses;
- in-text citations for print sources with known author like volumes, magazines, scholarly journal articles, and newspapers, a signal word or phrase (usually the author's name) and a page number are provided. If the signal word/phrase are provided in the sentence, they are not included in the parenthetical citation;
- in the case of an indirect source, this appears as follows: (qtd. in author's name page number) to indicate the source that has been actually consulted;
- in the case of electronic sources, a signal word or phrase (usually the author's name) are provided in the sentence. If these sources are not numbered, then only the author's last name appears in the parentheses;
- in the case of YouTube videos, podcasts and websites, a signal word or phrase (usually the title of the video or the title of the podcast) are provided in the sentence, whereas in the parentheses appears the time code.

On the "Works Cited" page entries are provided as follows:

- Last name, Name. *Work's title*, Publishing House, year of publication.
- Last name, Name. "Title of the essay". *Volume's title*, Publishing House, year of publication, page numbers.
- Last name, Name. "Title of the essay". *Title of the Journal*, volume, number, month and year of publication, page numbers.
- Last name, Name. "Title of the article". *Title of the online magazine*, year of publication, website link or url link, last access date.
- Last name, Name. *Title of the video*. website link.

2 Postcolonial Digital Humanities as Contemporary Manifestos

“The more we know – or care to know – about those who are not us, the more we will come to know about ourselves.”

(Caryl Phillips, qtd. in Ledent 16)

SKETCHY HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For a general, Western audience in the habit of regarding history as a record of events following one another in chronological order, postcolonialism is “the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism” (Iverson), and in this mainstream visualised sequence of events, the historical period in question covers a span of time of approximately fifty years of the last century. Historians identify 1947 – which marks the independence of India – as the beginning of the end of the British Empire; whereas its final stage is associated with 1997 when the handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to the People’s Republic of China occurred. Based on a rough calculation, it took Great Britain around three hundred years to develop into the British Empire but only fifty years for that empire to fall. The British Empire facilitated the spread of British technology, commerce, system of government and the English language throughout its colonies and domains. Imperial hegemony did contribute to the extraordinary economic growth of Great Britain and gave it the role of first world power until the aftermath of World War I, which drastically changed the European political landscape and enabled the emergence of other world powers. Subsequently, the outbreak of World War II expedited the fall of the British Empire. Some factors that led to its progressive decline include the considerable human and economic effort imposed on colonies by the United Kingdom during the entire 1939-1945 war in its continuous need of military age men and resources to maintain the war. Moreover, the values the United Kingdom wanted to safeguard entering the war – that is to say, freedom and democracy – were very often not granted to the local populations of the English colonies themselves. In this manner, resentment towards British rule gave rise to movements demanding autonomy and self-rule, which sometimes resulted in real wars of independence and civil wars (Iverson).

Nevertheless, what happened after the fall of the British Empire cannot be understood as a neatly laid out series of events arranged and displayed along a timeline. This understanding of History does not consider the cause and effect relationship existing among occurrences that took place at different times, in different locations and seemingly without any discernible connection. Even though providing an authentic representation of the past through a comprehensive work of reconstruction proves to be challenging and simultaneously debatable as different systems of thought are involved in the discussion, for a Western audience investigating the past based upon an uncustomary practice, taking into consideration moment of crises, ruptures, fragmentation and discontinuities instead of simple linearity, is indeed important and crucial to fully understand their present-day political, economic, social implications, and to some extent to encompass current migrations from countries whose past is marked by colonisation. In the attempt to demonstrate how past events, not necessarily arranged in order of time of occurrence, influence former colonised peoples' lives, it will be useful to revisit alternative ideas about history, such as the reflections developed by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin in 1940.

Although the entirety of human History can never be thoroughly explained and investigated in a single essay, Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* reveals far reaching patterns that are critical in understanding the past and which are particularly relevant to the analyses put forth later in this study.

The historical context played a crucial role in Benjamin's reflections, as his essay on the philosophy of history composed of twenty numbered paragraphs or theses was written before fleeing to Spain, fearing Nazi capture due to his Jewishness. At that point of his life, as argued by the American scholar in philosophy Alfredo Lucero-Montaña, Benjamin "could no longer be convinced that every historical event derives from a *linear* cause and effect relationship, and that all events together constitute a progressive, continuous motion" (125-6, emphasis mine).

Following his intuition, Benjamin puts forth a complex notion of the subject in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. To begin with, Benjamin compares history to a chess game:

I

It is well-known that an automaton once existed, which was so constructed that it could counter any move of a chess-player with a counter-move, and thereby assure itself of victory in the match. (1)

In order to win the match, as proposed by Lucero-Montaña, players must “have a certain conception of the present that allows [them] to generate an interrelationship between history and politics” (129) as suggested in the following theses:

VI

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. [...] The only writer of history with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this: that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.

VII

Those who currently rule are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious. [...] Whoever until this day emerges victorious, marches in the triumphal procession in which today’s rulers tread over those who are sprawled underfoot. The spoils are, as was ever the case, carried along in the triumphal procession. They are known as the cultural heritage. (3-4)

Bearing in mind Benjamin’s metaphor for History as a chess game, in the above passages the author seems to divide human beings into distinct opposing camps: “the enemy” or those who rule and occupy a commanding position and continue being “victorious”, and those condemned to defeat whose losing condition affects their descendants as well.

In this context, Benjamin’s metaphor may be a reference to the relationship between the coloniser: “the enemy [who] has not ceased to be victorious”, and the colonised: “that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious.” As will be explored later in this study, current migrations are one of the consequences of colonialism. Despite its official end, 1997 as recorded by historians, colonialism or neo colonialism still exercises political and economic control on previous colonised territories and human beings.

Later, Benjamin progressively manifests a darker vision:

IX

There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair [...], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm. (4)

Setting aside the religious slant that may arise from this passage as proposed among other reflections by the author in the last lines of his work “It is well-known that the Jews were forbidden to look into the future” (9), the German philosopher depicts history as “one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble.” The loose mass of fragments laid on top of each other is so unusually great in size that stands in the way of relieving “the dead” from the burden of their unfair fate, and unfailingly attracts “the Angel of History” to the “storm”, i.e. the future. This image typifies Benjamin’s disquieting perception of the past and represents the dreadful bond History is held in: thinking over the horror of the past, forced into the future, prevented from going back in time and fixing “what has been smashed” to allow “the dead” to win the match.

All the same, a glimmer of turning the tables on the victors of History seems to emerge in his last theses. In order to achieve victory, as Lucero-Montaña, emphasises, Benjamin “adopts a conception of history as discontinuity, as interruption” (130):

XV

The consciousness of exploding the continuum of history is peculiar to the revolutionary classes in the moment of their action. The Great Revolution introduced a new calendar. The day on which the calendar started function[ing] as a historical time-lapse camera. And it is fundamentally the same day which, in the shape of holidays and memorials, always returns. The calendar does not therefore count time like clocks. They are monuments of a historical awareness. (7)

Alluding to the French Revolution, Benjamin introduces the idea “of a historical awareness” involving remembering those individuals who took part in past major events but were defeated and unacknowledged. In this way, as the Italian scholar in philosophy

Andrea Raciti points out, the “calendar” restores “to the ‘nameless’ to whose memory the historical construction is dedicated the symbolic dignity of the name” (166), and giving recognition for their actions represents a first step of asserting their existence and their place in History.

Benjamin’s defeated and nameless human beings bear some resemblance to the subjects and characters disclosed, analysed, depicted and narrated in postcolonial criticism and literary production. In order to overcome the incomplete and/or inaccurate knowledge of History, to provide a more comprehensive whole that recognizes and embraces all facets of humankind’s past, literary and fine art practices have an essential role to play. Indeed, History in capital /H/ has constantly lent itself to intersect with histories in lowercase /h/. In opposition to History learnt at school, which is primarily concerned with significant past events that eventually shaped a country, humanities, histories in lowercase are wrought together from a collective memory that writes its past through the testimonies of the so-called ‘nameless’ thus contributing to the reconstruction of History starting from marginal perspectives. In this manner, literature and fine art can become an object of exhaustive knowledge.

In a similar manner, although chiefly focused on Caribbean culture and notion of time, Édouard Glissant – French writer, poet, philosopher, and literary critic from Martinique – puts forward the concept of “nonhistory” (62). Glissant refers to all peoples who were uprooted from their native locations to be enslaved in the Caribbean, and, because of this condition, were not able to create a new, heterogenous society gradually and organically. This led to a weak sense of community and nationhood. The dehumanisation process they underwent – dislocated, subjugated and considered as mere commodities – hampered the formation of a collective consciousness that could bring into being a fresh collective memory (91-92). To make matters worse, they encumbered with “the ambition of imposing a ‘single’ historical time, that of the West” (92).

Another obvious example of this concern with remembering events or peoples whose stories have been cast to the margins of History can be found in the Kittitian-British novelist, playwright and essayist Caryl Phillips’s literary production. As the Belgian postcolonial scholar Bénédict Ledent illustrates in her study on Phillips, his work shows a deep sense of moral responsibility to the History that has produced him and which has all too often been silenced or at least only partially represented (2002, 9). In

the seventies, in the predominantly white, British society the adolescent, outcast Phillips grows up acutely conscious of his own outsider experience and unable to find narratives that spoke to his awareness of not fitting in. In the absence of stories that reflected his particular experience, he turns to the closest parallel he can find: “the Jews were the only minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for that reason, I naturally identified with them” (Phillips 1987, 53-4).

“Because history is written by the winners” (Eddo-Lodge 38), the absence of marginalised peoples’ past in mainstream Western History is one of the themes and concerns at the core of postcolonial literature and criticism. Autonomy and self-rule gained in the second half of the last century represents a turning point for those devalued and unacknowledged by History. With independence, History’s losers begin to assert their existence and to speak the truth relying, initially, on literary and visual arts to articulate their experiences and to the reconstruction of History from their marginal perspectives. Similar to Phillips, Bill Ashcroft blames Western societies for employing and manipulating History to the advantage of their hegemony and prestige. As one of the founding exponents of postcolonial theories, Ashcroft reframes the practice of Western History, “particularly in its nineteenth-century imperial forms”, as a “perpetuation” and condemns “the scientific orderliness of historical accounts [that] are the imposition of a particular story” (2001, 82). This echoes Eddo-Lodge’s above-mentioned statement as well as Glissant’s notion of History when he asserts that “one of the most disturbing consequences of colonisation could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West” (93). In analysing the concept of history, Ashcroft introduces its Greek origin: “*historia* meaning ‘to investigate’” to emphasise the fact that the act of inquiring in detail into what happened in the past as a way to understand the present is not a universal practice. To non-Western societies, for instance, past events are “inseparable” from the present and future time. Furthermore, as the Australian scholar emphasises, “even contemporary Western theories of history contend that the past is essentially unknowable, that the scientific orderliness of historical accounts is the imposition of a particular story” (2001, 82). In other words, the insistence on a single History or of a Eurocentric single story, still serves the uninterrupted endeavour to find new resources to be exploited, new markets to be conquered and new geopolitical alliances to consolidate. In response to a perpetuation of a Eurocentric single

story and as a form of self-determination, postcolonial authors and critics can change the recounting “of history [...] as one of the most strategic and powerfully effective modes of cultural resistance” (Ashcroft 2001, 83).

In regard to postcolonial literature and criticism, *historia* is crucial. To former subjugated individuals, the act of investigating and, most importantly, disclosing the past becomes an act of cultural resistance. Besides demanding their place in the official account of past occurrences, they assert their presence in the present through self-representation, and they do it relying on, but also exploiting the construction of language and of culture imposed by the coloniser. The paradox of simultaneously sharing a language but being marginalized and alien inside that very language – summarised by Ledent as “colonized by language, and excluded by language” (99) – springs up as a form of action and reaction. As soon as self-rule was granted, the nameless and unacknowledged started rewriting History employing a means of expression that could be unquestionably understood by – borrowing Benjamin’s thought – the victorious enemy. More than ever in this context, literature represents a highly sophisticated laboratory for depicting human events while simultaneously drawing attention to the often biased process of selecting and propagating History in colonial and post-colonial societies.

Generally speaking, literature is defined as the body of written works of a language, period, or culture. Literature can, however, also be envisioned as a space where all sorts of disciplines intersect and where convergence, divergence as well as unexpected mixtures can occur. In this way, literature becomes a place of inquiry that encourages investigations arising from our primordial attempt to understand the world we live in. In terms of knowing how History was made from a marginal perspective, Phillips points to the fundamental contribution of literature:

I had learnt that in a situation in which history is distorted, the literature of a people often becomes its history, its writers the keepers of the past, present, and future. In this situation a writer can infuse a people with a sense of their own unique identity and spiritually kindle the fire of resistance. (99)

Since the beginning of the collapse of the British Empire, and increasingly in the years that followed, the nameless and voiceless peoples excluded from official History have managed through “the fire of resistance” to reaffirm their presence, at least from a literary

perspective. The Nobel Prize Institution is evidence of this form of requital: from 1973 to 2021 quite a number of postcolonial authors have been awarded this prestigious distinction in literature.⁶ However, postcolonialism is not only about being recognised, named and placed in History, it definitively concerns some enduring questions and concerns such as for instance racism, discrimination, marginalisation, displacement and belonging that seem hard to eradicate, not to mention all the consequences of centuries of colonisation to nations, their culture and territories. It is obvious that six or seven decades of self-rule are dwarfed by the effects of centuries of often violent subjugation and uprootedness.

POSTCOLONIAL MIGRATION NARRATIVES

All things considered, the Ghanaian-American literary critic Ato Quayson asserts that postcolonialism “has to be seen [...] in terms of a long process”, and

a possible working definition for postcolonialism is that it involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies and at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire. Postcolonialism often also involves the discussion of experiences such as slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender and place as well as responses to the discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. The term is as much about conditions under imperialism and colonialism proper, as about conditions coming after the historical end of colonialism. (2-3)

For Quayson, postcolonialism is a process of coming into being and struggling against colonialism along with its after-effects such as “slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender and place.” Among these enduring questions and concerns, it may be argued that current migrations may be an echo of the displacement experienced by human beings during colonialism. Among the crucial conditions of our times we can certainly list migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Phillips, in

⁶ In 1973 Patrick White was the first postcolonial author to be recognised worldwide, then followed Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, John Maxwell Coetzee, Doris Lessing and Abdulrazak Gurnah (as a primary source of information, details are easily available on the Wikipedia page).

conversation with Elvira Pulitano, authoritatively compares present time migrants' condition to the past subjugation to the former coloniser:

The asylum seekers, in particular, have migration forced upon them. It doesn't involve chains, it doesn't involve manacles, it doesn't involve physically brutal labor, but the psychological trauma can fester for years. These are not economic migrants who have bought a ticket. Europe is full of people who are psychologically scarred, having cut the umbilical cord with their countries and their languages, as viciously and as traumatically as people did in the past with slavery. (12)

The lawyer Peter Nobel is another writer who traces some of the causes of present-day upheaval and instability back to colonialism and neo-colonialism. On the topic of the migratory flows that characterise our age, he points a finger at the unscrupulous competition for economic advantage between powerful states eager to exploit and trample the interests of citizens from the Global South:

Some say we live in the era of the Bomb and the migrant. I would say it is the era of the refugee as very few states today encourage anything but marginal immigration and then exclusively in the interest, as it is understood, of that state. The overwhelming majority of the refugees originate in the Third World. The direct causes of their flight are conflicts kept alive mostly by super-power politics and by weapons forged and manufactured at bargain prices in the rich countries, who export death and destruction, and import the natural and partly processed products of the poor countries. At the same time they refuse to a great extent to receive the refugees who try to escape the suffering and the sorrow generated by super power-politics. (qtd. in Malkki 504)

In line with Nobel's statement, Liisa Helena Malkki – American scholar in anthropological studies – sustains that “the emergence of the Third World” represents one of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies especially after “the end of official colonialism” (504). The phenomenon of migration continues to occupy a central place in postcolonial intellectuals and scholars' thinking and reflections. For instance, the New York-based author Suketu Mehta clearly defines the conditions of migratory flows as one of the perduring effects of colonialism on cultures and societies:

These days, a great many people in the rich countries complain loudly about migration from the poor ones. But as migrants see it, the game was rigged: First, the rich countries colonized us and stole our treasure and prevented us from

building our industries. After plundering us for centuries, they left, having drawn up maps in ways that ensured permanent strife between our communities. Then they brought us to their countries as “guest workers” – as if they knew what the word “guest” meant in our cultures – but discouraged us from bringing our families. Having built up their economies with our raw materials and our labor, they asked us to go back and were surprised when we did not. They stole our minerals and corrupted our governments so that their corporations could continue stealing our resources; they fouled the air above us and the waters around us, making our farmers barren, our oceans lifeless; and they were aghast when the poorest among us arrived at their borders, not to steal but to work, to clean their shit, and to fuck their men. (3-4)

One prickling element that emerges from Nobel’s, Phillips’s and Mehta’s observations of the long-lasting issue of migration is the variety of terms used to refer to migrants. Always in regard to migratory flows, Nobel relies on the term “refugee”; Phillips employs the phrase “asylum seekers” in relation to migrations that characterise present-day Europe; whereas Mehta makes use of the general locution “migrants”, while opting to discuss their condition in a subjective, personalised manner that resembles a first-hand experience. The latter is detectable in the use of the pronouns “they” – i.e. “the rich countries” – and “us” – i.e. current migrants – every time Mehta addresses his complaints to the former colonisers.

Most of human existence on Earth has been marked by migration. Current migrants are quite often characterised by human beings trapped in the bureaucratic language of Western societies and their equivocal laws, and, because of the “growing anti-immigrant rhetoric” (Popescu 1), it is imperative to provide the proper definitions of individuals as well as the situations which have led them to arrive on less than welcoming shores in search for fair, equitable, unprejudiced life conditions. The Amnesty International website, for instance, provides, helpful and clear definitions of the status of migrant. Although the means of and obstacles to migration have changed over time, the primary motivations have remained the search for safety and enhanced life conditions. In this new millennium, however, due to discrepant legal systems, but above all as a consequence of postcolonialism, neocolonialism along with questionable approaches of neoliberal policy and globalisation (as it will be explored in the next sections), Western countries have found themselves in the position of having to manage mass migration flows and the protection of borders. As a result, tensions among communities have increased enormously. In this contemporary global, cultural context, a huge number of

human beings literally flee their country of origin as their lives are in peril. In the 21st century, Western societies with a history of struggles for full recognition of civil and human rights rather than providing a welcoming environment and opportunities to build a secure and dignified life for everyone, have created bureaucratic barriers that prevent free access. As soon as migrants manage to reach a Western destination, they are immediately categorised according to migration laws that establish their right to stay and settle or, as it happens most of the time, to be rejected and send back to their country of origin. There is another option that is both dehumanising and despicable, namely being in a state of uncertainty and illegality.

Reverting to the current definitions of migrant, this study focuses chiefly on asylum seekers and refugees. According to the above-mentioned website,

an asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker;

whereas

a refugee is a person who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

In addition, according to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, the noun refugee is an adaptation of the French word *réfugié* that referred to “Protestants who fled France following the revocation in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes, the law that granted religious liberty and civil rights to the Protestant Huguenots for nearly a century”. Thereafter, the noun refugee was used more generally in English to denote anyone who was forced to flee to a place of safety, often because of danger or persecution because of religious or political beliefs. (Sorgoni 16-17). Nevertheless, the meaning of refugee was later enlarged in the 1951 Geneva Convention. In this key legal document, released to avoid the return of atrocities that took place during World War II especially in relation to the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust, the noun refugee refers to:

persons fleeing events occurring before 1 January 1951 and within Europe [...] A refugee, according to the Convention, is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. (UNHCR 4-5)

The continuous political and economic changes that occurred in Western societies over the second half of the twentieth century proved, again, the unsuitability of the label refugee. In her work *Antropologia delle migrazioni* (2022), the Italian anthropologist Barbara Sorgoni analyses the legal, political and symbolic meanings of terms employed to describe current mass movements. Within the academic community, 1982 conventionally marks the birth of Refugee Studies and the further reconceptualising of human beings fleeing their country of origin.⁷ Scholars and intellectuals delineate, first, the distinction between economic migrant and refugee, when referring to human beings who made the journey to settle in another country, then, they further distinguish between migrant, asylum seeker and refugee as detailed on the above-mentioned Amnesty International website (18).

The establishment of Refugee Studies as an academic discipline in the United Kingdom is particularly indicative. From a postcolonial perspective, this field of research, first and foremost, sheds light on the question of migration from the periphery to the centre of the former British empire. Secondly, it explores the reasons that impel people to migrate from their place of origin to the so-called 'Mother Country'. These reasons are clearly and vividly depicted in literature. In their works, postcolonial authors not only assert their past and present culture, but they also display the enduring impact of different forms of subjugation, which have occurred over time, on their countries' economy and politics, which have led as a consequence to contemporary mass movements of people.

The last two decades particularly have witnessed a growing body of postcolonial literature that represents the experiences of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In these narratives, the conditions of the country of origin exist in some form of political

⁷ "The Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) was founded in 1982 and is part of the Oxford Department of International Development. In the early 1980s Dr Barbara Harrell-Bond undertook research regarding one such challenge: how to improve the performance of humanitarian agencies in the field. During fieldwork in Algeria she realised the paucity of academic literature available on the subject, and on her return to Oxford she founded the Refugee Studies Centre (then known as the Refugee Studies Programme)." <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/> Their mission, as stated on their website homepage, is to build knowledge and understanding of forced migration in order to help improve the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable people.

and/or economic crisis, sometimes as a direct result of colonial rule, neo-colonialism, or decolonization. Postcolonial migration narratives represent a relatively new but growing genre of literature that frequently highlights the human rights infringements facing stateless persons. The dichotomy between belonging and longing for home, i.e. the figurative stepping forward (into a new culture)-stepping back (into one's roots) movement is analysed through migrants' narrations by and about authors fleeing countries of origin that have a history of European colonialism. Keeping in mind that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are not a monolithic group, but originate from many regions and speak numerous languages, in this study I address some migration narratives produced relying on the employment of English. As mentioned earlier, to the nameless and unacknowledged by (colonial) History, literature represents a means of communication in terms of being simultaneously located in History and commonly accepted in the present. Moreover, this work examines the evolution of stylistic and writing techniques in postcolonial migrant and digital literature over the last two decades and how these have combined and incorporated existing and emerging models of multimodal, multimedia and hypertextual forms.

DIGITAL AVANT-GARDE POSTCOLONIAL MIGRATION NARRATIVES

José Angel García Landa, Spanish literary scholar and blogger, defines literature as a continuous experiment in form, and indeed literature is in constant evolution, always reworking and transforming genres, motifs and conventions inherited from a past tradition (2007, 143). With this protean feature of literature in mind, this thesis examines interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary⁸ approaches to postcolonial literature.

If on the one hand, the digital turn in postcolonial literature requires authors' willingness to adapt their narrative and writing style to the technical particularities and conventions of the Internet and electronic devices'; on the other hand, it has greatly

⁸ "Interdisciplinary involves bringing together distinctive components of two or more disciplines. In academic discourse, interdisciplinarity typically applies to four realms: knowledge, research, education and theory. Interdisciplinary knowledge involves familiarity with distinctive components of two or more disciplines. Interdisciplinary research combines distinctive components of two or more disciplines in the search or creation of new knowledge, operational procedures, or artistic expressions" (Nissani 121). "The term 'transdisciplinarity' was coined to denote a search for the 'unity' of knowledge or – more generally – the actual means with which such an integration of otherwise disciplinary fragmented knowledge can be achieved. Since its first appearance, 'transdisciplinarity,' in fact, stands for nothing less than 'the contemporary version of the historical quest for systematic integration of knowledge'" (Arnold 1819).

broadened its audience in terms of number and cultural background. The digital turn has enabled postcolonial literature to transcend academic barriers, reaching common readers worldwide who can also actively participate in authors' causes and activism. Nevertheless, purists will acknowledge a literary language impoverishment as the digital environment implies brevity and immediateness which can sometimes translate into basic, truncated language. This is not entirely true, as it will be demonstrated later in this study and especially in the chapter on the "Refugee Tales" project.

Recent decades have witnessed the proliferation of new narrative modes such as weblogs, social media posts, video poems, digital publications and digital essays. Besides weaving together multiple storytelling forms including fiction, testimony, (auto)biography, orality, performativity, photography and visuality, these diversified textualities, which have combined and incorporated already existing and newly emerging models of multimodal textual forms, also address the persisting questions and concerns at the core of postcolonial literature, that is to say racism, identity, belonging, displacement and alienation. It is not by chance then that the digital world and new multimodal textual forms fostered by new media interact with this literary genre, i.e. postcolonial literature, and most relevantly with migration and refugee narratives. As Phillips's approach to literature suggests:

As long as we have literature as a bulwark against intolerance, and as a force for a change, then we have a chance. [...] for literature *is* plurality in action; it embraces and celebrates a place of no truths, it relishes ambiguity, and it deeply respects the place where everybody has the right to be understood (Phillips 2011, 16 emphasis in the original).

According to Phillips's definition, literature has two powerful strengths: a) an innate idea that literature reflects, absorbs and explores the diversity of human society; b) a capacity to serve as an instigator of change by challenging the legitimacy of singular, unquestioned narratives that sustain the *status quo*. These characteristics of literature are not suited to strict, mathematical, 'cut-and-dried' methods of analysis. Be that as it may, authors are influenced by the world they live in and unconsciously or consciously conform to models and norms of usage of the language which prevail while writing as put forth by Roland Barthes's still relevant discourse who offers a more constricting, less malleable view of literary works:

literature is essentially an activity of language that makes a work literary. But this formal language is powerfully underwritten by conventions, approved vocabularies, standards of ‘taste’, ranges of reference, and so forth, which shape its acceptable ‘readability’ in any period. Therefore, to be ‘Literature’ [...] writing needs to conform to prevailing standards of expression. ‘Literature’, therefore, is fundamentally an *institutional* use of language. [...] To thrive, authors need to advertise their literariness; their work must display the signs of ‘Literature’ which prevail in their period (Barthes qtd. in Rylance 9-10 emphasis in the original).

Barthes’s definition of literature is founded on a triadic model. Writing depends on three practices (or emotions, or intentions): a) the activity of language, b) ‘readability’ in any period and c) the writer’s personal style and use of language. On the subject of the writer’s personal style, Barthes argues that the process of phrasing “originates in the body of the writer and in the writer’s past and gradually becomes the very reflexes of his art.” A writer’s personal style is in large part not an intention, but rather a spontaneous offshoot of personal experience and preferences along with the cultural and historical context which connects writers to their society (Rylance 10).

Although Barthes considered “literature [to be] an *institutional* use of language”, over time, and as a result of constantly evolving technologies, the three practices pinpointed by the French semiotician have proven to be quite adaptable to changing circumstances. Not only has literature adjusted to new media, but the digital world, with its capability of reaching users rapidly and everywhere, has enabled works of literature to reach a wider number of readers. This far-reaching, quick circulation and distribution of literary works allows literary genres that were previously restricted almost exclusively to an academic audience to become accessible to a more general public. Additionally, in their willingness to explore the potentialities offered by the Internet and its user-friendly, easily available platforms, the authors discussed in this study have contributed to forging innovative composite/hybrid forms of storytelling and engagement with the public.

Taking into consideration all the above aspects, it is crucial to emphasise the avant-gardist, militant and activist nature of current digital postcolonial migration narratives. Relevant to this type of discourse, in her philosophical reflections on the world and human affairs, Hannah Arendt states that individuals distinguish themselves through action and speech as “we exist primarily as acting and speaking beings” (176-181). Arendt conceives the ability of telling a story as the process through which individuals

reconstruct their personal experiences and enter a collective space. The notion of storytelling as spatial practice implies focusing on how stories are shaped through interactions and how they can transform into wider, collective engagements.

In literature, specifically in the case of postcolonial literature, this ability of telling a story may be compared at times to a form of social engagement as well as to forms “of emancipation, critique and transformation” (Nayar xiii).

Postcolonial literature and, by extension, contemporary digital migration narratives, in their ability to reproduce the world for an audience may be envisioned as a cutting-edge experiment involving collaboration between writers, not-for-profit publishers and citizens seeking to create equality, social justice and human rights guarantees. The quoted definition of postcolonial writing as “a literature of emancipation, critique and transformation” (Nayar xiii) reflects a common concern both for by now canonical postcolonial literature and innovative, digital twenty-first century migration narratives.

Practices of giving voice to marginalised individuals excluded by mainstream Western History, which draw attention to persisting issues of racism, identity, belonging, displacement and discrimination, have easily adapted themselves to rapidly changing realities, such as the emergence of new media. Thus, current, digital postcolonial migration narratives are both an account of events told and/or written by postcolonial authors and a first-hand testimony told and/or written by individuals who have recently made the journey. Furthermore, the dichotomy between belonging and longing for home is foregrounded by those migrant narrations produced by and about authors fleeing countries of origin that have a History of European colonialism. This fresh act of narrating can integrate a variety of modes, such as words, images, audio, videos and performances. The digital, multimodal storytelling is feasible because of the considerable and user-friendly features provided by the Internet.

THE DIGITAL TURN

The globally connected network system facilitates worldwide communication and allows users to interact through digital platforms such as social media platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram along with media sharing platforms like YouTube or Vimeo.

Moreover, digital platforms share the attributes of ease of use and immediate appeal for users/citizens (Ladow 345).

The virtual space created by digital connectivity has the power to temporarily erase national borders and catalyses feelings of belonging and longing for home offering in return a sense of digital citizenship. This virtual open space which functions as the migrant's ephemeral but inclusive safe site also simulates a highly sophisticated hub of activity of understanding, social and collective engagement and multimodal storytelling. It may be argued that, this emergent digital avant-gardist generation of writers are creating a new literature, a real 'digital-new-avant-garde' movement. This in turn expands and reinforces the existing canon of postcolonial literature. The term "literary canon" describes a set of texts that serve as a recognised standard of stylistic quality, cultural and social significance, and intellectual value. As current migration narratives rely on new media and electronic devices to be produced and disseminated, the above-mentioned set of texts now comprises hybrid and/or digital works by authors who are deeply concerned with the scale and controversies around issues of migration, racism and discrimination in Western societies. However, the nature of these hybrid and digital literary works is crucial. Differently from traditional literary texts that have the potential to last for centuries in book format, digital texts, such as the case of Eddo-Lodge's blogpost for instance, may disappear from the Internet at the same speed they were created. Although, cutting-edge technologies provide tools like screenshots to demonstrate a literary work was on the Internet at a certain point in time, realistically, it is not a common practice to track digital documents and Internet traffic through screenshots.

Setting aside the negative aspect of ephemerality, cutting-edge technologies facilitate multimodal creative works, multidimensional forms of protest and the building of "egalitarian alliances and connections across difference" (Sandoval *et al.* 83). This tendency to want to take an active part in events, especially in social and political contexts, has characterized human behaviour, in one form or another, since time immemorial, manifesting itself in every part of the world and in every culture, as Ai Weiwei – Chinese activist and film director – points out:

Throughout history, political and social change only existed in the forms we knew because protest actions, be they violent or peaceful, were carried out with a lack of resources, especially in terms of communications. Individuals could mobilize

and share information with others only to a limited extent. Such circumstances posed obstacles to protest actions that people can take and hindered the impact of their efforts. Today, we are in a very different world. The Internet and computer technologies liberate individuals and let them act as one. Ideas, plans and actions can be shared with others at lightning speed, and anyone may participate autonomously. New technologies finally enable humans to truly act as individuals. We no longer need to ask where an idea comes from. It gets shared quickly, and other individuals can carry it out within a short period of time. The real revolution is in each individual's mind. Everybody has to learn to become different from how they perceive themselves. The ways of bringing change and facing political and social struggles have become very different from the previous era. The work of individuals and the path to social change will continue to surprise us. (Weiwei)

Indeed “the path to social change” has surprised us particularly over the last two decades thanks to constantly evolving, user friendly and accessible digital devices.

Politically and socially active artists rely on these tools and deliver in return works of aesthetic value that fall under the umbrella of activism. The unit of language activism, which combines art and activism, “is a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism” (Sandoval *et al.* 82). Activism took roots in the late 1990s in gatherings between Chicano artists from East Los Angeles and the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, with the intent of shedding light on the issues of race and ethnicity within white American society (Sandoval *et al.* 92-93).

Since then, activism has developed in recent years especially thanks to digital technologies following the proliferation of protests against wars and globalisation. In many cases activists attempt to promote political agendas through the means of art. Besides using traditional mediums like film and music to raise awareness or push for change, an activist can also be involved in culture jamming, subvertising, street art, spoken word, protesting, and activism (Milohnić 15-25).

For instance, in a talk given and video recorded at the Chattanooga TEDx event, and uploaded on the YouTube platform, Marcus Ellsworth – spoken word artist and activist – introduced his speech on how to help build community around art and values of social justice with the following words: “art as activism, another way of saying it, it would be art as a bringer of change, art as a way to connect people, to engage people, to motivate and move people to action” (00:09 – 00:24).

In addition, Eve Ensler – playwright, performer, feminist, and activist – expands on Ellsworth's definition of activism. Acknowledging a twofold but divergent meaning

of change, Ensler frames activism in terms of passion as a creative, militant response to power:

It is easily argued that violent revolutions, war and repression bring about the most immediate, obvious change. But I think we need to look at what we mean by change. Terror and violence can change a given political situation and keep the population in line. But these tactics simply change one dominant force for another. Methods of passion involve a deeper, more transformational process: inviting commitment, vision and long-term struggle. All these can bring about lasting change both in the individual and the community. Methods of passion model the world we want to create. I have had my moments of rage where I think the powers that be will never end oppression or inequity voluntarily. But I do not trust these moments of violence within me. Passion is persuasive. Power is dominating. Passion is contagious and inspirational. Power is threatening and coercive. Passion moves people. Power controls them. I think in these perilous times, a third way is emerging, a kind of escalated passion – a creative energy that comes from giving one’s heart and soul and imagination to the struggle. Not aggression but fierceness. Not hurting but confronting. Not violating but disrupting. This passion has all the ingredients of activism, but is charged with the wild creations of art. Activism – where edges are pushed, imagination is freed, and a new language emerges altogether. (Ensler)

Pushing edges, freeing imagination and employing a language that can be understood by a wider audience may be read as keywords to digitally creative and emphatic literary works of the type that will be analysed in this study.

These works are mostly a collective production, developed and created by writers, artists, passionate human beings who aim to “bring [...] change and fac[e] political and social struggles” in relation to current migrations and Western political agendas (Weiwei).

In the following chapters this work will focus on four case studies: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*; Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*; Warsan Shire’s “Home” and the narrative produced within the “Refugee Tales” project.

These are very well-known and popular examples of digital avant-garde activism. Their analysis will focus on the narratology - qualitative and comparative - of such forms of “augmented” texts⁹ – by adopting and adapting a metaphor elaborated by a Russian

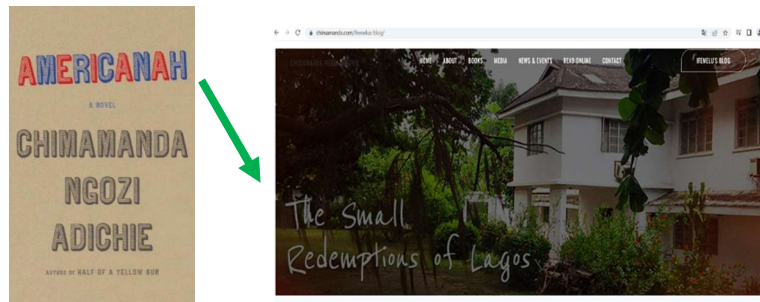
⁹ The term “augmented” text has been borrowed from the concept of “augmented reality or computer-mediated reality and/or technology” as explained by Alan B. Craig (1-38). Similarly to AR, the current migration narratives explored and analysed in this study represent an interactive experience that combines

group of scholars working in the field of film studies. In their case the so-called ‘algorithm’ serves the purpose to synthesis and visualise various possibilities and combinations of transposition from literary text to cinematographic production and vice versa (Zinnatullina *et al.* 357-369). In this specific case on the contrary the algorithm will be modelled to chart a variety of transpositions among a combination of digital media and Internet platforms, in relation to recent postcolonial migration narratives.

the thematic of migration and computer generated content. This is especially evident in Shire’s “Home” and the “Refugee Tales” project. Although, literature implies a figurative journey where readers may lose themselves in the world of fiction vividly and lyrically described in the text they are reading, in the case of digital productions, the content generated spans the visual and auditory senses while describing contemporary life experiences. It is as if literature has crossed the borders of print media to encroach upon digital productions which involve words, images and sound.

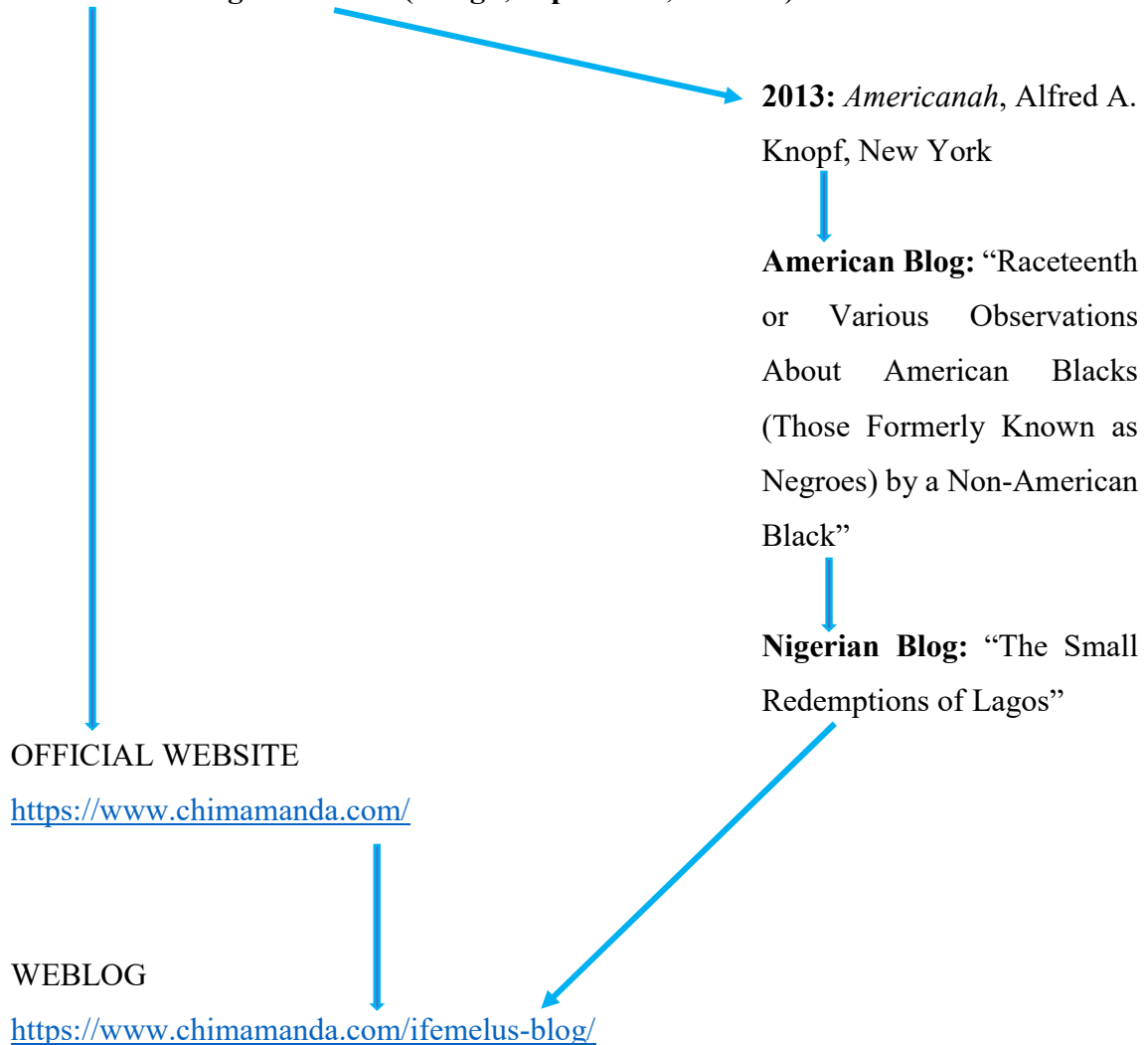
3 The Literary/Digital Case of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Algorithm # 1: From Blogging in the Novel to the Weblog



Flowchart of transpositions of a fictional blog

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Enugu, September, 15 1977)



3.1 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: A Digital Celebrity

“I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach [...] Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important, but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive.”

(Chinua Achebe, *The Novelist as a Teacher*, 44-45)

The Nigerian-American, award winning writer, lecturer and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu (Nigeria) in 1977. She is the fifth of six children and was raised in a middle-class Igbo family: her father was a professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria while her mother was the first female registrar. Under pressure from social and family expectations, Adichie enrolled in medical school in Nsukka, but dropped out after a year. Arguably as a self-determination gesture, she later moved to the U.S.A on a scholarship where she accomplished her multidisciplinary higher education and academic career. In her official website, in the “home” redirected page, visitors can view her degrees from universities across the globe, such as for instance, and just to name a few, Johns Hopkins University, Georgetown University, Yale University, SOAS University of London and University of Johannesburg (Adichie).

Adichie is a well-known novelist, but she is also a YouTube celebrity to regular Internet users. Already in July 2009 in Oxford (UK), Adichie took the TED stage to introduce herself both to a live and off-site audience as a storyteller who is, above all, the outcome of the clash between African, British and American cultures. As “seeing comes before words” (7), as suggested by the English art critic, novelist, painter and poet John Peter Berger, Adichie showed up wearing a Western outfit (a tank top under a silk waistcoat, tight-fitting trousers and stiletto heels) accessorised with a matching African style head covering, or in other words exhibiting a clear evidence of her Nigerian and British and American identity. In our globalised society that is eroding local traditional practices, even languages, Adichie’s manifestation of her inner feelings may be read as a practice of self-affirmation simultaneously displaying her African origin and maintaining her complex Nigerian-American identity.

In his study on cultural techniques of identity, the German cultural historian and philosopher Thomas Macho puts forth the concept of cultural techniques or techniques that

should be strictly limited to symbolic technologies that allow for self-referential recursions [...] The recursive, self-observing qualities of cultural techniques make them a ‘technology of the self’ and thus render them indispensable for the generation, repetition and maintenance of identity. (1)

According to Macho’s theory, these cultural techniques enable the individual’s “potential self-referentiality” but above all “a pragmatic of recursion”, i.e. the process a procedure goes through when one of the steps of the procedure involves invoking the procedure itself. This means that “we may talk about recipes or hunting practices, represent a fire in pictorial or dramatic form, or sketch a new building, but in order to do so we need to avail ourselves of the techniques of symbolic work.” Following Macho’s logic, if we rely on “systems theory [...] cultural techniques are *second-order techniques*”, this means that “they have been operating as techniques of self-reflection, identity formation and identification. Even today, the majority of cultural techniques serve as vehicles of self-description, self-legitimation, and authentication” (1-31 emphasis in the original).

Adapting Macho’s reflections on the Nigerian-American author as a digital celebrity who relies on the technology of the self as a way to maintain and exhibit her identity, Adichie’s mix of African and Western clothing in her public appearances serves as a “vehicle of self-description” and “authentication”, a reminder of her multifaceted identity.

In the aforementioned TED conference that is still available on the YouTube platform, Adichie informs – but also manages to entertain – the audience of “the danger of a single story”. With a straight face, the author delivers a speech which is a formal charge of wrongdoing brought against the former British colonisation and its persistent effects, even though her public lecture is at times characterised by irony as well as a deadpan sense of humour. Introducing herself as a storyteller, Adichie tells anecdotes typified by narrow-minded and biased perspectives, and in relation to the latter, in a very open and honest manner, she also provides examples of her own single stories such as for instance the one on Fide’s poverty:

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. [...] And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So, the year I turned eight, we got a new house boy. His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family. (02:47-03:30)

However, after some time when she and her mother visited Fide's family, she could see with her eyes and ultimately realise that poverty does not mean scantiness or unproductiveness because "anybody in his family could actually make something" (03:49-03:52). As she immediately admits: "their poverty was my single story of them" (04:01-04:03). Another example of a single story she shares with the audience is related to her misleading notion of Mexican immigrants shaped by words and images delivered by the U.S. media coverage: "There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleecing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing" (08:35-08:44). Again, she later learnt another story when she visited Mexico from the U.S.A.:

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, *the abject immigrant*. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself. So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. (08:46-09:24 emphasis mine)

This warning about unquestionably believing stories that are eventually told to provide biased perspectives, as is for instance the single story on Mexican immigrants, is introduced by the topic of education. Adichie was "an early reader" (00:27) and also

an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: all my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. (00:32-01:02)

Although the last sentence made some people in the audience laugh out loud, Adichie implies that a quarter of a century after independence, Nigerian culture and education were still living under the pernicious, corrosive consequences of colonization of African peoples. She was an eager reader – according to her mother she started reading “at the age of two” (00:20) – and because of the only books available at that time were written by and about Europeans, that is what Adichie read: British and American children’s books that undoubtedly stimulated her imagination and made her discover new worlds, but those were not the actual world she was living in.

The issue of education in former British colonies is one of the recurrent topics in postcolonial literature. Similarly, but on a different medium, the same issue was brought out, for instance, by the Kenyan author and academic Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o. In his *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir* (2012), wa Thiong’o describes the nineteen-fifties in Kenya, a country under a State of Emergency in response to the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule. Britain, the dominant political power at that time, was still using education to generate conformity to its culture. In this political context, the young Wa Thiong’o attends an élite English school whose aim was to produce “civic-minded blacks who would work within the parameters of the existing racial state” (10), and the English text-books provided to students offered a Eurocentric world view along with the teaching of the history of Africa – their homeland – from an imperialist perspective. Wa Thiong’o’s critical thinking makes him realise that “none” of the subjects taught in school “reflected [his] black experience” and, “the language of [his] education was no longer the language of [his] culture” (162).

In 1986, when the nine-year-old Adichie manifested her writing skills, Wa Thiong’o published a collection of essays about language and its constructive role in national culture, history, and identity titled *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Notwithstanding the independence granted to former African colonies almost two decades earlier, as Wa Thiong’o directly highlights in his work, “imperialism continues to control the economy, politics, and cultures of Africa” (4) and “literary education [is] determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance” (12). Carrying on with his reflections, Wa Thiong’o accentuates the negative effects of such dominance: “language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds” (12). This sense

of distancing and estrangement is well described by Adichie in her talk when she elicits memories of her early writings. Those British and American children's books were taking her further from her world to the point that she could not even develop the idea that African people could be depicted or merely exist in literary texts:

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books. But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized. (01:32- 02:24)

Adichie's struggles to search for a self along with carrying out "cultural techniques as vehicles of self-description, self-legitimation, and authentication" (Macho 31), as argued by the German cultural historian and philosopher, and "indispensable for the generation, repetition and maintenance of identity" (1), are elucidated in Wa Thiong'o's accusation against the imposition of the colonizer's mother-tongue language on at first subjugated and later former colonised peoples:

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture [...] Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as member of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language. (13-15)

In turn Adichie, with a perceivable hint of irony, as a response to the audience's burst of laughter at the description of the characters – "they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out" (00:053-01:02) –, emphasises the fact that they – African readers – "never talked about the weather, because there was no need to" (01:14). As a matter of fact, subjects, topics and characters described in British and American children's books did not belong to "the

collective memory bank of [her] people's experience in history" (Wa Thiong'o 15), and especially in the twentieth century when education was accessible to a wider number of people, those "foreign books" (Adichie 02:08), that were so easily available, eventually functioned to entrench the sense of estrangement and alienation in African readers. This further act of isolating and estranging people from their identity was defined by Wa Thiong'o as "the cultural bomb":

the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. (3)

With the phrase "the cultural bomb", Wa Thiong'o reminds us that language remains the most essential vehicle through which the human soul can be held captive. In this case, the former coloniser, who is fully aware of this intrinsic quality of language, deliberately relies on it as "a means of spiritual subjugation" (9). In Wa Thiong'o's reflection, this cultural and psychological form of domination remains the biggest weapons that undermine the value of the human being and erodes the dignity of people's identity. Moreover, this form of domination has the tendency to make people embrace the former coloniser's alien culture, language, and way of life, and feel removed from their indigenous heritage and identity. The call to defend and maintain one's own identity, to some extent, can also be found in the reflections of Sir Derek Alton Walcott – Saint Lucian poet, playwright and 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature – when in April 1973, at the University of Miami American Assembly on the United States and the Caribbean, delivered a speech on culture and mimicry:

We live in the shadow of an America that is economically benign yet politically malevolent. That malevolence, because of its size, threatens an eclipse of identity, but the shadow is as inescapable as that of any previous empire. But we were American even while we were British, if only in the geographical sense, and now that the shadow of the British Empire has passed through and over us in the Caribbean, we ask ourselves if, in the spiritual or cultural sense, we must become American. We have broken up the archipelago into nations, and in each nation we attempt to assert characteristics of the national identity. Everyone knows that these are pretexts of power if such power is seen as political. (3)

Although Walcott's thoughts are focused on the Caribbean situation, they point to a broader reality that was affecting all former colonised peoples from the moment they gained independence from the British Empire, along with implying a destiny of permanent colonisation even though different in manner. This form of enduring subjugation was at first put forth and analysed in 1964 by the French philosopher, novelist, political activist, and literary critic Jean-Paul Sartre in his collection of essays *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. In 1965, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, formally coined the word "neo-colonialism" to describe the influence of the former imperial nations on the ex-colonies in the areas of economy, language, culture, and political philosophy. As Nkrumah sustains in his work *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), despite having achieved independence, the influences of colonialism and its agents are still very much present in the lives of most former colonies as:

the essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.
(ix)

In the decades after World War II, Britain gradually granted political independence to its colonies in Africa, but still found a way to retain its economic influence and power over the former colonies. This exercise of power, as Nkrumah states, is nothing else than the evolution from colonialism to neo-colonialism. Expanding his reasoning to Africa as a continent, he asserts that the European imperialism in Africa has passed through several stages, from slavery to colonisation and subsequently to neo-colonialism, or the last stage of the imperialist subjugation and exploitation process. In return, this alternative form of domination ensures power without responsibility (xi-xx).

The issue of power widened to language both as a means of communication and as a means of transmitting knowledge also arises in Adichie's speech when she avows the correlation between "the single story" and "power". She corroborates her assertion relying on her native language and specifically on the word "nkali" which is:

a noun that loosely translates to "to be greater than another". Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they

are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. (09:41-10:09)

Adichie places power and the act of telling a story on the same level and confers, at the same time, a negative connotation. In her role of a teacher, she warns her audience that they have the means to reverse and expand the meaning of a story they have been told, especially when the story is recounted in order to deprive peoples' culture and knowledge with the aim of subjugating and exerting control. In point of fact, she quotes the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti who

writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly". Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story. (10:13-10:42)

As Adichie explains later in her speech, human beings, societies and cultures all are an outcome of many dissimilar, contrasting and at times overlapping single stories and every story has to be read and understood from different perspectives. The discovery of African writers such as Chinua Achebe (02:09); realising that Fide's family was poor but "hardworking" (13:13); watching people in Guadalajara living their lives normally and not as "the abject immigrant" (09:10) are all proofs of protean realities, and the setting up of a single story only aims to "show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (09:21-09:28). In addition, Adichie directs her audience's attention to the nature of stories, especially her just shared personal anecdotes, and, in a mixture of warning and seeking for comprehension, she states:

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (12:45-13:12)

The unreliable and "incomplete" nature of stereotypes is related to the notion of History explored in chapter 2. Former subjugated peoples were, and still are not only marginalised

in Western society, but also in the established record of events following one another in a chronological order known as history. As Bill Ashcroft asserts, History does not reflect the lives of defeated or marginalised peoples, Western, mainstream history is a conventional and oversimplified conception of past events based on a Eurocentric perspective (82-83). However, upper case /H/ History is never entirely impervious to infiltration from lower case /h/ histories, from the stories that are wrought together from the collective memory that writes its past through testimonies of the people on the margins thus contributing to the reconstruction of single-narrative History from a plurality of perspectives. The storytelling delivered by postcolonial authors may be metaphorically envisioned as small missing pieces needed to complete the puzzle also known as History. To some extent, this metaphor of History as a puzzle may find an analogy in Adichie's thought uttered in the last minutes of her video:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. (17:29-17:46)

As perceived from the speech, Chinua Achebe, Nigerian novelist, poet, critic and a central figure of modern African literature and Anglophone Postcolonial literature, was an immensely inspirational figure for Adichie. At some point she mentions and wishes for a "balance of stories" as one of the answers to the danger of a single story.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Achebe published a collection of essays – *Home and Exile* (2000) – based on personal anecdotes and experience. The essays are anchored in African culture and history, decentring the narratives written by Europeans about Africans. In the essay "Today, the Balance of Stories", Achebe argues for the importance of living and writing the African experience, but above all, he emphasises the conviction that Africa needs stories to be told by Africans:

My hope for the twenty-first century is that it will see the first fruits of the balance of stories among the world's peoples. [...] I do not believe that the balance of stories, which I speak and dream of and would wish more than anything else on the twenty-first century, will be facilitated by the eccentricities of that postmodernist stranger. [...] People have sometimes asked me if I have thought of writing a novel about America since I have now been living here some years. My answer has always been "No, I don't think so." Actually, living in America for

some years is not the only reason for writing a novel on it. Kafka wrote such a novel without leaving Prague. No, my reason is that America has enough novelists writing about her, and Nigeria too few. And so it is, again, ultimately, a question of balance. You cannot balance one thing; you balance a diversity of things. And diversity is the engine of the evolution of living things, including living civilizations. (79-97)

Achebe wishes for a balance of stories where every people will be able to contribute to a definition of themselves, where Africans and previous colonised peoples are not victims of other people's accounts. In another essay – “The Empire Fights Back” – he argues that the act of writing has to be allowed universally to anyone. Human beings who have been written about should also participate in the making of these stories, in other words, in the writing of their History (49).

Nonetheless, the reader's first perception of a plausible influence and subsequent relation between Achebe and Adichie's works and thinking is confirmed by the Belgian scholar in postcolonial studies Daria Tunca. Tunca has extensively explored and investigated Adichie's literary production, not to mention the well organised and exhaustive website she developed and continues to update on a regular basis. Already in the title of one of her essays, Tunca defines Adichie as “Chinua Achebe's (unruly) literary daughter” (1) and starts her assertion

stat[ing] the obvious: namely, that journalists' and literary critics' compulsive comparisons between Achebe and Adichie are based on indisputable connections between the authors that extend well beyond their common Nigerian nationality and Igbo ethnicity. A long list of these literary ties can be drawn up without even opening any of the writers' books. For example, it is widely known that Adichie has repeatedly called Achebe “the writer whose work is most important to me” [...] she has consistently singled out *Arrow of God* (1964) as her all-time favorite novel [...] Achebe, for his part, expressed his admiration for Adichie by writing a laudatory blurb for her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) [...] Then, following Achebe's death in 2013, the younger author paid a public tribute to her literary idol by writing an elegy in Igbo in his honor. The list of such connections is all but endless [...] In both journalistic and academic circles, one of the most common manifestations of the association between the two writers has taken the form of a genealogical metaphor, whereby Achebe is cast into the role of the “father of African literature” and Adichie into that of his “literary daughter.” (3)

As a “literary daughter”, Adichie continues to play the role of the storyteller as a teacher as intended by Achebe. It may be argued that Adichie, both as a writer and a

public/digital figure, manages to inform and impart Nigerian past and present history. Her writing production, according to the English Wikipedia Internet page, starts in 1997 when she publishes her poetry work *Decision* that is followed a year later by the play *For Love of Biafra* (1998). Her written production as a novelist is also listed in her official website that oddly does not consider her non-fictional prose narrative. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) is Adichie's first novel set twenty to thirty years after the Nigerian Civil War, during the rule of General Ibrahim Babangida, whose regime was characterised by political and economic instability, as well as hardship. *Purple Hibiscus* is a first-person narrative about the coming-of-age or individual growth of a shy, Catholic, Nigerian teenager. Throughout the narration, the young, main character struggles to express herself as the daughter of a controlling, devout businessman and sanctimonious man who violently abuses his family. Like Achebe in his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Adichie relies on expressions in Igbo that are employed and scattered across the text. Three years later, Adichie publishes *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) the story of the years leading up to and the course of the Nigerian civil war or Nigeria-Biafra war of the late 1960s. Following a failed coup, Nigeria's Igbo population, centred in the east of the country, seceded to form a proto-independent state called Biafra. War and violence are the main themes in the novel and one of the key events is the narration of the slaughter of thousands of Igbo people that occurred in 1966. Achebe, who already expressed his admiration for his "literary daughter", wrote "a laudatory blurb [...] for *Half of a Yellow Sun* [...] in which he called his younger colleague 'a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers'" (Tunca 3). Once again three years later, Adichie publishes a collection of twelve short stories – *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) – set in Nigeria and in the U.S.A. The narrated stories depict the ties that bind men and women, parents and children, Africa and the United States. This shifting between Nigeria and nowadays main Western imperialist country, that is to say the U.S.A., is resumed and deepened in *Americanah* (2013), Adichie's third novel analysed in the following chapter.

In addition to being a "novelist as a teacher", Adichie is also a skilled orator, spreading messages of inclusiveness and empowerment through both the written and spoken word. As a matter of fact, she also did turn her penetrating and acute eye on current Western and non-Western societies that are still characterised by a patriarchal system. In

December 2012 in London (UK), at TEDxEuston,¹⁰ Adichie appeared on the TEDx stage talking about feminism, and once again starting from the recount of personal stories:

Gender matters everywhere in the world, but I want to focus on Nigeria and on Africa in general, because it is where I know, and because it is where my heart is. And I would like today to ask that we begin to dream about and plan for a different world, a fairer world, a world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves. And this is how to start: we must raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently. (10:01-10:30)

The video alone has garnered million views on YouTube since it was uploaded in 2012. Two years later, the digital talk was published in print media – *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) – as a personal, eloquently-argued essay adapted from her TEDx talk of the same title. The core topics are inclusion and awareness, and Adichie expands her reflections to the feminism question in the U.S.A. too. The essay is argued in the same observant, witty and clever storytelling style audible and visible on video. Furthermore, in 2013, the American singer and songwriter Beyoncé released her fifth studio album – *Beyoncé* – and sampled the TEDx talk on her song “***Flawless,” bringing, in this manner, Adichie’s message to a wider, younger public. Adichie’s voice is audible for fifty-four seconds during the four-minute mixed vocal and instrumental track:

We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller, we say to girls: you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful, otherwise you would threaten the man. Because I’m female, I’m expected to aspire to marriage; I’m expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. A marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support. But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same? We raise girls to see each other as competitors, not for jobs or for accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are. Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. (01:26-02:20)

¹⁰ “TEDxEuston is an independently organised TED-like event dedicated to spreading the very best ideas and innovation from across Africa and the global pan-African diaspora. Over the past 10 years, we have grown to become the largest Africa-centered ideas forum in the UK [...] introducing awe-inspiring thinkers and doers from across the African continent and beyond.” <https://www.ted.com/tedx/events/36077>.

Three years later and always on the theme of feminism, Adichie publishes another essay: *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017). During an interview with a Canadian journalist, Adichie points out that *Dear Ijeawele* was originally released in the form of a digital text on her official Facebook page on October 12, 2016, and later adapted and expanded for the print media (Bascaramurty online page). *Dear Ijeawele* was a personal email written by Adichie in response to Ijeawele's request for advice as explained in the introduction to the author's published work:

When a couple of years ago a friend of mine from childhood, who'd grown into a brilliant, strong, kind woman, asked me to tell her how to raise her baby girl a feminist, my first thought was that I did not know.

It felt like too huge a task.

But I had spoken publicly about feminism and perhaps that made her feel I was an expert on the subject. [...] In response to my friend's request, I decided to write her a letter, which I hoped would be honest and practical, while also serving as a map of sorts for my own feminist thinking. This book is a version of that letter, with some details changed. (3-4)

The result of the above-mentioned email correspondence between the two women is the extended sixty-three-page manifesto developed in the epistolary form and composed of fifteen suggestions on how to raise a feminist daughter with references to Adichie and Ijeawele's shared Nigerian heritage and Igbo culture, and ultimately to promote gender awareness in contemporary societies.

In 2021, Adichie published a memoir *Notes on Grief* following the death of her father James Nwoye Adichie in June 2020, during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a similar way to the previous work, *Notes on Grief* is the expanded version of an essay she wrote for "*The New Yorker*" magazine and published on September 10, 2020.

Adichie is also a prolific short fiction writer and this kind of written work has been published on international magazines, such as "*The New Yorker*" or "*The Observer*", along with *Zikora: A Short Story* (2020) that is available only on the Amazon e-book publishing platform.

Adichie's literary production has won several honours, recognition, and awards on the international stage. Her works listed in this chapter, her public and later digital appearances, her taking a stand against issues of racism, gender and discrimination attest

to her being a strong, determined, activist woman and a writer who has been contributing to complete the puzzle known as History. It may be argued that she has embraced Achebe's intent to assign a place in History to the so-called 'nameless' and often disregarded peoples both in Western societies and cultures. As Achebe points out in his essay "The Novelist" on the balance of stories "what is both unfortunate and unjust is the pain the person dispossessed is forced to bear in the act of dispossession itself and subsequently in the trauma of a diminished existence" (70). According Louisa Uchum Egbunike, English scholar in African and Caribbean literature, the act of dispossession has to be read in terms of "the imposing nature of colonial rule and its associated institutions [that] undermined indigenous epistemologies, dismissing African institutions of power, spiritualism and learning as inferior to those of Europe" (15).

Over the years, Adichie has been playing the role of "the novelist as a teacher", along with informing her audience relying on any available digital means of communication in pursuit of her activism. Indeed, the YouTube platform is well-supplied with videos that bear witness to her unceasing activity to provide multiple stories on the complexity of human existence.

In her storytelling Adichie examines the intricacies of postcolonial cultures and the effects of colonialism over the years. Characters in Adichie's works frequently struggle with crises of identity in its broader meaning, i.e. national identity, cultural identity, personal identity, and the latter as a consequence of the co-existence and unavoidable clash between tradition and modernity. The richness of Nigerian culture and tradition permeates Adichie's writing and spoken word. Her stories also emphasise the complexity of language, food, rituals, and familial bonds, from the Igbo customs in *Purple Hibiscus* to the investigation of the Nigerian diaspora in *Americanah*. She also depicts characters that go against gender expectations, and express their autonomy in a setting that often tries to stifle them.

Adichie's writing style is clear and expressive; it combines vivid descriptions with deep emotional investigations. Her storytelling has a complex depth due to her ability to fluidly transition between first-person and third-person tales. Her speech is genuine and impactful due to her ability to keep up with changes in the production, distribution and usability of literature that occur in time reaching in return a wider audience. Her written and spoken word may be compared to a vessel that bears the weight of history, the

urgency of the present and the hopes for a brighter and just future. Furthermore, it may be argued that her stories go beyond mere fiction; they may be associated to discussions that subvert expectations, compel reflection, broaden and multiply the audience's perspectives. Her writing production ensures a place in History to her people; her oral production at public events digitally reproduced also makes her voice reverberate as a force for social change and gender equality. As a feminist, besides defending women's rights – she especially advocates for the rights of contemporary African women –, Adichie questions and challenges gender norms in general; she delivers stories that champion women's independence and the freedom to follow their ambitions. The method taken by Adichie's feminism, known as intersectionality, acknowledges the interdependence of many oppressive and discriminatory practices such as forms of marginalisation like racism and classism. Ultimately, by forming ties that link activism and art, her partnership with musicians, artists and activists broaden the scope of her influence on the web and outside of it. Her accomplishment of using numerous platforms to spread her message of equality and justice or teaching as wished for by Achebe, are demonstrated by her use of multiple media, participation in films, and investigation of cultural intersections.

Adichie's involvement on digital platforms has made her, at first, a digital celebrity and, consequently, have helped make her works popular, even if the adjective is sometimes used in depreciatory way with regard to art. In general terms, "popular" is often referred to something that panders to mainstream tastes, implying that it does not challenge or stray from the existing beliefs and trends of the moment. However, is not becoming known to and accepted by an always wider audience, and thence popular, one of the purposes of literature? As put forward for consideration in this study so far, postcolonial literature in particular aspires to break free from boundaries and restrictions, to expanding knowledge, to asserting peoples' presence in the established and prevailing narration of past and present events. Only then, as argued and demonstrated by postcolonial authors, literature may achieve a critical mass necessary to become an effective means of resilience and resistance, besides being a welcoming, lively space for experimentation.

Experimenting with language and modes of producing literature is a distinguishing feature of literature as asserted by Roland Barthes and mentioned in the

previous chapter. Employing Barthes's words, Adichie advertises her literariness displaying the signs of 'Literature' which prevail in this day and age. She avails herself of updated technologies to spread knowledge from the Other's point of view. Her literariness encroaches on performance every time she is in front of a camera. She does not feel pressure to conform to social norms and expectations when she is being filmed. She nonchalantly engages in self-representation strategies, especially in exhibiting her Nigerian-American identity. Despite addressing a general audience, she distinguishes herself in her cultivated language and her use of a gentle irony that can only encourage and strengthen a connection with individuals attending her lectures or commencement ceremonies or television shows or interviews. In this modality of producing and transmitting literature, Adichie can be defined as a digital celebrity who, often starts her talks telling stories. In 2018, at the Boston – U.S.A – INBOUND annual event, Adichie introduced her speech "The Power of Storytelling" stating "I believe in storytelling. I look at the world through the lens of stories. I believe that stories can change minds. I believe that stories can take away dignity and I believe that stories can also restore dignity" (02:11-02:25). In so doing, she emulates Achebe's "business as a writer", she educates her audience in the culture of the Other simultaneously increasing awareness of issues of migration, racism, feminism and discrimination.

3.2 Contextualising *Americanah* and the Blog

“The New World. A twenty-first-century world. A world in which it is impossible to resist the claims of the migrant, the asylum seeker, or the refugee. [...] The colonial, or postcolonial, model has collapsed. In its place we have a new world order in which there will soon be one global conversation with limited participation open to all, and full participation available to none. In this new world order nobody will feel fully at home.”

(Caryl Phillips 2001, 5)

Americanah, Adichie’s third novel, was published in 2013 and immediately gained recognition on the international literary scene. The novel “is licensed for publication in 29 languages” and won, or was nominated for numerous prestigious awards as listed in the author’s official website:

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction, 2013;
Listed among the New York Times Book Review’s “Ten Best Books of 2013”;
Winner of The Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for Fiction, 2013;
An NPR “Great Reads” Book, a Washington Post Notable Book, a Seattle Times Best Book, an Entertainment Weekly Top Fiction Book, a Newsday Top 10 Book, and a Goodreads Best of the Year pick;
Winner of the “One Book, One New York” campaign, 2017. (Adichie)

A couple of years later, a digital presentation combining an interview along with an introduction to the novel was posted on the YouTube platform. As Terry Flew – Australian scholar in digital communication and culture – sustains, YouTube, established in 2005, draws out even more strongly the features of the Internet as networked and participatory media, with a range of implications across the economy, society and culture, promoting content sharing and peer-to-peer communication and the large-scale distribution of user-created content (12). It may be argued that, although released years after the publication of the novel, the above-mentioned digital presentation may represent the novel’s as well as Adichie’s calling card, as well as clear evidence of the novel’s augmented text: it promotes the content of *Americanah*, it spreads the author’s

perspective on social issues that still affect the black community, and ultimately it gives a helping hand in the distribution of the book whether it be printed or electronic. Indirectly this video echoes all other Adichie's interventions on the web and at the same time all together create a huge digital corpus. Furthermore, the above-mentioned digital presentation may arguably be defined as a practice of participatory culture. The concept of participatory culture developed by Henry Jenkins, the American media scholar who has extensively analysed and explored the world of communication under the lens of sociology and media, can also be applied to *Americanah*'s digital presentation. It is necessary to specify that Jenkins originally coined the term in 1992 to describe what happens when "patterns of media consumption have been profoundly altered by a succession of new media technologies which enable average citizens to participate in the archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation, and recirculation of media content" (1992, 2).

Adichie's digital presentation may be understood as a practice of participatory culture as it features the characteristics of collaboration, involvement and commonality as put forth by Jenkins in 2009 when he was advocating for the inclusion of new media education in schools:

A participatory culture has relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created). (2009, 5-6)

As a matter of fact, after having Googled some keywords or merely having come across the video by chance while surfing the Internet, and having waited for the inevitable ads that precede YouTube videos to come to the end, we encounter Adichie, the storyteller-teacher discussed in the previous chapter as well as the digital celebrity, engaged in "some type of informal mentorship" and "pass[ing] along knowledge". In addition, in this lapse of a little more than six minutes, Adichie also exhibits her "civic engagement" in debating the issues of race and racism and how these topics still make the majority of Americans uncomfortable due to the fact that they have not fully come to terms with their past of slavery and exploitation.

That being said, it is important to keep in mind that the general idea and understanding of the Internet as a free space is true but only to a certain extent. In their study *YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture – Digital Media and Society Series* (2009), the Australian scholar in the field of innovation and technology Jean Burgess and her American colleague Joshua Green, scholar in comparative media studies, widely discuss sites of participatory media in the contemporary online environment, but focus especially on the first genuinely mass-popular platform for user-created video, i.e. YouTube. In regard to its supposedly free of charge use, they allege that

YouTube seemed more like a community of video makers before ‘partners’ came on to advertise to us. But, all this was inevitable. YouTube was spending millions on the computer power and bandwidth necessary to provide this free service to the uploaders and viewers of the thousands of new videos posted weekly on the website. (92)

The so-called ‘price’ to pay every time YouTube users watch a video that is punctually introduced and at times interrupted by commercials has been described by Jenkins as a typical practice of gift economy or commodity culture. Taking Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (2007) as his point of departure, the American media scholar argues that in a culture increasingly governed by money and overrun with commodities, the giving of a gift tends to establish a certain relationship between the parties involved. When gifts circulate within a community, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized cohesiveness emerges. These communities are drawn together by gift exchange because of expectations in return, that is to say, “status”, “prestige” or “esteem” that substitute for cash remuneration, and “YouTube seeks to transform the free exchange of cultural ‘gifts’ into an attention economy monetized through advertising revenue” (Jenkins, 119-120).

Nonetheless, proceeding with the above-mentioned digital presentation, after a few commercials followed by the French cover of *Americanah* on a black screen, Adichie appears in an elegant, Western outfit with her African hair arranged in a bun that give in return a sense of French *bon ton*. During the six minute and twenty-five second duration of the video, Adichie looks at the unseen interviewer and not directly at the camera while replying to questions that have been cut during the editing. The seven key-moments listed on the YouTube page of the video, in which the author replies to the seven questions that

the audience does not have access to, (what is *Americanah*?; plot summary; how has Nigeria changed?; on the idea of home; immigration as a theme; why does literature matter?; literature can make a difference) are sequenced and interrupted by a few seconds of silence accompanied by a dark screen. This editing strategy equally confers an aura of a real conversation between the French host and the Nigerian-American author putting the latter at the centre of the scene. One of the first things that comes into sight, even to a non-observing spirit, is a sense of quietude along with a full mastery of the means of communication held by Adichie and perceivable over the length of the digital introduction to *Americanah*. As the hashtag on the right side and at the bottom of the screen suggests, in Bordeaux – France – at the Mollat bookstore, the author talks about her novel starting with the title:

Americanah is a Nigerian word that means a person who has gone to the U.S. and comes back to Nigeria and suddenly has all of these affectations and he pretends not to understand the Nigerian languages, speaks with an American accent ... that kind of thing...It is a kind of a funny way of making fun of people who do that ... and it ... it's kind of mild, it's well intentioned, it's not, there is nothing ugly about, it is not derogatory, really, and I thought it would be, I thought it would be fun and interesting to have it as the title of the book because obviously it is different ehm ... and it is not really a word in the dictionary ehm ... so I realised that nobody would be able to translate it ... so, then, the title of the book would be the same everywhere. (00:05-00:54)

Adichie continues briefly outlining the plot, but above all, providing ideas and reflections on the writing process of the novel. She also specifies time, location and characters' social class adding that America is the central idea of this work of fiction. According to Adichie, "America is a place that represents something to this generation of Nigerians" (01:18-01:23) as "they dream of America as the extra place where magical things happen, they all want to go to America" (01:30-01:36). Nonetheless, "the question of what home means" (01:42-01:43) is one of the main reasons that made her write the novel. The author provides her own reflection on the topic of home, she explains the concept of home and the implications for her and her fellow countrymen. In this day and age, to the majority of Nigerian people, "home has come to mean often more than one place" (01:54-01:58), and to the greatest extent, this is due to a globalised society that also allows certain categories of individuals to leave home and go back home by choice. In contrast with the past, marked by the triangular trade and the displacement of millions of Africans, in the

twenty-first century, Nigerians are able to migrate on their own free will. All the same, Adichie states that to her, Nigeria is home, but these days,

home can be many places, home can also be something, home can be the one place where you feel most ehm ... where you feel most at peace, where you feel that your heart has its roots and for me that's Nigeria, but also, I like to be able to leave Nigeria from time to time, so America is also a kind of home, but you know for me just the general idea of home is a very interesting subject particularly now that we live in a globalised world where people are interconnected but also they are not in a way, and, yeah, then, home is ... I think home is one of the major ideas of *Americanah*. (02:32-03:09)

Although she does not explicitly link the two topics, Adichie explores both the meaning of home and the issue of migration in *Americanah*. The two main characters in the novel, Ifemelu and Obinze migrate from the periphery to the centre of the current economic and political, Western empires: U.S.A and the United Kingdom. Both characters leave Lagos with the intent to improve their life conditions, despite belonging to Nigerian middle-class families. Thus, in *Americanah*, migration reflects a common action encapsulated by the generic meaning of the word found in any dictionary. To paraphrase Merriam-Webster, for instance, migrations are movements of living beings carried out periodically, along specific and generally repeated routes for a variety of reasons. These movements also cover very long distances, and are followed by a return to the point of departure. This definition literally applies to animals. In regard to human beings, migrations do not always involve a return journey. However, in *Americanah*, both protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze, return to Nigeria after several years spent overseas. As Adichie reminds us, the two young Nigerian characters aspire to live the so-called 'American dream' (or, to be more accurate, in Obinze's case, the dream of succeeding in the Global North), they do not have to flee their country of origin because their lives are in peril. Despite their class privilege and education, upon their arrival in the West, they are confronted with issues of race and racism, legal vs illegal status, attempts to belong to the host country but longing for home, and eventually their failed integration in the host country. As Adichie explains in her video presentation, from the moment she felt ready to write her novel, she had in mind different topics to explore, but she decided to focus on those themes she knows from a personal perspective and experience:

race is the subject that Americans are the most uncomfortable about, and race is something I discovered in America, because when I was in Nigeria I didn't think of myself as black, and then I went to the U.S. I became black, and it was a learning process for me, and it was even more interesting because it was not just discovering that I had this new identity, because in Nigeria I identified as Igbo, which is my ethnic group, and I identified as Christian, which is my religion and that's how ... those are the bases of identification in Nigeria, but then in the U.S., suddenly black, you know, suddenly a black person. And it was interesting to me because I realised that to be black meant something in America and often it meant things that are not very positive and ... so trying to make sense of that, I think it's something that's also part of *Americanah*. (03:21-04:12)

As Adichie accentuates in her video presentation, nowadays middle-class Nigerians have jobs and lead decent lives, but they continue to regard America as the land of opportunities, a “magical place where dreams happen” (05:08-05:12). Therefore, this mental picture of easiness functions as a magnet for individuals who aim at privileged and prosperous living standards.

The context for this idea of an overseas Eldorado is made clearer by the thesis articulated by African-American novelist and Nobel Prize laureate, Toni Morrison, in *The Origin of Others* (2017). Every year, the University of Harvard hosts “The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures”, and in the spring of 2016, the annual lectureship was assigned to Morrison who delivered academic talks on the literature of belonging (Coates, viii). These lectures were collected and published under the title *The Origin of Others* with a foreword by the African-American journalist and activist Ta-Nehisi Coates. In the lecture “The Foreigner's Home”, Morrison shares with her audience her reflections on History emphasising the hold it still has on the black community worldwide. She argues that over the centuries the Western world has been carrying out forms of political and economic control of large parts of the world including domination over African peoples. She traces the origin of non-European nations' forced subservience to Western priorities to “the domination one nation (Great Britain) then had over most others”. After the fall of the British Empire, and in spite of changes in Western political conditions, forms of control and pressure did not go away. The labels assigned to what Morrison calls “categories of historical trends” evolved to take on more benign-sounding notions such as a sense of unity, or equality of opportunities, as demonstrated by terms like “internationalism” or “universalism” or the ongoing form of control known and understood as globalisation (96). In actual fact, these Western-centric projects mirror the same structures and

practices of white control and domination over the black community, as she explains in her discussion of the meaning of globalisation:

Globalization has the same desire and yearnings as its predecessors. It too understands itself as historically progressive, enhancing, unifying, utopian and destined. Narrowly defined, it means the free movement of capital and the rapid distribution of data and products operating within a politically neutral environment shaped by multinational corporate demands. Its larger connotations, however are less innocent, encompassing as they do, not only the demonization of embargoed states or the trivialization-cum-negotiation with war lords and corrupt politicians, but also the collapse of nation states under the weight of transnational economics, capital, and labor; the pre-eminence of Western culture and economy; and the Americanization of the developed and developing world through the penetration of U.S. cultures into the West in fashion, film, music and cuisine. (96-97)

Morrison expands her reflections providing more evidence to disclose the real meaning of globalisation and its impact on marginalised societies. Even though globalisation “has reached a level of majesty in our imagination”(97) with its promising qualities, that is to say encouragement of movements of human beings and goods, high-speed communications and circulation of information, opportunities for economic growth for nations that have long remained on the margins of global economic development as well as the contraction of space-time distance, in truth, globalisation reveals “an evil courting dangerous dystopia” (97).

Due to a common “abhorrence of diversity” (98), borders are reinforced, local bureaucracies and laws contradict the idealised concept of borderless countries, ultimately only individuals who can bring economic benefits to the host country are entitled to freedom of movement. The last two decades in particular have been marked by mass movement of peoples, that, contrary to the utopian possibilities advanced by globalisation, generated migrant crises as Western governments reacted by closing their borders, and most countries refused to take in the arriving refugees. In her discussion the ongoing forms of control, Morrison reminds her audience that

one of the many reasons and necessities for the mass movement of peoples, war leads them all. It is estimated that when the final numbers of the displaced come out – those running from persecution, conflict, and generalized violence in today’s world (including refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons) – the

number will far surpass sixty million. Sixty million. And half of all refugees are children. I don't know the number of the dead. (98)

Continuing in her analysis of globalisation, Morrison points out another negative consequence related to high-speed communications and circulation of information. This rapidity of motion requires and encourages the employment of a global language that is nothing else but the “in-distinguishability, the elimination in the near future of all minority languages and cultures” (98).

Furthermore, Western countries actively engage in the exploitation of resources, which is limited by “a finite planet and the countless goods and services that can be exported and imported” (97), not to mention the corresponding exploitation of the workforce in those marginalised countries that were supposed to be benefitting from globalisation.

The American novelist concludes her talk on a pessimistic note: “even if our worst fears about the future are not made completely manifest, they nevertheless cancel out globalization's assurances of a better life by issuing dire warnings of premature cultural death” (99).

Morrison's analysis arguably functions as a seismograph that reveals and records the real implications concealed behind the deceptive idea of an unbalanced existing order put forth as “historically progressive, enhancing, unifying, utopian and destined” (96). To some extent, Morrison's view on globalisation reflects Arjun Appadurai's theory on the same issue. The Indian-American anthropologist¹¹ already challenged the complex concept of globalisation in his work *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) and especially in terms of a global village in thought and in action as envisaged by the Canadian philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s. As an intellectual ahead of his time, McLuhan compares technological innovation to an electronic nervous system that allows human beings to be “pluralistically in many worlds and cultures simultaneously” (31). This means that events taking place somewhere in the world are able to be experienced elsewhere in real-time even in far away and isolated small villages. He goes further positing that the modern world does not

¹¹ It has to be emphasised that Appadurai, born in Mumbai, moved to the United States in 1967 on a student visa (1). Although being settled in the U.S, India remains the principal ethnographic referent in most of his anthropological thinking and work.

exist in isolation and human beings are increasingly connected by electric (or electronic) technologies. According to McLuhan, “electro-magnetic discoveries have recreated the simultaneous ‘field’ in all human affairs so that the human family now exists under conditions of a ‘global village’. The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” (31).

Appadurai, by contrast, argues that the one interconnected, metaphorical global village is primarily disjunctive and depicts

the world we live in now [as] schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other. Here, we are close to the central problematic of cultural processes in today’s world. (27)

In view of proximity to “the central problematic of cultural processes”, Appadurai sustains that when McLuhan envisaged the one interconnected, global village, he “overestimated the communitarian implications of the new media” (29), and it has to be emphasised that, despite being an intellectual ahead of his time, the Canadian media theorist could not foresee the constant and swift-flowing improvements electronic, digital products and systems have produced in recent years. Experiencing the global village three decades later, Appadurai is able to formulate a definition where human agglomerations are now occurring virtually, often independent of a shared physical location: “we are now aware that with media, each time we are tempted to speak of the global village, we must be reminded that media create communities with no sense of place” (29).

From an anthropological perspective, as extrapolated from Appadurai’s theory on globalisation, this “no sense of place” is accompanied by a diminishing, even an absence of, a sense of belonging or the emotive bonds and attachments human beings develop or experience in particular locations and environments, at scales ranging from home to nation. This development of location-removed communities made possible by electronic and digital technology that affects current cultural processes, is counterbalanced by the agency of “imaginary landscapes”, as put forward by Appadurai later in his reflections:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the

imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media.

The image, the imagined, the imaginary — these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. (31)

In his reasoning, the anthropologist goes further averring that “the imagination as a social practice” is also a consequence of the increasing pace and scope of interconnections crisscrossing the globe, and almost inevitably,

the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (31)

Appadurai goes on to explain that “the new global order” has at its core a peculiar aspect: “the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (32). As it may be perceived, this tension triggers conflicting effects and reactions especially in terms of cultural and lifestyle diversities which, because of homogenisation may be diminished or erased in favour of an artificial blending and conformity. This is perceived particularly by smaller communities fearing being culturally absorbed by communities of a larger scale. Moreover, in order to avoid what Appadurai defines as “indigenization” (32), or external, foreign values that are altered and made to fit in with the local, traditional culture, these smaller communities put pressure on their own original cultural values and beliefs giving rise in return to forms of insularity. Simultaneously, globalisation also enables individuals in far-flung corners of the world to encounter new ideas, commodities, belief systems, and voluntary groups to which they might choose to belong. At times, these are at the expense of local options, but it is also crucial to acknowledge that people increasingly make choices and can select the communities, ideas or opportunities that most resonate with them.

The role played by imagination along with a concern for indigenisation, as put forth by Appadurai, find evidence in Adichie’s *Americanah*. Obinze, in particular, best embodies these features as it will be put forward later in this chapter.

Proceeding with Appadurai's study, the anthropologist examines "the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (32) through five dimensions or "scapes" of global flows: "ethnoscapes", "technoscapes", "financescapes", "mediascapes" and "ideoscapes" (33). The distinct peculiarities of each of these "scapes" of global flows, which act on each other and affect human lives from their daily routine to larger global trends, are manifested in Ifemelu's and Obinze's migration experiences in *Americanah*.

The dimension of ethnoscapes (33) which have to do with multidirectional movement of people is at the core of Adichie's novel, which is about movement of young Nigerians who envision the West and "America as the extra place where magical things happen" (Adichie, 2015 01:32-01:36).

The dimension of technoscapes, or flows of technologies that move across boundaries connecting the world and erecting the "global village" foreseen and suggested by McLuhan (29), appears in Ifemelu's and Obinze's narrations distinctively. At the same time, technoscapes allow the two characters to mend their relationship. Indeed, they reconnect at first by email, and then through texting and social media when they both live in Lagos as returning migrants.

By contrast, the dimension of financescapes is not evident in *Americanah*. According to Appadurai, it refers to the flow of money across political borders; it is highly interrelated with other scapes, and shares a disjunctive relationship with them. Changes or cracks in one scape can drastically alter other scapes. For example, changes in global political alignments will directly impact financescapes, the rapid financial flow and all the other scapes respectively (34-35).

The dimension of mediascapes refers to the diffusion and spread of media images across the globe. Appadurai argues that the collection and/or accumulation of images engrossing individuals' attentions through a variety of platforms – printed, electronic and digital – provides them new narratives and perspectives in which commodities, politics and entertainment are all thoroughly intermingled. In return, this offers individuals gorged on an overabundant diet of images the occasion to idealise their own "chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic" (35) imagined worlds.

This perspective is crucial because it provides a nuanced complexity in how to perceive and understand media consumption. Furthermore, due to the involvement of the

image, the imagined and the imaginary, mediascapes may both unify and distance individuals. An overabundance of images that create the illusion of America as an accessible, better place to reside is well depicted in Obinze's narration.

The last dimension theorised by Appadurai – ideoscapes – delves into state ideology. The flow of ideas across boundaries implies movement of images. Consequently, ideoscapes are related to mediascapes, especially in terms of state ideology and/or counter-ideology. Ideoscapes are therefore very closely tied to ideological worldviews and work toward constructing or deconstructing specific political ideologies, cultures, and mainstream narratives. These constructions must be understood within the specificities of political and ethnic contexts. The flow of ideas across boundaries, however, can be small-scale, such as an individual posting her or his personal views on digital platforms such as social media; or larger and more systematic, such as missionaries, for instance, who have made their explicit goal to spread their religious doctrines throughout large parts of the globe (36).

Appadurai relies on this framework to elucidate the concept of globalisation that occurs at the points of rupture and disjuncture between the above-mentioned landscapes. Delving into his reflections, a common, shared trait among “the five terms” comes into view, that is to say the “imagination as a social practice” (31) to the point where he situates the work of imagination at the centre of all globalisation processes. Appadurai contends that contemporary global flows need to be articulated in more complex terms, and the role of imagination within different socio-cultural contexts may be the key to understanding modern globalisation. Furthermore, as “this is a world where electronic media are transforming the relationships between information and mediation” (188), media flows decidedly play a crucial role in the shaping of the imagination, therefore mediascapes are decisive in any given context.

That is, one type of imagined world can trigger similar imageries in other parts of the world, although, they will possess different shapes and forms. Nevertheless, as the five dimensions or “scapes” of global flows may also overlap and intertwine, Appadurai draws attention to a conflicting aspect of globalisation: the movement of groups of people. Thanks to increasingly instantaneous and ramified media connections, these movements, whether mass or single movements, are characterised by continuing forms of communication especially with relatives and friends left in their home country as well as

with those who already reached the host land. This gives rise to “diasporic public spheres” (4) which have the possibility – also by virtue of their de-localisation – to mobilise their respective cultural differences to the advantage of a group identity thus constructed by and in the historical process and not by primordial characteristics. These public spheres contribute significantly to the phenomenon of the transfer of differences, in the form of goods, signs, slogans, lifestyles, images and ideologies. These flows, coming from various parts of the world and from people or groups with different experiences, create out of nothing or reinforce antagonistic micro-identities that oppose regimes – state and non-state – of normalisation (42). As Appadurai later states “in the postnational world that we see emerging, diaspora runs with, and not against, the grain of identity, movement, and reproduction” (171); it is “a new sort of world in which diaspora is the order of things and settled ways of life are increasingly hard to find” (172). This form of diaspora within the context of globalisation is a consequence of “global electronic transformations” (197), and when human beings move, regardless of the reasons behind their travel, they carry with them their own cultural backgrounds that are always socio-historically contingent and culturally specific. Be that as it may, if on the one hand, this may be perceived as a form of transferring abroad customs and ways of life; on the other hand, because of “the global flow of images” along with the crucial role played by “electronic mediation”, identity itself develops into a more complex and, to some degree, disconnected sense of selfhood. As “the global flow of images, news and opinion” may also represent the so-called cultural experience, because of electronic transformations, they may consequently be transferred from a virtual to an actual, physical, spatial dimension. Nonetheless, this still seems mainly possible for “the more educated and elite members of diasporic communities”; labour migrants or refugees are more concerned with basic, practical aspects of their day to day lives in the foreign place they inhabit (197).

A couple of decades later, in her lecture on “The Foreigner’s Home”, Morrison too deals with multidirectional movement of people across boundaries and argues that the twenty-first century mass movement of peoples are in large part the journey from the periphery to the “seat of the colonizers” (94). The crossing of borders in search for better life conditions along with those journeys made by refugees and asylum seekers merely continue to keep in existence unjust societies based on exploitation and always to the advantage of Western societies and their economic, political prestige. Morrison

emphasises that the general undermining of the concept of home is just one of the consequences of modern globalisation. This allegedly “progressive, enhancing, unifying, utopian and destined” (95) historical occurrence, that theoretically simplifies the act of travelling across political borders, in actuality, has turned Western political borders into militarised barriers designed to impede the passage of a hostile army. In this climate of mistrust and fear of outsiders notions of hospitality, belonging and the very “concept of home” become unstable and dissonant in their relation to each other:

Excluding the height of the slave trade in the nineteenth century, the mass movement of peoples in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is greater than it has ever been. It is a movement of workers, intellectuals, refugees, and immigrants, crossing oceans and continents, through customs offices or in flimsy boats, speaking multiple languages of trade, of political intervention, of persecution, war, violence, and poverty. [...] The spectacle of mass movement draws attention inevitably to the borders, the porous places, the vulnerable points where the concept of home is seen as being menaced by foreigners. Much of the alarm hovering at the borders, the gates, is stoked, it seems to me, by 1) both the threat and the promise of globalization; and 2) an uneasy relationship with our own foreignness, our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging. (93-95)

In his “Foreword” to Morrison’s lectures, Coates points out the fact that our contemporary globalised society is, in truth, about “the creation of aliens and the erection of fences” (x), or, in other words, the exact opposite of allowing people’s movements and or social mobility. The American activist notes that Morrison relies on literature and History only to describe and understand “how and why we have come to associate those fences with pigment” (Coates, x). Morrison’s lecture reminds us that distinctions based on colour exist to justify disparities and to reinforce a sense of estrangement in particular populations. The twenty-first century has not changed the reality experienced by African-Americans “of not being at home in their homeland; of being exiled in the place where they belong” (99). Their sense of belonging is constantly brought into question by white supremacy that still exerts global, political and economic control over the black community. Morrison is aware of the fact that there is not an immediate escape from the grip of the past, but, understanding how that grip came to be may help Africa to overcome the enduring infantile phase it is relegated to:

As the original locus of the human race, Africa is ancient, yet, being under colonial control, it is also infantile. A kind of old fetus always waiting to be born but confounding all midwives. In novel after novel, short story after short story, Africa is simultaneously innocent and corrupt, savage and pure, irrational and wise. (104)

Morrison's claim is well depicted in *Americanah*. In this novel, Adichie also deals with the current concepts of race and racism in the U.S., England and Nigeria and provides in return an analysis and critique of obstacles and prejudices that still concern all former colonised human beings; she sheds light on the falsehoods and deceptions involved in contemporary forms of migration, from affecting an accent to using false identification that cause emotional strain, and lead to feelings of inferiority and invisibility; and all the while maintaining the love affair between the two young Nigerian characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, at the centre of the narrative.

Before ending her video presentation, Adichie subjoins, as a sort of closing remarks, her perspective on literature, highlighting its crucial relevance especially in relation to causing change. Literature unquestionably widens individuals' horizons in terms of knowledge and, above all, acceptance of diversities that characterise humankind:

I think literature really matters, I think literature ... I think literature matters on the level of just simply reminding us of the humanity of other people, and I think that by doing that it kind of makes a difference. I think that if we had politicians and decision makers who all read literature, I think it would affect the way they make policy, because they would think about ... not just about numbers, they would think about the humanity of it ... One of the thing I love about, and I should say just not literature, but storytelling in general, I think storytelling comes in different forms, in books, in film, even in music to an extent, and I think, it really does matter, I think that it kind of makes a difference, I think you can read a book ... and it can change the way you look at the world, it can change the way you think about a particular kind of person. I think it's sad that we live in a world where literature seems to be kind of ... not as important, but I think it matters, and it is not just because I'm in the business of creating literature, I really think it matters. (05:12 - 06:24)

Adichie's video introduction to her novel manages to provide a clear and inviting overview of the plot. As a consequence, after having read *Americanah*, besides the fulfilment of their expectations, readers now possess a wider perceptiveness of current migrations, which are unquestionably an ancestral practice as ancient as the history of Homo Sapiens. In *Americanah*, Adichie covers the topic of migration in terms of both

movements driven by necessity and those triggered by the “imagination as a social practice” (Appadurai 31) as put forth by the Indian-American anthropologist. The novel’s concern and insights on this latter imagined, aspirational and constructed idea of a new country on the part of the migrant will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

3.3 Overturning the Canon: Blogging the Novel

“Nigeria haunts me in terms of being a space of unfinished stories. But my identity maps onto other things: being a Lagosian (Lagos is like a city-state), being a West African, being African, being a part of the Black Atlantic. [...] I am now in a country where people (convinced of their innocence) sleep well; [...] I’m still one of history’s amnesiacs. [...] I meant to write ‘insomniacs’! But the error is illuminating.”

(Teju Cole 84-85)

For a general audience *Americanah* is a novel about the love story between two longstanding Nigerian friends – Ifemelu and Obinze – who meet as teenagers. They share their lives and dreams, they are romantically involved and make plans for their future. Adichie’s own description of her work substantiates this reading of the novel, that is to say a narration which is extensively focused on a love story. In the above-mentioned video introduction to *Americanah*, for instance, she places the topic of love as one of the central subjects of the novel:

I wanted to write about many things, a love story...ehm, I wanted to write about race [...] so race was important, but immigration was important because I think that many of the stories of immigration that we ... that ... I think that ... that the mainstream Western world knows about Africans is the kind of immigration where Africans have left poverty, or AIDS, or war ... and ... and where they’re mostly refugees and ... I think those stories are important because they matter, but it’s not the story that I know personally. (Adichie 2015, 03:11-04:56)

On a previous occasion, during a chat show that was later uploaded on SVT – a Swedish YouTube channel – Adichie avers that, in *Americanah*, she explicitly wanted to explore the emotional bond between two young Nigerian friends and how it evolved within the time frame of the narration. Encouraged by the female interviewer, in a witty, ironical and at times feminist tone, the completely at ease in the spotlight and self-assured author states that she wanted to write a novel about “an unapologetically old-fashioned love story” along with explaining what she means by that:

well, I think that sort of story ... ehm Anna Karenina, and I think, well, here's the thing, when men write love stories we call it great literature, when women write love stories we call them love stories [...] and it's also interesting because I've often been asked somehow, you know, why a love story, as though somehow one needs to justify the choice to write about love. I wanted to write about love. I love love, I think love is ... you know, in the way that I think we all need food, I think we all need love and in different kinds of love, and so I wanted to write about the love of two people in this very old-fashioned way which is the idea of the soulmate you meet when you're much younger and life somehow draws you apart and at some point you meet and we don't know whether you're going to be together or not but ... and I wanted a kind of, I didn't want it to be too drenched in irony, I didn't want it to be cynical, I wanted a love that was unafraid to be lushly about love. (Adichie 2013, 06:14-07:30)

As mentioned in the previous section, in the final part of her video introduction to *Americanah*, besides stressing the importance of literature, Adichie simultaneously places emphasis on storytelling and on its multiple forms of expression (2015, 05:44 - 05:54). If literature is envisioned as a collection centre where all human knowledge together converges, then, besides welcoming and hosting different disciplines and knowledges, this hub also allows them to cooperate, overlap, intertwine and give rise to new modalities of storytelling or artistic expressions. This form of coexistence that generates new acts and or processes of narrating is put forth by Caryl Phillips as follows:

Music, dance, film – all these forms of artistic expression were encouraged and coexisted with literature; the new, and often avant-garde, was ordered to take a seat next to more traditional work. (2011, 148)

In a looser sense, storytelling also refers to techniques used in other media to unfold or disclose the narrative of a story. *Americanah* develops into a complex repository of a variety of new media and crossmedia discourses. In regard to these last features *Americanah* allows the proliferation of other media, or videos in this specific case, besides providing examples of autonomous storytelling that simultaneously expand Adichie's novel, so as to create an augmented text. The digital audience is privy, through images, sound and spoken words, to a parallel, complementary storytelling account of the love story between two young Nigerians. While surfing the Internet or looking up videos about Adichie and/or her works, her digital audience has undoubtedly come across Dennis Schmitz and Uche Aguh's *Americanah Concept Trailer* (2016) and *Americanah Full*

Concept Film (2017) along with Ayoinmotion's music video *Americanah (Ifemelu)* (2019). These digital productions share one common trait: they are narrated from Obinze's subjective perspective. This means that, after having seen the videos, readers – who have already read the love story from Ifemelu's point of view – now have a fuller account of the longstanding relationship between the two characters.

Dennis Schmitz – American producer – and Uche Aguh – screenwriter and film director born in Nigeria but raised in the U.S.A. as he moved to Texas with his family at the age of ten (Aguh) – adapted Adichie's novel for a short film. In late 2016, they uploaded on the YouTube platform what they define as a concept trailer or a three-minute video that advertises and anticipates the 2017 full concept film. In approximately twelve-minute run, this digital storytelling delivers a narration that depicts the main stages of Ifemelu and Obinze's relationship. As emphasised on the YouTube web page in the comments/further information section, the film “was shot over a period of seven days, on location in London, on no budget,” while another visible comment reads “this is not meant to be a real film.” In truth, this production was originally intended as a suggestion for a television show that should have been released in 2021. In 2019, HBO, an American pay television network, announced it would start work on a 10-episode series involving the multi-award winner, Mexican-Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong'o both as executive producer and Ifemelu's leading female role (Otterson, 2019). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the shooting of the episodes was at first postponed and later cancelled due to Nyong'o's previous professional commitments (Otterson, 2020).

Another instance of a digital product enhanced by *Americanah* is the work of Ayoinmotion. Born in Nigeria, raised in Flint (Michigan, U.S.A.) and currently based in New York City (U.S.A.) defines himself

as a wordsmith and activist (as a combination of activist and artist) [...] at the core of everything he does is words. Words mean everything to him whether he is reciting a poem, singing, or advocating for justice and talking about movements such as End SARS and Black Lives Matter. (Campbell)

Besides his advocacy in social justice movements, Ayoinmotion is a singer and songwriter, and as he declares to his interviewer, Rasheeda Campbell – an editorialist for the Los Angeles, online “The Official Black Magazine” – he is proud of having introduced Afrobeat/Afropop music to the American audience. Since 2019, his four-

minute-and-three-second music video *Americanah* (*Ifemelu*) has been available on the YouTube platform as well as on other digital music and video services such as Spotify, Apple Music and Shazam.

It is worth pointing out the attention to accuracy and authenticity that characterise the sound scape of these digital stories. In all the videos characters speak English with a Nigerian accent and in Ayoinmotion's song, Nigerian expressions are also embedded in the lyrics.

Although they focus exclusively on the relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze, in truth, the three videos still manage to provide an overview of *Americanah*'s plot. Therefore, it is quite possible that this digital, visual and audible approach to literature may induce Internet users to actually read the novel: a literary work that has been the source of inspiration, as clearly stated in the credits, to Aguh as a screenwriter and Ayoinmotion as a songwriter.

For the so-called 'old-fashioned' readers, individuals who before buying a book will leaf through it to see if it is written in a way that captures their attention and then decide to read it, Adichie's third novel does not destroy their expectations.

Upon opening of the book, readers do not receive information about the structure of the narration, or hints on the plot as *Americanah* does not contain a table of contents; conversely, they are immediately led to "Part 1" of a story that the author has divided into seven parts and fifty-five chapters.

With the exception of direct speeches scattered in the text, the narration is entrusted to two main voices: Ifemelu's narrating voice along with her third-person narration and Obinze's narrating voice along with his third-person narration. This shifting from the first person to the third-person voice turns each character into the observer and the observed.

Another major shift that represents an innovative element in *Americanah*'s narrative is the switchover to digital writing in the form of blogposts along with some emails and mobile phone text messages that are embedded in the narration.

From the first lines, such as for instance "I write a lifestyle blog" (Adichie 4), readers intuitively apprehend a timespan – present-day and digital age – within which the course of events occur, only to have proof of it later in the narration when they read the

title of one of Ifemelu's blogposts: "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women – Both American and Non-American – Love Barack Obama" (264).

The narration is characterised by a nonlinear timeline: presumably the start of *Americanah* is set around 2009, but transitions to earlier events interrupt the chronological development of Ifemelu's and other characters' stories.

The third-person narration through Ifemelu confers a sort of circular shape to the narrative, as it starts and ends the novel. In the opening line, readers immediately receive some basic information, such as location ("Princeton") and time ("summer"), along with a list of the "American cities she knew well" as both hints of her past and present life:

Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops, and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of a smell that most appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had all smelled distinctly. Philadelphia had the musty scent of history. New Haven smelled of neglect. Baltimore smelled of brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell. She liked taking deep breaths here. [...] But she did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair. It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton – the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could not imagine them wearing braids – and yet as she waited at Princeton Junctions station for the train on an afternoon ablaze with heat, she wondered why there *was* no place where she could braid her hair. (3-4 emphasis in the original)

As Ifemelu informs readers later, she wanted "to braid her hair for the journey home" (9) and already from these first considerations, readers get an early sample of her sarcastic tone every time she makes comments or discloses small frustrations and incongruities that characterise her interactions with American culture and society. Her going back home implies a return to the place where, unlike the U.S., she feels closer to her true self as well as to a reunion with her long-standing friend Obinze, but as the very last line of the novel suggests, readers are left with an open ending:

AND THEN, on a languorous Sunday evening, seven months since she had last seen him, there Obinze was, at the door of her flat. She stared at him.
"Ifem," he said.
[...] He was holding a long sheet of paper dense with writing. "I've written this for you. It's what I would like to know if I were you. Where my mind has been. I've written everything."

[...] “I know we could accept the things we can’t be for each other, and even turn it into the poetic tragedy of our lives. Or we could act. I want to act. [...] I moved out of the house today. I’ll stay in my flat [...] I know it’s taken me too long and I know you’re moving on and I completely understand if you are ambivalent and need time.”

He paused, shifted. “Ifem, I’m chasing you. I’m going to chase you until you give this a chance.”

For a long time she stared at him. He was saying what she wanted to hear and yet she stared at him.

“Ceiling,” she said, finally. “Come in.” (588)

The nickname “Ceiling” employed in the last sentence alludes to a shared history and intimacy. The emotional bond between the two characters was already evident in “Chapter 2” when Ifemelu emails Obinze announcing her return to Lagos: “*Ceiling, kedu¹²? Hope all is well with work and family [...] I recently decided to move back to Nigeria. Should be in Lagos in a week. Would love to keep in touch.*” (23 emphasis in the original).

Readers, who have come across Schmitz and Aguh’s videos as well as Ayoinmotion’s music video after having read the novel, have now a wider perspective on the relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze. Unlike the printed version of *Americanah*, the full concept film and its trailer provide details that are omitted in the narration: Ifemelu and Obinze met for the very first time in 1995 at a party in Lagos; they immediately established a close relationship; Obinze’s wife will unlikely grant his request for a divorce. The song “Ifemelu” chiefly focuses on Obinze’s story. Obinze as the singing voice expresses in lyrics both his love for a young, determined woman who left him in Nigeria to pursue her American dream and his desperate attempts as illegal immigrant in a Western country to avoid deportation. Eventually, the visual narrations of *Americanah* confer to the printed version an augmented narrative.

¹² The employment of Igbo words known as ethnosizing narrative strategy represents an identity marker for immigrants who feel marginalized and discriminated in the host country. The five key elements of ethnic identity are identified in language, visible cultural elements, ethnicself-identification, ethnic networks and future citizenship plans. According to the German scholar in Economics Klaus F. Zimmermann, “the concept of ethnosizer has to be understood as a measure of ethnic identity. This measure of ethnic identity is the result of four distinct combinations of commitments to identification: assimilation, integration, marginalization and separation” (6). When marginalization and separation prevail, then relying on mother-tongue expressions becomes a means of establishing his/her existence within a hostile context.

OBINZE: ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

To a certain extent, it may be argued that Ifemelu, Obinze and the digital writing of Ifemelu's blog, deliver three separate and autonomous readings of the novel: Ifemelu's storytelling is chiefly focused on the question of racism; Obinze's story is mainly focused on the question of migration, illegal status and deportation; Ifemelu's blogposts provide extensive and "*Various observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (4 emphasis in the original).

As may be inferred so far, Obinze plays a minor role in *Americanah*. This does not mean that his story is marginal and only serves to complement Ifemelu's narrative. The lines devoted to him provide further details about current forms of migrations, as made clear by Adichie in her above-mentioned video introduction to the novel:

I wanted to write the immigration story that I know, and it's the story of people who dream of more, so people who are middle-class, they are not hungry, they have jobs, but they want to leave because they think America is this magical place where dreams happen. (2015, 04:57-05:11)

In the novel, Adichie introduces Ifemelu and Obinze as two Nigerian friends in their late teenage years who spend a lot of time together, besides being romantically linked. Obinze's mother reproaches his son for being "too besotted with America" (84) to the point of disregarding his Nigerian culture and reads only "American books because America is the future" (84). His interest in Western literature echoes Appadurai's reflection on the "new role for the imagination in social life" (31) and how it affects human beings from their daily routine to a larger global extent, which is also a consequence of the increasing pace and scope of interconnections crisscrossing the globe. In addition, Obinze's belief that "America is the future" may be traced back to Adichie's remarks about present-day Nigerians and their desire to leave their home country "particularly now that we live in this globalized world where people are interconnected" (2015, 02:56-03:00).

Indeed, Obinze's fascination with America is a product of imagination that routinely enters his thoughts, permeates his decision-making, becomes a domain in which he immerses himself regularly. Arguably, imagination is the primary impetus ultimately that sends him on his quest to achieve the much-cherished dream of living in America.

Judging from Ifemelu's reminiscences of her schoolmate, readers cannot help but notice that Obinze's longing for America borders on an infatuation so intense as to verge on obsession:

He was fluent in the knowledge of foreign things, especially of American things. Everybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines, but he knew details about American presidents from a hundred years ago. Everybody watched American shows, but he knew about Lisa Bonet leaving *The Cosby Show* to go and do *Angel Heart* and Will Smith's huge debts before he was signed to do *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* [...] He often said "It's not as if this is Manhattan" or "Go to Manhattan and see how things are." (80-81)

Her observation that he "often said" Nigeria could not be compared to Manhattan implies that Obinze was virtually living elsewhere, in "the extra place" (Adichie video 2015, 01:32) on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Arguably, this social practice driven by the roles of imagery and imagination (Appadurai 31) resembles a sort of preparation for his new life "where he was destined to be." Obinze

had never simply wanted to go *abroad*, as many others did [...] it had always been America, only America. A longing nurtured and nursed over many years [...] Later, seeking out magazines and books and films and secondhand stories about America, his longing took on a minor mystical quality and America became where he was destined to be [...] Days after he graduated from university, bloated with knowledge about America, he applied for a visa at the American embassy in Lagos. (288 emphasis in the original)

Obinze applies for a visa three times unsuccessfully always receiving the same negative response "Sorry, you don't qualify" (289). However, when his mother was "*invited to an academic conference in London*" (289 emphasis in the original) she offered Obinze the opportunity to accomplish his ambition to reach America:

"I'm going to put your name on my British visa application as my research assistant," she said quietly. "That should get you a six-month visa. You can stay with Nicholas in London. See what you can do with your life. Maybe you can get to America from there. I know that your mind is no longer here."

He stared at her.

"I understand this is the sort of thing is done nowadays," she said, sitting down on the sofa beside him, trying to sound offhand, but he sensed her discomfort in the uncommon briskness of her words. (290)

His straight-talking mother “lied for him” (290) only to make him somehow leave for America. This motherly gesture causes Obinze to feel “like a failure” (290) and fuels at the same time sentiments of sorrow and shame he is not able to come to terms with. In London he shifts from a six-month legal visitor status to undocumented, illegal migrant. He is an outsider in a society that is often hostile to people who are not white. He soon realises that within British society privileges and opportunities are strictly related with skin complexion, and that as an illegal migrant, his residence and stay require succumbing to extortion, blackmail and exploitation. Out of desperation, Obinze manages to arrange a sham marriage with a woman named Cleotilde (282) to remain in the country. However, on the day of the wedding, he is arrested and subsequently expelled from the United Kingdom. Ironically, years later, when he has to go on a business trip to Atlanta, he goes back to the “American Embassy [where] he had been refused a visa years ago, when he was newly graduated and drunk with American ambitions, but with his new bank statements, he easily got a visa” (33).

Obinze’s life experience as a black immigrant in a Western society serves as evidence of Toni Morrison’s reflections on globalisation as a deceptive idea of an occurrence put forth as “historically progressive, enhancing, unifying, utopian and destined” (96). Obinze moves to London, or putting it in Morrison’s words, he makes a journey from the periphery to the “seat of the colonizers” (94) where he is subjected to the repetitive patterns of discrimination, exploitation and alienation:

He lived in London indeed but invisibly, his existence like an erased pencil sketch; each time he saw a policeman, or anyone in a uniform, anyone with the faintest scent of authority, he would fight the urge to run. (318)

Obinze’s time in the United Kingdom is dominated by fear, because of his status as illegal immigrant, and desperate efforts to make his move a success. He weekly visits a bookshop to “buy an overpriced caffeinated drink, read as much as he could for free, and become Obinze again” (315). Even though, he realises he does not relish reading contemporary American fiction any longer as “he read novel after novel and was disappointed: nothing was grave, nothing serious, nothing urgent, and most dissolved into ironic nothingness” (317). Conversely, he finds comfort in American newspapers and magazines because in the British press “there were more and more articles about immigrations, and each one

stoked new panic in his chest” (317). One evening, on the way to his accommodation, he goes to the tube station and

He sat on the stained seat of the noisy train, opposite a woman reading the evening paper. *Speak English at Home, Blunkett tells immigrants*. He imagined the article she was reading. [...] The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain. Yet he understood. It had to be comforting, this denial of history. (320)

The “Blunkett” of the newspaper headline who advises immigrants to “speak English at home” is David Blunkett who served as U.K. Home Secretary within the 2001-2004 Labour government, a role involving responsibility for immigration and citizenship as well as internal affairs. Since the early 2000s, the United Kingdom has implemented several policies aimed at impeding irregular migration. These policies have increasingly adopted a securitisation approach whereby migrants, including asylum seekers, are understood as a threat to the British society and national identity (Hough and Le Louvier 3).

Obinze as “one of those illegal immigrants who were overcrowding an already crowded island” (321) is surrounded by the current language of fear imbued with the rhetoric of Home Secretary Blunkett. The threat of deportation looms over the young Nigerian. Nonetheless, unlike the British press and mass media, Obinze does connect the colonial “past” and the “present,” concluding that “the influx into Britain of black and brown people” is “from countries created by Britain” and because of that, their arrival in “an already crowded island” was unquestionably foreseeable.

Obinze’s reasoning mirrors Ambalavaner Sivanandan’s assertion: “we are here because you were there” (qtd. in Patel 1). Born in the British colony of Ceylon, Sivanandan migrated to the United Kingdom in 1953 where he started his career as a writer along with his activist engagement in decolonisation and Black Power movement. The Sri Lankan Tamil British novelist argues that if on the one hand, the Second World War marked the beginning of the fall of the British Empire; on the other hand, it made it clear that domestic British history had been separated from British imperial history. This

intended separation generated confusion, ignorance and bias against immigration, especially against the so-called ‘coloured immigration’. As a consequence, to a common, general understanding, the concept of immigration has become a “byword for race, and for ideas about who is and who is not native to the nation”. Sivanandan expands his reflections asserting that if Britain was unable to create a post-imperial nation, it was indeed able to pursue a politics of separation relying on the concept of being or not being “a national.” The British scholar in sociology and human rights studies, Ian Sanjay Patel summarises Sivanandan’s reasoning as follows:

the immigrant, by definition, does not belong to nation-state in which she resides. The imagined idea of a nation-state-a people belonging to an ancestral territory under a state that protects both – finds its negative image in immigration. The claim that some do not belong only brings the belonging of those included in that nation-state into greater relief. One of the primary international prerogatives of the state is the ability and discretion to define who is a citizen (a national) and who is not. (2)

In his work, Patel elucidates Sivanandan’s well-known aphorism: “we are here because you were there”. This apparently naïve, and arguably obvious statement captures with simple elegance the indisputable relationship between “we”-as-post-war migrants who are “here” in Britain because “you”-as-the British empire colonised and subjugated “there”: our territories and peoples over the years (1).

More than seven decades later, Western political rhetoric, wilfully ignoring the link between past events and present realities, continues to describe migrants as a threat to host societies and their national identities. It is not coincidental that nowadays Sivanandan’s assertion is still employed by migrants, such as Suketu Mehta for instance, as a counter discourse to immigration policies in Western societies.¹³

As put forth in the previous section, Morrison traces back to former forms of imperialism the association between fences and pigment. She expands her reasoning in asserting that skin complexion still generates disparities before and after entering a Western society (99). For the most part, non-white individuals are prevented from entering, as it was for Obinze. However, if non-white individuals manage to enter a

¹³ Cf. chapter 2 “Postcolonial Digital Humanities as Contemporary Manifestos”

Western society illegally, then, their survival within a hostile environment depends on subterfuges that give rise to various, and at times paradoxical, forms of exploitation.

In her novel, Adichie provides examples of exploitation of irregular migrants. In one scene Obinze, whose visa and later his illegal status do not allow him to work in the United Kingdom, is offered a NI number plus protection from being reported in exchange for a portion of his wage:

“This is business, innit, but I’m helping you. You can use my NI number and pay me forty percent of what you make,” Vincent said. “It’s business, innit. If I don’t get what we agree on, I will report you.”

“My brother,” Obinze said. “That’s a little too much. You know my situation. I don’t have nothing. Please try and come down.”

“Thirty-five percent is the best I can do. This is business.” He had lost his accent and now spoke Nigerian English. “Let me tell you, there are many people in your situations.” [...] “You know that some people take half. Yes, he is in a situation but all of us are in a situation. I am helping him but this is business.” (310)

One day, his employer receives an anonymous telephone call. Someone warns him saying that Obinze is “illegal and working with a Brit’s name” (324). In order to untangle the problem, he is required to bring his passport to work the next day. In truth, Obinze is consciously aware that the telephone call was made by Vincent. Some time earlier, Vincent had demanded more money otherwise he would have reported him, as he eventually did. Without any spare money to give to his blackmailer – a Birmingham native (312) born of Nigerian parents – Obinze “left the warehouse that evening for the final time” (324).

The scam marriage organised by Angolan racketeers represents the final stage of Obinze’s process of dehumanisation during his stay in the United Kingdom. Since his visa had expired, he has turn himself into a commodity similarly to his ancestors during the slave trade. Within British society he is invisible, but with his work he contributes to its economy and with the earned money he contributes to the thriving, illegal business done by individuals who despite sharing his African origin do not show compassion. One of the contradictions of globalisation put forth by Morrison is the rapid “disintegrating sense of belonging” (95). Although intended as a unifying process that fosters freedom, Morrison stresses the opposite aspects of globalisation, which, among other things, lets individuals disregard local bureaucracies, laws, margins and marginal people (96-97).

Like Vincent, the Angolans keep asking for more money:

“Things have gone up, yeah,” in a tone that he imagined was accompanied by a shrug. A silence would follow, a wordlessness over the phone line that told him that it was his problem, not theirs. “I’ll pay it in by Friday,” he would say finally, before hanging up. (325)

Obinze is so focussed on legalising his status within British society to the point of disregarding its laws. On the day of the wedding, at the register office “two policemen stood behind the door, watching them with stony eyes. Obinze quieted his panic. There was nothing to worry about, nothing at all, he told himself, the civic center probably had policemen present as a matter of routine” (343). But it soon becomes clear the police officers are not there as a matter of routine when a man with “a sheaf of papers and [...] a photocopy of [Obinze’s] passport page” (343) approaches him:

“Are you Obinze Maduewesi?” [...] “Yes,” Obinze said quietly, and that word, yes, was an acknowledgement to the red-checked immigration officer, to Iloba and to Cleotilde, and to himself that it was over.

“Your visa is expired and you are not allowed to be present in the UK,” the red-checked man said.

A policeman clamped handcuffs around his wrists. [...] “Where you aware that your visa had expired?”

“Yes,” Obinze said. [...] “I can arrange for a lawyer for you, but it’s obvious you’ll be deported,” the immigration officer said evenly. [...] “I’m willing to go back to Nigeria,” Obinze said. The last shard of his dignity was like a wrapper slipping off that he was desperate to retie.” [...] “Removed.” That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing.” (343-345)

This passage describes the stark transition from optimistic dreams to sobering reality. To Obinze, the marriage represented a desperate final stratagem to reach America, as suggested by his mother before leaving for the United Kingdom. However, despite his efforts, Obinze does not succeed in getting any nearer the country “where he was destined to be” (288). As if his deportation were not enough, his sojourn, in Morrison’s words, at “seat of the colonizers” (94), is a catalogue of uninterrupted failure and disillusionment which ends with the miserable awareness of having being depersonalised.

IFEMELU: LEGAL MIGRATION

Conversely, Ifemelu manages to enter America and live there legally for “thirteen years” (19). Contrary to Obinze, to Ifemelu America does not symbolise the place where she is destined to be. However, having spent a lot of time with him, she unavoidably, albeit reluctantly, is exposed to some elements of its culture:

he gave her a copy of *Huckleberry Finn*, the page creased from his thumbing, and she started reading it on the bus home but stopped after a few chapters. The next morning, she put it down on his desk with a decided thump.

“Unreadable nonsense,” she said.

“It’s written in different American dialects,” Obinze said.

“And so what? I still don’t understand it.”

“You have to be patient, Ifem. If you really get into it, it’s very interesting and you won’t want to stop reading.”

“I’ve already stopped reading. Please keep your proper books and leave me with the books I like.” (81)

In truth, it is her Auntie Uju who offers Ifemelu the possibility of pursuing her studies in America, and, as expected, “the America expert” Obinze enthusiastically encourages her to “take the SATs and try for a scholarship” (121), assuring her he would join her right after his graduation:

and so she began to dream. She saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease. She took the SATs at a Lagos center, packed with thousands of people, all bristling with their own American ambitions. [...] She applied for a visa, convinced that a rude American would reject her application, it was what happened so often, after all, but the gray-haired woman [...] smiled at her and said, “Pick up your visa in two days. Good luck with your studies.” (122)

Like “thousands of people all bristling with their own American ambitions”, Ifemelu commences dreaming of a life in the land of opportunities where black people may aspire to a lifestyle similar to the one exhibited by the Cosby family.¹⁴ It may be argued that, the manner in which American culture is transmitted via mass media affects young, middle-class Nigerians recalls the manner English language and culture affected colonised people. The so-called ‘children’ of the Mother Country too were mesmerised by tales of

¹⁴ *The Cosby Show* is an American television sitcom that focuses on the Huxtables, an upper middle-class African-American family living in Brooklyn, New York. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cosby_Show.

order, beauty and wealth in ways which came to represent the splendour and prestige of Britain in the minds of colonised people. These unavoidably gave rise to dreams of one day leaving the periphery for the centre of the Empire. This is vividly described in postcolonial novels, such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), in which "the West Indians think that the streets of London paved with gold" (2), or in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004):

'Oh, Hortense, when I am older...' all her dreaming began with 'when I am older' '... when I am older, Hortense, I will be leaving Jamaica and I will be going to live in England.' This is when her voice became high-class [...] 'Hortense, in England I will have a big house with a bell at the front door and I will ring the bell.' And she made the sound, ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling. 'I will ring the bell in this house when I am in England. That is what will happen to me when I am older.' (11)

That being said, Obinze's expressed desire to join Ifemelu and "do the same [if he could] just get up and go" (121) presents readers with switch in the characters' intended life trajectories. It may be argued that this unexpected turn of events confers in return a feminist quality to the narration. In his essay on transnational mobility in *Americanah*, the African-American scholar in African Studies, Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ remarks:

I am particularly intrigued by Adichie's decision to reverse the traditional migrant narrative where the aspiring male travels to the metropole, leaving his hopeful girlfriend in Africa or the Caribbean, waiting to be brought over when the man has settled. *Americanah* features an aspiring female character who charts her way into a successful life and career in the United States before deciding to give it all up and relocate to Nigeria, unlike her Aunt Uju who continues to pursue the elusive American dream. (199)

In America, Ifemelu proves to be a strong, determined young woman despite the feelings of bewilderment and longing that manifest themselves very soon after her arrival as well as throughout her stay in the host country. Eventually, she manages to succeed in her studies, and in her social and working life, even though she witnesses and experiences discrimination on the basis of her skin complexion because

in America, you are black, baby [...] when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm

Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. [...] So you're black, baby. (273)

The discovery upon her arrival that the land of opportunities is "an iniquitously racist country" (339) triggers a deep sense of disorientation, a culture shock, a concern that does not affect Obinze in Britain in quite the same way. In a conversation with his university friend living in London and married to a white, British lawyer, Obinze shares one of his considerations based on his knowledge of America and on his British experience as an illegal immigrant:

"I think class in this country is in the air that people breathe. Everyone knows their place. Even people who are angry about class have somehow accepted their place," Obinze said. "A white boy and a black girl who grow up in the same working-class town in this country can get together and race will be secondary, but in America, even if the white boy and black girl grow up in the same neighbourhood, race would be primary." (340)

THE BLOG IN THE NOVEL, A DIGITAL TURN

Plausibly as a means of asserting her presence as a human being in a prejudiced, unjust Western society Ifemelu starts "an anonymous blog called *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (4 emphasis in the original). Her self-identification as a Non-American Black may be read as both Ifemelu's 'calling card' and a foretaste of her attempts at conforming to global prevailing standards of expression along with her attempts to feel fully included in the host country. Moreover, this opening lets readers instantaneously perceive a distinguishing, digital aspect of the novel. As mentioned previously, *Americanah* contains blogposts, emails, mobile and smartphone text messages which are smoothly embedded and merged in the narration, although differentiating themselves for layout, font and language. These markers of the current digital age also represent an extension of Adichie's writing style whose literary, intellectual and activist work is concurrently embedded in new and always up-to-date technologies. As the Italian scholar in English drama and postcolonial fiction, Serena Guarracino points out:

Adichie herself owns a sort of celebrity status: her videos show an impressive number of online views, making her a 'viral' public figure both inside and outside the traditional boundaries of postcolonial academic discourse. *Americanah* exists

in an almost seamless continuity with these media flows by and about Adichie, as she prolongs there the role of opinion maker she has recently assumed on matters such as race, gender, and the comparison between Nigeria and the US, her country of adoption. [...] the novel represents another instalment of the writer's public persona; yet it also elaborates on the issues of shaping public opinion via the Internet by using a blog as a metanarrative device. (2-3)

In *Americanah*, the so-called 'traditional' hard-copy novel reading audience has access to seventeen posts that are scattered throughout the novel, and always following the story's back-and-forth narration style. These posts function as social commentary, arguably a metanarrative device and are recognisable as mentioned earlier, by different layout (as they are indented from the margin on both sides) and font. They start with a bold type title that provides hints of the content in a trendy, slightly provocative, academic essay language complete with subtitles:

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA FOR THE NON-AMERICAN BLACK: WHAT HISPANIC MEANS (129)

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA FOR THE NON-AMERICAN BLACK: AMERICAN TRIBALISM (227)

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA FOR THE NON-AMERICAN BLACK: WHAT DO WASPs ASPIRE TO? (253)

WHY DARK-SKINNED BLACK WOMEN – BOTH AMERICAN AND NON-AMERICAN – LOVE BARACK OBAMA (265)

TO MY FELLOW NON-AMERICAN BLACKS: IN AMERICA, YOU ARE BLACK, BABY (273)

**A MICHELLE OBAMA SHOUT-OUT PLUS HAIR AS RACE METAPHOR (367)
SO WHAT'S THE DEAL? (374)**

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT? (378)

OPEN THREAD FOR ALL THE ZIPPED-UP-NEGROES (380)

JOB VACANCY IN AMERICA – NATIONAL ARBITER IN CHIEF OF "WHO IS RACIST" (390)

OBAMA CAN ONLY WIN IF HE REMAINS THE MAGIC NEGRO (398)

FRIENDLY TIPS FOR THE AMERICAN NON-BLACK: HOW TO REACT TO AN AMERICA BLACK TALKING ABOUT BLACKNESS (403)

TRAVELING WHILE BLACK (410)

WHAT ACADEMICS MEAN BY WHITE PRIVILEGE, OR YES IT SUCKS TO BE POOR AND WHITE BUT TRY BEING POOR AND NON-WHITE (429)

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA FOR THE NON-AMERICAN BLACK: A FEW EXPLANATIONS OF WHAT THINGS REALLY MEANS (435)

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA FOR THE NON-AMERICAN BLACK: THOUGHTS ON THE SPECIAL WHITE FRIEND (448)

JUST THIS EVENING (464-465)

Ifemelu embodies the typical blogger figure who nervously tracks her follower counts and engagement rates. Then, as it happens in the World Wide Web where weblogs display information in a reverse chronological order with the latest post appearing first, at the top (Blood), her first post introduced in her account of events is the last one she uploads before leaving for Lagos:

She had written the final post only days ago, trailed by two hundred and seventy-four comments so far. All those readers, growing month by month, linking and cross-posting, knowing so much more than she did; they had always frightened and exhilarated her. (5)

The numerous commentators on her blogposts and shared links, seems to her a slightly intimidating, somewhat ponderous creation she feels not entirely her own.

The virtual space provided by her blog allows Ifemelu, a non-African-American black immigrant, to explore issues of racism and discrimination which are deeply rooted in white American society. Like racism also “blogs were new, unfamiliar to her” (366), but driven by questions: “How many [...] people chose silence? How many [...] people had become black in America? [...] she signed on to WordPress, and her blog was born” (366).

Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins, English scholars in Arts and Participatory Media studies, emphasise

the importance of digital storytelling as a means to raise and amplify voices that are unheard or suppressed in public spheres as a means to find stories, to share them and then to analyse what influence the sharing of such representations can have on public discourses. (7)

Ifemelu's blog represents such a virtual space, where she can "raise and amplify" her voice and analyse the ways in which her posts affect her digital audience. Indeed, she addresses her observations and thoughts to them, in return, they enthusiastically comment and discuss the content of each post. Even though their feedback is crucial, Ifemelu does not interact with them. Over time, "the blog had unveiled itself and shed its milk teeth [...] its readers increased by the thousands from all over the world" (375) and her digital audience switch to real people who ask her out, or make suggestions for the next post, or ask her to post a picture of herself, or merely willing "to support the blog. Support. That word made the blog even more apart from her, a separate thing that could thrive or not, sometimes without her and sometimes with her" (375). The blog as a virtual space, which allows access to a wider and global audience, offers users the opportunity to express themselves freely. If on the one hand, the latter suggests the idea of a space where social equality and inclusion are practiced, on the other hand, as Guarracino suggests: "the blog becomes more and more a shared space where the blogger has only limited agency" (17).

Ifemelu's sense of detachment along with the contradictory impulse to withdraw and keep her distance from something she created mostly to bridge a cultural gap are grounded on emerging feelings of subordination and annihilation as eventually she is "identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog. She had become her blog" (379). Differently from Obinze who becomes invisible in the host country, to some extent due to her digital presence and attempted social commitment, she increases her visibility.

Ifemelu's posts may be understood as a digital attempt to, at first, comprehend as "she hungered to understand everything about America, to wear a new, knowing skin right away" (166), and later blend into the culture of the host country. In essence, the virtual location functions as her "in-between space" that may:

provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate[s] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjectivity and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (Bhabha 2 emphasis in the original)

“The emergence of the interstices”, or the feeling of in-betweenness discussed by the Indian-British critical theorist Homi Bhabha, implies the simultaneous “collision of cultures” and a “transition, passage, process” that results from the “collision” in an instant space where borders become momentarily blurred, where it becomes possible for diverse cultures to converge without merging (Dingwaney and Maier, 8). In this context, Ifemelu’s blog, a virtual space without identifiable borders, houses her reflections, her observations, her political views and anecdotes of her daily life in America where, in her eyes, “whiteness is the thing to aspire to” (253). In the end, Ifemelu’s attempts to engage in virtual conversations with the wider American, and possibly white, audience remains in a suspended liminal zone. Her blog turns into a virtual space to host the collisions of cultures without producing a sense of genuinely fitting in and belonging in her adopted North American culture. Nonetheless, as a counter effect, the attention she receives, all the assorted and numerous comments provide an illusion of, or a substitute for, the real connection and acceptance she yearns for in the U.S., so much so that she begins to experience anxiety at the thought of losing that ephemeral, virtual community and is desperately “eager to be fresh and to impress” (6), to keep her audience interested. Ifemelu’s blog as an “in-between space” should, following Bhabha’s logic, help her to create a new identity; in reality the negotiation process proves to be difficult to achieve, and eventually the act of posting leaves her feeling hollow and inauthentic:

She began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people’s stories for something she could use. Sometimes making fragile links to race. Sometimes not believing herself. The more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false. (6)

In fact, Ifemelu’s insatiable hunger for stories may follow a familiar social media pattern. According to Ella McPherson – sociologist of New Media and Digital Technology – digital stories can be used as advocacy tools for a cause

as engagement is a subjective feeling and participation is a concrete action, it may be that participation is easier to measure; feelings of engagement must be elicited, whereas participation can be observed. (137)

Ifemelu’s posts are digital stories with an activist inclination, and the virtual space of the blog allows her to observe participation. Tracking the numbers of visitors and reading

their posts represents concrete evidence. After having uploaded her post, even though Ifemelu is no longer at her keyboard producing content, her digital stories play an active role arousing her audience to take action. Ifemelu observing her digital readers' participation may be regarded as a return to traditional usability of literary works: as soon as they are handed to a publishing house, they, then, have their own autonomous life, and authors can only observe their readers' participation, for instance, checking best seller lists or ratings on book-logging apps (like Goodreads) that are based on certain criteria, such as sales and readers evaluations.

Ifemelu's seventeen posts embedded in the novel resemble open letters addressed to an anonymous "Dear American Non-Black" on the subjects of racism, discrimination, politics, white privilege and social injustices and mostly intended for the general, white readership. Although, the non-African-American black immigrant Ifemelu does not seem interested in engaging in conversation, she does take advantage of her blog to participate in a larger dialogue on topics that resonate with most Americans. The blog becomes a virtual container that holds open questions and potential suggestions to address racial biases affecting U.S. society:

**FRIENDLY TIPS FOR THE AMERICAN NON-BLACK: HOW TO REACT TO AN
AMERICA BLACK TALKING ABOUT BLACKNESS**

Dear American Non-Black, if an American Black person is telling you about an experience about being black, please do not eagerly bring up examples from your own life. Don't say "It's just like when I ..." You have suffered. Everyone in the world has suffered [...] Don't say "I'm color-blind," because if you are color-blind, then you need to see a doctor and it means that when a black man is shown on TV as a crime suspect in your neighbourhood, all you see is a blurry purplish-grayish-creamish figure. Don't say "We're tired of talking about race" or "The only race is the human race." [...] Don't say "Oh, racism is over, slavery was so long ago." We are talking about problems from the 1960s, not the 1860s. [...] don't put on a Let's Be Fair tone and say "But black people are racist too". Because of course we're all prejudiced (I can't even stand some of my blood relatives, grasping, selfish folks), but racism is about the power of a group and in America it's white folks who have that power. (405-406)

Similarly to the other posts, this long post on the issues of race and racism is characterised by colloquialism expressed with an assertive tone mixed with sarcasm – "if you are color-blind, then you need to see a doctor" – and irony – "Don't say 'We're tired of talking about race' or 'The only race is the human race'"; – whereas her indignation is marked

by long sentences without punctuation as if she is shouting at flesh and blood white American people standing before her; not to mention the sense of urgency in her tone that demands immediate awareness of the contradictions that characterise white American society and its members, along with their limited understanding both of past and present events. The conclusion of this open letter addressed to a “Dear American Non-Black” summarises perhaps the primary reason why Ifemelu started her blog: “people just want to feel heard” (406). This also represents the first step in the long process of an aimed global society marked by equality, recognition of human and civil rights without any distinction and, above all, bias.

In truth, the overcoming of prejudices of race and racism is a long process that requires a huge and concerted global effort. After thirteen years of failed attempts along with the deep sense of longing for home, Ifemelu “meld[s] into a piercing homesickness” after having

scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees. (7)

She returns to Nigeria, her home country and the place where being black does not stand for being the Other:

Finally, Zemaye said, “So you were a famous race blogger in America. When Auntie Onenu told us, I didn’t understand”.
“What do you mean?”
“Why race?”
“I discovered race in America and it fascinated me”.
“Hmm,” Zemaye murmured, as though she thought this, discovering race, an exotic and self-indulgent phenomenon. (499-500)

The safe site created by digital connectivity, while temporarily erasing national borders, catalyses at the same time feelings of belonging to the host land and longing for home. Despite of her Western, university education, Ifemelu seems unable to negotiate between a culture marked by white supremacy and her own culture that does not contemplate the concept of race, as shown in the passage above. Furthermore, the act of blog writing eventually does not serve a purpose in her American life. Although her blogposts reach a large audience they do not trigger serious debates among black and American Non-Black

blog readers. If, on the one hand, *Americanah* shows the pervasiveness of new media in daily life, besides being characterised by different, at times hybrid, writing styles and strategies; on the other hand, it seems to shed light on the ephemerality of weblogs or a user-generated website that simultaneously provides and welcomes commentary on a particular subject. However, Adichie's novel bears witnesses to the new life of books as objects. As the Italian literary critic Angelo Piero Cappello points out, books are no longer isolated objects; they no longer have the function of a closed container of words, ideas and reflections: in this ongoing digital age, books have opened to the Internet and the boundaries of writing have crossed the front and back cover to overstep and encroach upon a network of multiple relationships via the World Wide Web (11).

In relation to the latter, Cappello sustains that the digital environment operates as a sounding board for books, from their production to their dissemination. This became more obvious especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and the months of global lockdown, books were, for large numbers of peoples, beacons that allowed isolated individuals scattered all over the world to meet online and discuss literature. Moreover, authors have learned to consider the network as an extension of the known and knowable world, a place to find, elaborate and create their characters. Publishing houses too have learned to structure processes of elaboration and production in networks, they have learned or refined the paths of production and sale on line. Readers, in turn, have learned to read on a variety of media, to buy books on any platform and have them delivered at home; they have learned to take advantage of online loans in libraries (14).

3.4 The Digital Storyline

“I believe in life online, the way a person in 1910 might believe in aviation, or a person in 1455 might believe in movable type: with excitement and apprehension. But who knows where it’s going to go? For sure, some of the smartest and most interesting literary minds of our generation and the generations to come will work in areas that are not ‘books’ as we currently think of them. That’s a given. But I think some of these people will also write books. In writing [...] I think that’s going to change very fast. I’m not saying there will be a Nobel Prize for tweeting, but I expect that the rewards of literary production will inevitably include people whose work is embedded inside these newer technologies.”

(Teju Cole, *A Conversation with Aleksandar Hemon* 89-90)

Reprising Bhabha’s reflections on the individual’s quality or condition of being exactly the same in a persisting manner in any place, and how the individual’s set of characteristics is challenged when the clash of cultures occurs, be it in the host country or at home as will be discussed later in this section, the Indian born Harvard critical theorist asserts that there is a space “in-between the designations of identity” and that “this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5).

In regard to Ifemelu, if, on the one hand, she seems to adapt to the cultural hybridity of her life in America, on the other hand, dealing on a daily basis with American, Western culture has reinforced her sense of her own identity. This awareness takes shape in her mind during a conversation with Blaine (7) – her “black American boyfriend” (20) – who expresses criticism towards her blogging:

“You know, it’s not just about writing a blog, you have to live like you believe it. That blog is a game that you don’t really take seriously, it’s like choosing an

interesting elective evening class to complete your credits.” She recognized, in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American. (427-428)

From a dissimilar point of view, Obinze – Ifemelu’s African ex-boyfriend – also passes judgement on her blogging:

He read all the archives of *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. The blog posts astonished him, they seemed so American and so alien, the irreverent voice with its slanginess, its mix of high and low language, and he could not imagine her writing them. (464)

In both passages, the concept of identity acquires a reverse perspective. The time spent in America has not affected Ifemelu’s identity, “she was African” (428) as pointed out by her black American boyfriend; whereas, her Lagosian longstanding friend Obinze states the opposite: “so American and so alien” (464).

In his reflections on identity and culture, Bhabha relies on the word “unhomely” to render the concept of *unheimlich*. The latter is a loan translation from the German “Heimlich” (*Heim* means home) employed by Sigmund Freud for his theorisation about the unconscious mind and the conscious mind, i.e. *unheimlich* in opposition to *heimlich*, or in very simple terms, unfamiliar versus familiar. According to traditional anthropological and sociological thinking, the concept of home is in contrast and in opposition to the external space. Home is understood as an intimate, private, space that hosts emotions and tradition, and its front door functions as a dividing line forming a boundary between two different world systems based on the opposition of the inside versus the outside. The first is quintessentially the realm of the private, the stable and the safe, whereas the second is public, uncertain, continually subjected to modifications and transformations, frequently perceived as threatening and full of dangers. According to Bhabha, home is the place where the individual’s identity takes shape being conceived in at first and consequently influenced by their own cultural *habitus*. The perception of the self and others is initially established by the environment in which the individual was born and grows up. This means that emotional and identity bonds develop within the home, and to some extent within the local community or society. Individuals develop

their own sense of who they are based on their culture, social class, life experiences and social relationships. Therefore, the same place can be interpreted differently and in diametrically opposed ways. However, in our current globalised world, it is no longer possible to make a comparison between binary categories such as private versus public, local versus global, native versus foreign; even the idea of home and domestic undergoes a process of rethinking and rewriting. This means that the very concept of home which has always been recognised as reassuring, as the perfect meeting point between place and self can reveal itself unhomely. Bhabha expands his reflections asserting that the place between *unheimlich/unhomely* and *heimlich/homely* is a postcolonial place, a space in which the individual's identity is the result of an aggregation of what is unfamiliar or foreign and what is familiar (13-15).

Adapting Bhabha's reflections to the novel, it may be argued that Ifemelu's blog exemplifies his concept of "the 'unhomely'", or "a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" (13) where,

[p]rivate and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an 'inbetween' temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge, which like the coloured South African subject represents a hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality. (19)

Ifemelu's "blog post [...] so American and so alien" (464) seem to echo what Bhabha defines as "the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge." Although the virtual space of her blog shrinks the distance between Ifemelu's private and public sphere, she avails herself of the virtual space to report on current American society that is based on the dichotomy between white and black. At the same time, while she dwells at home, or what America allegedly represents to her during her residence there, her remarks, comments, accusations and clarifications posted online deliver a narrative that discloses the ambiguities and contradictions of present-day American society delivering in return "an image of the world of history." Carrying on with Bhabha's statement, "the coloured South African subject" may be compared to Ifemelu. Analogous to South Africa, America may be defined as an in-between reality

where the concept of identity is questioned and put to the test. Although always from the side-lines, because she limits her activity to updating her American blog, Ifemelu observes and provokes her African American and American digital audience, as is the case, for instance, in the following extract from the fifth blog post “To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby”:

If you are in an Ivy League college and a Young Republican tells you that you got in only because of Affirmative Action,¹⁵ do not whip out your perfect grades from high school. Instead, gently point out that the biggest beneficiaries of Affirmative Action are white women. If you go to eat in a restaurant, please tip generously. Otherwise the next black person who comes in will get awful service, because waiters groan when they get a black table. You see, black people have a gene that makes them not tip, so please overpower that gene. If you’re telling a non-black person about something racist that happened to you, make sure you are not bitter. Don’t complain. Be forgiving. If possible, make it funny. Most of all, do not be angry. Black people are not supposed to be angry about racism. Otherwise you get no sympathy. This applies only for white liberals, by the way. Don’t even bother telling a white conservative about anything racist that happened to you. Because the conservative will tell you that YOU are the real racist and your mouth will hang open in confusion. (274-275)

The extract displays a sharp satirical slant regarding the American societal dichotomy between white and black. In her usual colloquial register, Ifemelu dispenses advice to her fellow non-American blacks emphasising, at the same time, their double condition of marginality: they are discriminated on a regular basis because they are black, yet they have to pretend their skin complexion is not relevant, to camouflage their black identity, whenever their accomplishments and achievements are discussed, or if the topic of unequal treatment within the white America society is raised.

Bhabha further defines the unhomeliness as a state of feeling that captures someone and compels the individual to select one of two cultures: the culture of the coloniser or the culture of the colonised. From the reading of *Americanah* it may be clearly inferred that Ifemelu selects the latter. After thirteen years lived in the land of opportunities, the increased consciousness of being African draws her back to Nigeria where,

¹⁵ In the United States, Affirmative Action consists of government-mandated, government-approved, and voluntary private programs granting special consideration to groups considered or classified as historically excluded, specifically racial minorities and women (Feinberg 272).

only her old friend in Lagos, Ranyinudo, had made her return seem normal. “Lagos is now full of American returnees, so you better come back and join them. Every day you see them carrying a bottle of water as if they will die of heat if they are not drinking water every minute,” Ranyinudo said. They had kept in touch, she and Ranyinudo, throughout the years. At first, they wrote infrequent letters, but as cybercafés opened, cell phones spread, and Facebook flourished, they communicated more often. (16-17)

Besides accepting Ifemelu’s homecoming as an unremarkable example of yet another Nigerian expat returning to Nigeria and not an ill-considered decision resulting from “her own foolishness” (16), as assumed by her aunty Uju, Ranyinudo simultaneously provides for the audience the meaning of the title of the novel. In a mild, ironic tone, Ifemelu’s “old friend in Lagos” informs her of those Nigerians who having spent some time abroad seem unable to cope with local weather conditions any longer. At the same time, this abnormal sensitivity to Nigerian heat denotes a cultural hybridity that is marked by a hierarchy where signs of American identity predominate over their native, African identity.

According to Bhabha, culture has a dual identity. On the one hand, it is homely or realistic and confers stability and consistency; on the other hand, it is unhomely because it changes, especially at current times, as it is in a ceaseless relationship with other cultures, texts or disciplines that confer in return new meanings and perspectives. To Bhabha, culture is never coherent and self-sufficient, and, as he points out, migrants above all experience first-hand this dual nature of culture. This proves to be especially true on their arrival in a foreign country as they find themselves under a set of circumstances that make them negotiate with their own culture and with the culture of the host country. Bhabha expands his thought and suggests that the sense of alienation felt in the unhomely moment, may also represent an opportunity to re-evaluate one’s own identity (199-201).

In the ongoing globalised world, the unhomely moment is not necessarily felt by migrants only. As Ruben Andersson emphasises, globalisation involves “time-space compression on an unprecedented scale” (4). Even though his remarks are not specifically made in connection with the digital age, they are relevant to the subject, when, in his lecture given at Princeton University Bhabha states that: “the unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world” (141).

Along with the awareness of being African, Ifemelu's desire to move back to Nigeria is driven by

amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness. She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. (7)

As the Internet has become increasingly present in our daily lives, digital means of communication shrink distances and compress time. Interactions, images, video and pieces of information are instantly shared and exchanged through virtual social spaces. The various "Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs" visited by Ifemelu embody Bhabha's postcolonial place: a space in which Ifemelu's identity is an aggregation of what is unfamiliar or foreign and what is familiar, but also the above-quoted "shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (141). At this point in her American life, Ifemelu is not able to find a balance between her native culture and Western culture, and this sense of discomfort along with the sense of deprivation – they had "taken something of hers. They were living her life" – kindles the need of being in a place that makes her feel at home where her sense of belonging can be entrenched. Those digital social spaces that virtually bring Nigeria to America substantiate Ifemelu's sense of identity, of being African from Nigeria, an identity that is not constructed of binary oppositions where each binary is seen as dichotomies in which one negates the other, such as the white versus black divide she is confronted with in North America.

However, the unhomely feeling recurs also in "the only place she could sink her roots" (7). Back in Lagos, Ifemelu behaves differently from the other "American returnees" (16); she seems not to exhibit the expected cultural hybridity internalised in the host country, at least this is how she is perceived by her friend Ranyinudo who

teased her often. “You are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!” (380)

As Adichie mentions in her video presentation/introduction to the novel, during the thirteen years she was away, both Ifemelu and Nigeria had gone through substantial changes (02:04 - 02:18). As a consequence, these transformations generate in Ifemelu a sense of bewilderment and estrangement that eventually produce an unhomely condition in the place she calls home.

In Nigeria Ifemelu works as an editorialist for a “leading women’s monthly magazine” (482); however, after quite a number of interviews with madams “who boasted about what they owned and where they or their children had been and what they had done, and then they capped their boasts with God” (507), she starts a new blog: “*The Small Redemptions of Lagos*” (519). It may be argued that also in Nigeria, the virtual space that hosts her digital writing functions as an attempt to bridge, once again, her cultural gap. Like the American blog’s title that provides suggestions about its content, that is to say the digital narrative evidence of racism, the Nigerian blog’s title connotes her digital reconciliation with her point of origin, as she eventually realises that “she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being” (586).

As put forward earlier, the novel weaves three distinct strands: racism, migration, and the impulse to engage with the social/political issues of a place through blog writing. In regard to the latter, *Americanah* resembles a *Bildungsroman* novel in terms of tracing the evolution, changes and experiences of Ifemelu the blogger in her passage from being a novice blogger making her first tentative steps in a new cultural and media reality to a confident, perceptive social media observer of, and more importantly, participant in the life of her native city. Blogging, when she first arrives in the U.S., was a novel, easily available tool for a somewhat isolated outsider from Lagos such as Ifemelu to try and make non-American black voices audible. And to a certain degree she succeeded in eliciting a response from her audience. In her adoptive country, however, she was more timid, much more hesitant and removed from the impact of her observations, whereas in Lagos she is comfortable with the dynamics and immediacy inherent to digital writing due to her familiarity with the local context. With a pen and a paper journal she could not

get the immediate publication and response, the vibrant, real-time back and forth exchange and connection that characterises social media activity and which the character, cautiously at first and more effortlessly later in the novel, strives to find.

Differently from her American blogposts, her Nigerian blogposts observes everyday Lagosian life:

She wrote of the woman at the street corner in Victoria Island [...] She wrote about the views from her bedroom window [...]; the gateman helping a hawker raise her tray to her head [...] She wrote about the announcers on radio stations [...] She wrote about the tendency of Nigerian women to give advice [...] She wrote about the waterlogged neighborhood crammed with zinc houses [...] and of the young women who lived there. (585)

After having the content of Ifemelu's blogposts described by the novel's narrating voice, readers cannot help but notice the difference in perspective between her American and Nigerian blogs. The latter resembles a tourist's point of view, someone who is experiencing the Lagosian routine rather than a resident's account of events. This is particularly evident when she relates small quotidian incidents that stand out for her: "the woman at the street corner in Victoria Island who joyously said, 'Fine Auntie!'; "an act so full of grace that she stood watching long after the hawker had walked away"; "their accents so fake and so funny"; "sincere advice dense with sanctimony" or "the young women [...] fashionable and savvy in tight jeans" (585).

However, the American and Nigerian blogposts both share Ifemelu's acute sense of observation along with her ability to unpack the incongruous beliefs and expectations of particular social group such as the "young returnees" in Lagos:

Lagos has always been undisputably itself, [...] Lagos is not like New York as though Lagos had ever been close to being like New York. [...] Most of us have come back to make money in Nigeria, to start businesses, to seek government contracts and contacts. Others have come with dreams in their pockets and a hunger to change the country, but we spend all our time complaining about Nigeria, and even though our complaints are legitimate, I imagine myself as an outsider saying: Go back where you came from! And Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called assorted, and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted. (519-520)

Her connection to her home and its culture manifests itself in a playful but defiant defence of her city's distinct character, in its un-Americanness. New York's (and America's) celebration of the 'melting pot' model of integration seems to conceal a mistrust of difference, a compulsive impulse to categorise which "assorted" Lagos has no time or concern for. In addition, in a telephone conversation with her American ex-boyfriend Curt, Ifemelu in part confirms this when she explains the American preoccupation with race does not translate in Nigeria:

"So you still blogging?"

"Yes."

"About race?"

"No, just about life. Race doesn't really work here. I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black." (586)

In contrast with her American blog, Ifemelu not only reads her Lagos digital audience's responses, but she intervenes and edits their replies, as the narrating voice informs readers:

By the sixth day, the blog had one thousand unique visitors. Ifemelu moderated the comments, deleting anything obscene, reveling in the liveliness of it all, in the sense of herself at the surging forefront of something vibrant. She wrote a long post about the expensive lifestyles of some young women in Lagos. (520)

Despite her engagement and commitment with her digital audience, readers are able to read only three Nigerian blogposts. Differently from the American posts that had titles and were in some manner announced, the Lagosian posts are embedded in the narration, and recognisable by the indentation and distinct type font. The deeper emotional attachment to her blogging at this point of the novel is also evident in her attention to details relating to the digital and visual aspects of the space that hosts her blog: "Ifemelu was full of sanguine expectations for *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, with a dreamy photograph of an abandoned colonial house on its masthead" (519).

The "dreamy photograph" referred to in *Americanah* is a real photograph and is visible on Adichie's website. What is more, the author's official website provides a link to "IFEMELU'S BLOG". It is as if the character has become a living individual who has

continued her blogging in the author's digital space, or it is as if Adichie has identified herself in her character and decided to continue Ifemelu's digital writing. No matter who the blogger is, nowadays "IFEMELU'S BLOG" resembles a digital archive that contains twenty-seven posts about life in Nigeria. This digital storage area hosts posts without any allegedly chronological order or logic. Posts are accessible clicking on the image that suggests or represents the topic covered in the post. In the redirected area, digital readers have to scroll down as images are large in size, below they find a date followed by a concise title such as: "28 Aug Problem and Solution 3" (<https://www.chimamanda.com/problem-and-solution-3/>). Her posts contain very short texts with links which are visible and accessible on Adichie's social media accounts, Facebook and X(Twitter). Also visible is the number of – real or supposed – digital readers, even though this last function is not clickable – perhaps emulating Ifemelu's detachment from her American digital audience – these posts too do not have any comments.

This discontinued attempt to carry on a digital conversation in blog form recalls Teju Cole's digital experiment. The Nigerian-American writer, photographer and art historian published his debut novel *Every Day Is for the Thief* in 2007. The novel reads like a travel diary and unfolds in picaresque style from the first-person perspective, as an unnamed narrator who resembles the author returns to Nigeria after fifteen years in the U.S. to reckon with their Nigerian identity. Surprised to find that he feels less comfortable in his homeland than he would have expected, he struggles to readjust to the realities of Lagosian life. Almost ten years later, in his essay "A Conversation with Aleksandar Hemon", Cole talks about his failed attempt to write a blog:

Every Day is for the Thief appeared online in January 2006, as a limited-edition experiment. I wrote one chapter each day. In effect, I was blogging on this weird project eight hours a day for an entire month. Months later, after I erased the blog, a Nigerian publisher showed interest, and the project was edited and found a second life as a book. (89)

The edited second life of Cole's online storytelling is subdivided into twenty-seven short stories,¹⁶ with the majority of them introduced, like Ifemelu's *The Small Redemptions of*

¹⁶ In *Every Day is for the Thief*, the twenty-seven chapters can be read autonomously because they are not strictly related each other.

Lagos, by a black and white photograph. In a conversation about current times and how new technologies influence and pervade our lives and literature, the Bosnian-American author Hemon, sharing Cole's perplexities on digital writing, asserts: "If we ever find ourselves writing only for the present – which would essentially mean that tweeting is all we can do – I would feel absolutely defeated as a human being and a writer" (91).

In truth, social media and blogging may be equated as they produce and deliver texts that are short and immediate. They capture a slice of life, in some manner they depict the reality of the moment, and to some extent they may function as a kind of informant of the present.

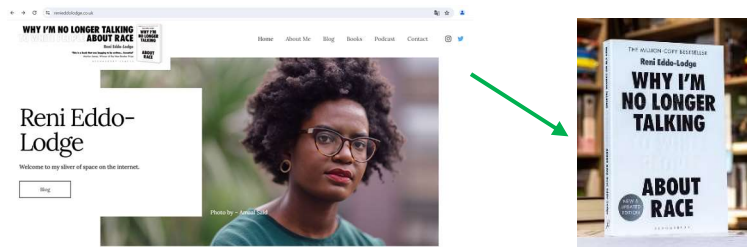
In an interview "conducted in London on 11 October 2018" (Tunca 182), the Belgian scholar Daria Tunca questions Adichie's role as "native informant" (183). According to Tunca, over the years people have become more interested in Adichie's opinions but increasingly, "the discussion often comes back to feminism" shrinking in this manner the range of topics to deal with. In return, she has "become a therapist of sorts, especially in Q&A sessions with audiences" (183). It may be argued that this is a plausible consequence of this digital age and of the fact that Adichie consciously relies on new media and on the Internet to advertise and make known both her intellectual thinking and literary work. In doing so, she has become what the American scholar in social sciences and sociology Joshua Gamson calls an "Internet celebrity." Because of modern "celebrity culture [that] is at once a commodity system, an industry, a set of stories, and a participatory culture" (1062), Internet celebrities attract, mobilise attention and reach their audience in different ways. Gamson goes further asserting that the modern celebrity culture has allowed the rise of new celebrity types: "people become famous because of achievement, merit, talent, or special internal qualities, earning admiration and attention; [...] they are to be revered or vicariously consumed" (1063), implying that everyone can become a celebrity in the borderless and unbound digital world.

That being said, Adichie clearly plays the role of native informant also by virtue of her digital notoriety, and, to some extent, by the agency of the digital storytelling of *Americanah* mentioned in the previous section (3.3) that offers clear evidence: it expands Obinze's storytelling providing a larger picture of the novel for the audience. Her native informant ability, which is not limited to the digital space only, lies in her relying on and employing the most modern means of communication available at the current time. If

Ifemelu is in many ways a stand-in for Adichie and vice versa, as is suggested by “IFEMELU’S BLOG” on Adichie’s website, then it is imperative that we revise our definition of cultural informant. As Ndigirigi points out: “Ifemelu inverts the dominant narrative of ‘culture collecting’ and the traditional assumptions that the ‘informant’ is a localized ‘native’ while the ethnographer is the cosmopolitan/intercultural hybrid traveller” (199). Clearly, Adichie is both.

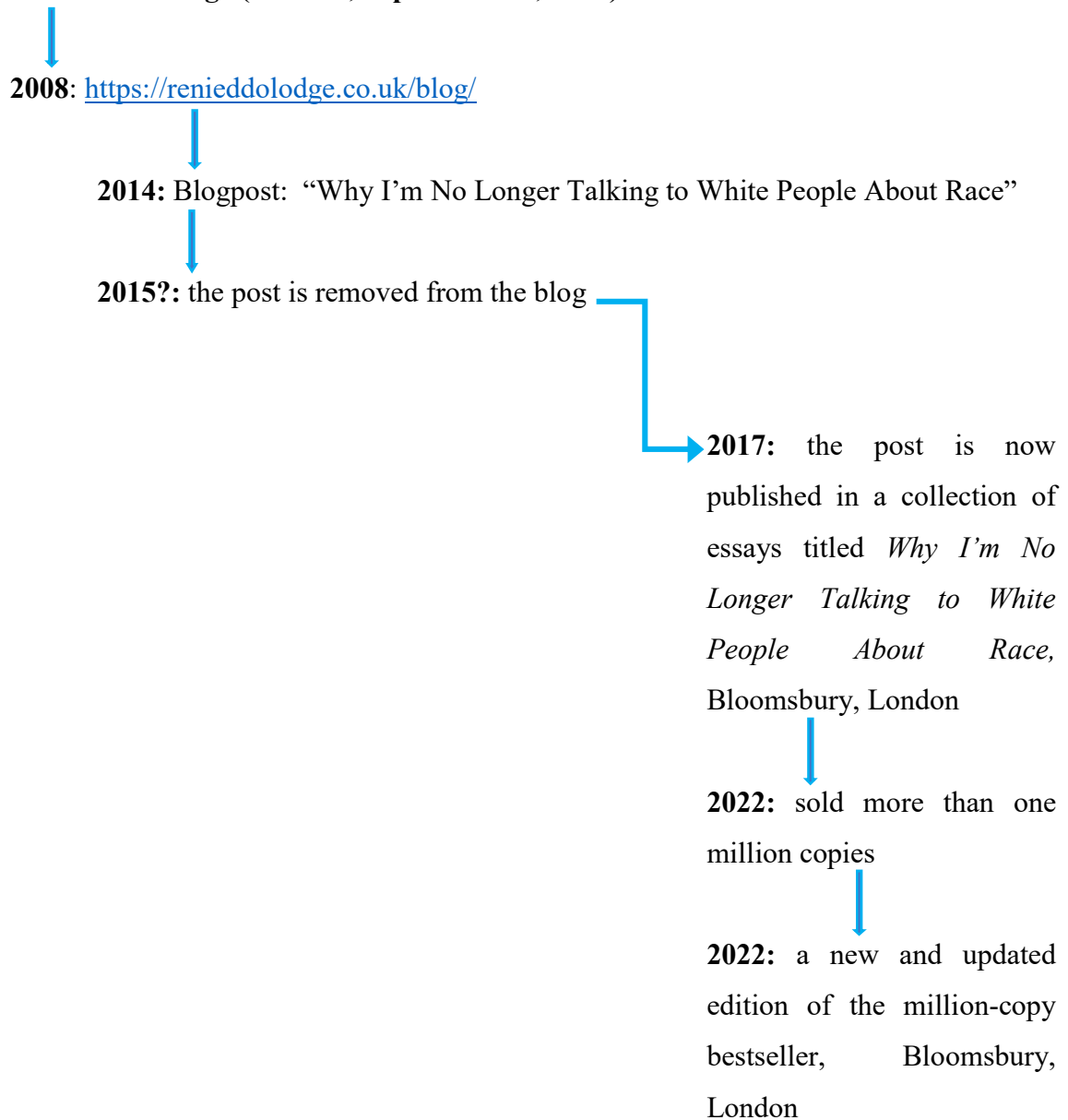
4 The Digital/Literary Case of Reni Eddo-Lodge

Algorithm # 2: From Blog to One Million Copies-worth of Essays



Flowchart of transformations of a digital text

Reni Eddo-Lodge (London, September 25, 1989)



4.1 Reni Eddo-Lodge: A Digital Native

“As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.”

(Roland Barthes 1967, 142)

Reni Eddo-Lodge is a London-based journalist. She was born in London in 1989 to a Nigerian mother. She is an award-winning journalist, author, and podcaster (Eddo-Lodge). As is the case with Adichie, Eddo-Lodge's digital activity too can be traced to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Analogous to Adichie, Eddo-Lodge too employs the latest social media tools to give herself a greater presence in the digital sphere becoming in return a well-known author on the Internet. Since the age of nineteen, Eddo-Lodge has been communicating and relating first-hand experiences and political discourses on the Internet through her website, her blog, and her social media accounts. Differently from Adichie's character Ifemelu who started her blog with the intent to fill a cultural void and feel included in the host country, Eddo-Lodge generated her blog in her home country focusing on feminism and exposing structural racism. Also, unlike Ifemelu's American fictional blog, which offered commentary and the opportunity for discussion among the blog's readers, Eddo-Lodge's blog is a filter-type web page that directs her audience to her Instagram and X(Twitter) accounts as well as to other blogs and websites on the Internet.

In her survey of the blogging practices among American and British bloggers, Sarah Pedersen – English scholar in Communication and Media – states that

Success in the blogosphere is linked to popularity. The more links to a blog, the greater its success rating. Although it must be conceded that not all bloggers are interested in the type of success that comes with membership of the 'A list' (Technorati's list of the 100 most linked blogs), the survey did investigate how far bloggers promoted their blogs to other bloggers in order to encourage a higher readership and more incoming links. As far as promotion of their blog was

concerned, the most popular methods used by respondents were to submit their blog to a blog directory or blog search engine (97 respondents) or to post on other blogs (66 respondents). Male US respondents were the most likely to submit an RSS feed to a blog directory or search engine, rather than merely submitting their URL, which perhaps suggests a higher level of technical ability in blogging. (5)

It is worth mentioning Eddo-Lodge's high "level of technical ability in blogging", along with her frequent contributions to her website has made blogging her main means of communication and activist commitment. Nonetheless, this digital exposure suggests legal and promotional assistance, and when visitors scroll down her website pages, at their very bottom they are informed that Eddo-Lodge is represented by an agent – "Carrie Plitt at Felicity Bryan Associates" – and the management of her website is entrusted to a digital, ethical, marketing agency: "Website Design and Digital Marketing by Exposure Ninja" (Eddo-Lodge).

In 1964 the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas elaborated the concept of "the public sphere" or

a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. (49)

Although "his concept is directed instead at the institution, which to be sure only assumes concrete form through the participation of people" (49) as later specified by the American historian and literary theorist Peter Hohendahl, it may be argued that, in the twenty first century, Habermas's definition of the public sphere may be applied to the alternative, digital realm of online social platforms. In truth, the German scholar in media, culture and literature Melih Kökcü adapts Habermas's original thinking to our current, global, digital world:

The Public Sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) is a confidential space which is sterilized from authorities and enables the bourgeois society to hold political debates. Yet, participation in these debates extends beyond the bourgeoisie to all kinds of citizens, who can now access social platforms along with the World Wide Web and find their voices within these spaces. (1)

Disregarding for a moment the reality that users are increasingly “surveilled and controlled with sophisticated technologies” by individuals or organizations that “gather data on online platforms” (1), Habermas’s revisited definition is valid for Eddo-Lodge’s blog, which is an obvious instance of a public “realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” regarding social and political issues such as feminism and structural racism in the United Kingdom.

These public discussions that occur online exist by means of digital media in written form, and because of this fact, José Ángel García Landa defines them as “networked literature” (11). The Spanish senior lecturer in English argues that “there are many ways in which the specificity of the Internet as a medium may develop new literary genres” (11). He goes further stating that the medium *per se* is a breeding ground for writing attempts produced by anyone who can access social platforms. He calls the product of these endeavours “collaborative intertext” (11) that do not occur only in written public discussions. For instance, forms of collaborative intertext can be originally designed as plain sentences to be uploaded online and left available to acquire fresh meanings that may be given by anyone willing to join the digital act of writing already in progress. Landa comments on one of the collaborative intertexts he found on an Argentinian website¹⁷ as follows:

Online readers then wrote their own continuation to the story following the paths initiated by previous reader/writers. So the story becomes an endless and endlessly branching one, but still preserves its unity as a communal narrative work: something made possible only by all readers sharing a common interactive space: the World Wide Web. (11)

A similar example is Teju Cole’s *Hafiz* – a short story about a public heart attack – that is a collaborative intertext. In early 2014, the Nigerian-American novelist published “a fiction in the form of 33 tweets, each posted from the account of a different ‘collaborator,’ and then retweeted sequentially by Cole” (Byrne). In truth, this is not Cole’s first foray into Twitter publishing. Between 2011 and 2013 on his Twitter account he published *Small Fates* that “comprised a mammoth and often wearying series of news stories compressed into Tweet-length narratives of violence and disaster” followed in 2013 by

¹⁷ The website is quoted in the essay, the last access is July 14, 2006. However, almost twenty years later, the website is not available any longer.

Seven Short Stories About Drones [that] was a series of similar compressions, ending famous first novels (*Mrs. Dalloway*, *Things Fall Apart*) by incorporating drone strikes in their first lines. It was a direct attack on the then-obsession with Obama as reader, and it had the half-life that all political provocations share. (Byrne)

Setting aside the above digression, but suitable for providing examples of collaborative intertexts, in his reflections delivered as a digital text – “I wrote this chapter online on my blog” (13) –, García Landa focuses his attention on the “Internet genre” of blogs:

Perhaps the most characteristic development of the Web in the early years of the 21st century, along with the supremacy of Google, has been the spectacular development of the blogosphere. According to Technorati, the main site for blog tracking so far, there are about 48 million blogs on the web (as of July 2006), with specific connections between them which make them constitu[t]e an open subsystem of the Web, known as the Blogosphere. (11-12)

Although intuitive, the “blogosphere is the online universe of blogs” (Dennis), and as the blogger Rishabh Verma further expands its meaning,

The term Blogosphere refers to the set of blogs available on the net and the interconnections between them. For this reason, in a broader sense, it is also sometimes used to refer to users who create and share a variety of content on the Web on a daily basis. (Verma)

The term blogosphere was coined by Brad L. Graham in 1999 who after a year spent updating his blog on a regular basis “sarcastically spoke about the speed with which blogs can be created on practically any topic and the rapid spread of the expression ‘web-log’. (From which the general term ‘blog’ is derived from shrinkage)” (Verma). In other words, the blogosphere pertains to a densely interconnected conversation with bloggers referring and linking to other bloggers and posting comments on each other’s blogs.

As García Landa’s reminds us, blogs still represent, more than twenty years after their first appearance on the web, a virtual space that hosts products of collaborative intertext:

a blog abandons the model of the Work, or finished artifact, and gives us instead a Text, a fluid process of writing which is provisional, interactive, collaborative: in this sense the blogs provide the best example of Roland Barthes' dichotomies in "From Work to Text" and "The Death of the Author" [...] Blogs work through references to posts in other blogs, through the exchange, referencing, commentary and transformation of information, not so much through supposed originality in authorship: and what is paradoxical is that there is probably just as much originality in blog writing as in any other kind of writing. (12)

These dichotomies that García Landa – expanding on Barthes's ideas – identifies in blogging are applicable to Eddo-Lodge's web-based writing. In his essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), Barthes questions the authorship of works asserting that the author's intentions and interpretations hold no authority in determining the meaning of their literary work as "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142). As a consequence, the discovery and recognition of the meaning is left to the audience because in the act of writing "only language acts, 'performs' and not 'me'" (143). Indeed, in the moment the audience experiences a literary work, in order to develop and elaborate their own reading they have to detach "the body writing" from its author/creator "me". According to Barthes, the author is merely a "scriptor" (145). The scriptor exists to produce but not to explain the work and "is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding writing, [and] is not the subject with the book as predicate" (145). Each work is "eternally written here and now", with each rereading, because the "origin" of meaning lies exclusively in "language itself" (146) and its impressions on the reader. In his subsequent essay "From Work to Text" (1971), Barthes argues that, unlike the Work, "the Text is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed" (156). Whereas the Work is a material object that can be seen and or touched, "the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules) [...] the text is held in language" (157). Barthes goes further asserting that "*the Text is experienced only in an activity of production*" (157 emphasis in the original) because the text is writable, it is on the move as it crosses works, and differently from works that can be assigned to a specific literary genre, the text disregards classifications. Being a process of language, the text does not come to an end, the meaning is always suspended, something deferred or still to come. In view of this, Eddo-Lodge's

blog posts catalyse attention and readership because of their content as an outcome of Eddo-Lodge's practice of language in her activity of production. Eddo-Lodge relies on digital platforms to convey her thoughts and observations and to take a stand. Her digital texts both speak according to digital writing rules and against traditional literary writing rules.

The British blogger communicates her views to her digital audience, sometimes in the form of a direct dialogue, in other cases it is rather presented in the form of articles allowing her blog visitors to communicate with each other. This is in contrast to traditional media that operate on transmission over a single channel (one source to multiple receivers), such as a newspaper, for instance, or a radio station that broadcasts the same programs throughout a given territory. Eddo-Lodge's "A note on work, health and productivity" post epitomises blog writing. Like Ifemelu who feels the pressure of writing fresh, original and captivating blog posts regularly as a form of building visitors loyalty, Eddo-Lodge too feels compelled to update her digital audience after a period of silence due to health issues:

I feel like I have lost the entire month of July. Things had ground to a halt. [...] I was so tired that every day felt like swimming through treacle. [...] I'm self-employed so I don't have one boss to apologise to. [...] This Friday it all came to a head. I've been diagnosed as severely anaemic, having been discharged yesterday from my local hospital, pumped with three bags of blood and a ziplock bag bursting full with various boxes of medication. After the blood transfusion, I feel much better and full of gratitude towards anyone I know who'd ever donated pints of theirs at a blood bank. Cumulatively, you've all saved my life. I'm feeling ten times more alive thanks to the new blood coursing through my veins at the mercy of lots of generous strangers. [...] Thanks for bearing with me. (<https://renieddolodge.co.uk/a-note-on-work-health-and-productivity/>)

As perceived in the above extract, blogs are the original social media, precipitating the now common trend of disclosing personal opinion, information and common everyday experiences in real time with minimal (apparent) filtering. Eddo-Lodge's posts are a good example of this: they deliver personal content simply and effectively. Her online activity exhibits originality in terms of addressing matters of great importance blended with small amounts of levity.

This apparent contradiction does not diminish the urgency of the call for attention on societal flaws; actually, in opposition to Barthes's enunciation on the death of the

author, as soon as the blog post is online, it establishes a close connection between the author/creator and her general audience, a sort of affiliation that encourages a stable relationship and the phenomenon of followers, or in other words, a manner to attract and build blog readers loyalty. This is detectable, for instance, in the post “Running, revolutions and undercover”:

Happy spring! After a cold and long winter, here’s a round up of some of the online work I’ve done over the last few months:

After women organised a protest run in Manchester in the wake of a series of assaults against women joggers, I spoke to the organiser for the Telegraph.

I wrote a piece on the BBC’s new drama focusing on the secrets and lies of an extraordinary black family for Refinery 29 UK

Here’s something for Grazia magazine on afro hair making it into the mainstream

When Stanley Nelson’s documentary on the Black Panthers was released, I had the opportunity to speak to an original Black Panther for Broadly.

And finally- a slight deviation from my usual output, I spoke to beauty website Brown Beauty Talk about one of the unending loves of my life- skincare. (Eddo-Lodge)

The extract has been faithfully copied, and the first, noticeable feature is the colloquial register employed. Eddo-Lodge delivers a summary statement containing all the important information. It echoes an act of updating her online friends after an absence of several weeks from the digital scene. Furthermore, when blog readers hover their mouse over the following phrases “I spoke to the organiser”, “a piece”, “for Grazia magazine”, “to speak to an original Black Panther for Broadly” and “skin” these become hyperlinks that direct the audience to the corresponding websites which host Eddo-Lodge’s writing.

The London-based journalist provides autobiographical information on her website that functions as a digital showcase for her work along with her social and political commitment:

I’ve always been a writer and reader. When I was about nineteen, I threw myself into feminist activism. It changed my life, introduced me to some brilliant people, and helped me develop the politics I have today.

Around the same time, I started a blog. Over the subsequent decade, it became an outlet for my political thoughts. I kept one foot in feminist activism, and made a living as a freelance journalist. I'm now a full time author. Outside of writing, you might find me reading, cycling, buying nail polish or trying to find good coffee. (Eddo-Lodge)

As is perceivable in the above passage taken from the "About Me" webpage, Eddo-Lodge tries to engage with her audience. She introduces herself as a politically active young woman who, at the same time, exhibits her feminine stylish, and enjoys "buying nail polish."

Her website is also a self-promotion tool where Eddo-Lodge lists the awards and distinctions she has received:

About my work

My debut non-fiction book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, was published in June 2017 to critical acclaim. It has since become a Sunday Times and New York Times bestseller.

In 2020, *Why I'm* became the first book by a Black British author to top the British book charts in Nielsen Bookscan's twenty year history.

Why I'm won the 2018 Jhalak Prize, the 2018 Bread and Roses Award for Radical Publishing, and a 2018 British Book Award for Narrative Non Fiction. A 2018 public poll by Academic Book Week named *Why I'm* the most influential book written by a woman.

The book earned a spot on many prestigious award longlists and shortlists, including the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction, the Orwell Prize for Political Writing, the Specsavers National Book Award, and the Books Are My Bag Readers Awards. In its year of publication, *Why I'm* was voted non-fiction book of the year for 2017 by booksellers at both Foyles and Blackwells. The actress Emma Watson selected *Why I'm* for her feminist book club, Our Shared Shelf, in January 2018. You can watch us in conversation [here](#).

My podcast, *About Race with Reni Eddo-Lodge*, premiered in March 2018. It was chosen as one of the best podcasts of 2018 by Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Harper's Bazaar UK, The Guardian, British GQ and Wired UK. It's since won three Lovie Awards.

In 2019, my work earned me a place on Forbes' European 30 Under 30 list. In 2018, I won a Bold Moves Award from Women in the Creative Industries for the publication of *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. Prior to the publication of the book, in 2015, I won a 30 to watch award from MHP Communications. In 2014, the Guardian listed me as one of the 30 most exciting

people under 30 in digital media. I've also been listed in Elle Magazine's 100 Inspirational Women list, and The Root's 30 black viral voices under 30.

I'm represented by Carrie Plitt at Felicity Bryan Associates.

As stated in the first line of her list, her debut non-fiction book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017) earned Eddo-Lodge international recognition. However, all of the above would have not been achievable without her social engagement or without her digital activity which has earned her numerous awards as well.

At this point, a question may be raised in regard to current, digital, literary productions: can digital and traditional literary productions be both a tangible and available proof of what has been written and said for future generations? Undoubtedly digital productions are expanding the contemporary Anglophone literary canon, but the word digital implies speed in terms of appearance/upload to the web, transmission, disappearance/removal from the web. For instance, in Eddo-Lodge's website, despite being visible and clickable as a link, the "Podcast" webpage is no longer accessible. Undoubtedly, records of it are available somewhere, be they in private digital archives or digital platforms on demand. This ephemerality of content on Eddo-Lodge's webpage (and on other webpages in general) contradicts one of the main promises of the Internet, that is to say the inclusive space that grants open, common access and usability to users, or, in George P. Landow's words, a place of "online democracy and large-scale collaboration" (362).

One last point worth mentioning is in relation to Eddo-Lodge's post 2020 work. After having engaged with her audience, committed herself on issues of racism, discrimination and feminism along with her political activity on the Internet since she was nineteen years old, visitors to her website or her social media accounts looking for new information, discover that there is no trace of her recent writing or activist engagement. Her last blog post is about George Floyd's murder that occurred on May 25, 2020; while her last tweet is on *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* that reads "A million copies sold 🏆 thank you to everybody who made it so" (Eddo-Lodge). It seems that after having achieved an impressive level of success she has digitally silenced herself. Her collection of essays has become an editorial triumph, both because it has crossed the threshold of one million copies sold and because, as noted

especially by the British press, it was written by a young black, British woman. This seems the incarnation of Ifemelu's blog. Indeed, readers can detect similarities in writing styles and contents. Both bloggers denounce white supremacy; they both become ironic and sarcastic at white people who define themselves colour-blind; they both tackle the twofold implications of having afro-hair, which stands for black identity and discrimination at the same time: "The face of power is rarely wearing an afro" (Eddo-Lodge, <https://renieddolodge.co.uk/afro-hair-and-racial-objectification/>); they both expose the marginal conditions black people are relegated to within Western, white societies.

In truth, some information is available on Eddo-Lodge's publishing house website where a 2022 updated edition is announced (Yamazaki and Owen). In addition, still in the same year, a video interview on her debut and updated non-fiction book was uploaded on the Fenwick Official YouTube channel. Fenwick is a British chain of department stores in the United Kingdom, and the fact that *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* was discussed at a common, commercial venue is an indication of our current digital world's welcome ability to bring literature, in an age of diminishing book sales and bookstore closures, to an ever widening audience. On that occasion, over the last minutes of the interview Eddo-Lodge briefly talked about the new chapter included in the last edition which is about "the conditions of the pandemic" and how that unexpected global event affected the health care system and lower social classes (34:48 - 39:46).

As Pramod K. Nayar points out, twentieth century postcolonial authors committed themselves to a "literature of emancipation, critique and transformation" (xiii) to make themselves visible and audible relying on the publishing industry. In this present century, Eddo-Lodge's social engagement officially started on the Internet where she reached a considerable audience. Nonetheless, as she states in the preface of her debut published work:

I've turned 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race' into a book – paradoxically – to continue the conversation. [...] I won't ever stop myself from speaking about race. Every voice raised against racism chips away at its power. We can't afford to stay silent. This book is an attempt to speak. (xv-xvii)

Allegedly, she abandoned the wide and unbounded space of the Internet initially employed to speak about race, and “paradoxically”, as the sales of her volume prove, she has successfully continued the conversation relying on the publishing industry just like her precursors did.

4.2 From Digital to Print Media: A Quantum Leap

“For a large part of my life I grew up feeling that the real divisive factor in British, and by extension European, life was race; that it was race that was keeping us separate from each other, and that racism had made the greatest contribution to the inequity of opportunity in modern Britain.”

(Caryl Phillips 2011, 7)

Weblogs (or blogs) are frequently updated webpages with posts typically appearing in reverse-chronological order. Blogging is a form of online communication that has rapidly become mainstream. Blogging is a surprisingly versatile medium, with uses similar to an online journal, personal chronicle or newsletter, along with its current, direct and simplified writing. Media attention tends to focus on “heavy-hitting” blogs devoted to politics, punditry and technology, but the vast majority of blogs are written by ordinary people for much smaller audiences, and on largely personal themes. Surprisingly little is known about this so-called ‘blogging by the rest of us’, especially from the blogger’s point of view (Jenkins 2006, 178).

Eddo-Lodge turned to blogging as a form of personal expression and communication. As mentioned in the previous section, her blog is a filter-type webpage that directs her audience to her Instagram and X(Twitter) accounts as well as to other blogs and websites on the Internet.

This deliberate steering of Internet users to other websites or platforms is discussed by the American political theorist Jodi Dean. These websites will quite often also host and display promotional material ads. The latter bring Internet surfers into the realm of communicative capitalism. By communicative capitalism, Dean is referring to the expansion of market logic into what are essentially democratic pursuits and practices:

The notion of communicative capitalism conceptualizes the commonplace idea that the market, today, is the site of democratic aspirations, indeed, the mechanism by which the will of the demos manifests itself. [...] The concept of communicative capitalism tries to capture this strange merging of democracy and capitalism. It does so by highlighting the way networked communications bring

the two together. Communicative capitalism designates that form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies [...]. Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation come to be realized in and through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications. (54-55)

The above-mentioned “democratic aspirations” lead to the creation of “networked communications [that] are celebrated for enabling everyone to contribute, participate and be heard” (60). As Dean points out, we live in the digital age where the number of people who have access to information has increased exponentially, not to mention the given possibility of making their opinions known, of registering their point of views, of agreeing or disagreeing as well as of sending messages. The easy and fast access to the abundance of information due to “the convenience of the Web” has its pros and cons:

Those optimistic about the impact of networked communications on democratic practices emphasize the wealth of information available on the Internet and the inclusion of millions upon millions of voices or points of view into “the conversation” or “public sphere.” Pessimists worry about the lack of filters, the data smog and the fact that “all kinds of people” can be part of the conversation. (58)

That being said, José Ángel García Landa suggests that those blogs started to contain forms of narrative they then may be considered a literary genre. Eddo-Lodge’s blog represents an interesting example of the interconnections among traditional and current forms of literature that are influenced and made possible by the pervasiveness of the Internet in our daily life.

In 2017, Eddo-Lodge published her debut non-fiction book whose title was taken from a piece she had posted on her blog three years earlier:

On 22 February 2014, I published a post on my blog. I titled it ‘Why I’m No Longer talking to White People about Race’.
It read:

I’m no longer engaging with white people on the topic of race. Not all white people, just the vast majority who refuse to accept the legitimacy of structural racism and its symptoms. I can no longer engage with the gulf of an emotional disconnect that white people display when a person of colour articulates their experience. [...] This emotional disconnect is the conclusion of living a life

oblivious to the fact that their skin colour is the norm and all others deviate from it. (ix)

The blogger Eddo-Lodge, after having emphasised white supremacy as an enduring issue and pointing out the erasure of real diversity under a regime that piously asserts that “skin colour can and should be universal”, condemns the Eurocentric sanctimonious knowledge of history that conveniently omits histories of peoples who are not white. This denial of History turns into “the ubiquitous politics of race that operates on its inherent invisibility” and renders “the problem” non-existent. In addition, if she attempts to assert herself as a black human being, “it’s very likely that they’ll then paint [her] as a bully or an abuser. It’s also likely that their white friends will rally round them, rewrite history and make the lies the truth.” Eddo-Lodge’s digital, public stance toward racism and white people’s rejection of a multi-ethnic society becomes a political form of activism. She stands for all “people of colour”, who are condemned to live “a lifetime of self-censorship”, and strives to make white people “to listen or learn.” She concludes her post stating that this disclosure is not an act of throwing in the towel, on the contrary, “if there’s something like a media or conference appearance that means that someone might hear what I’m saying and feel less alone, then I’ll participate” (ix-xii).

It is important at this point to exercise some caution with the regard to the authenticity of this post. It is interesting to note that as soon as the London-based journalist “signed a deal with Bloomsbury Publishing to write [her] first book!” (Eddo-Lodge) she removed the original content of the post and replaced it with the announcement of her imminent publication that reads:

Just over a year ago, I wrote a blog post that seemed to resonate with thousands of people across the internet.

Today, I’m pleased to announce that I’ve signed a deal with Bloomsbury Publishing to write my first book! Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race will critically tackle politics, pop culture and a thousand received wisdoms about race and racism in the UK. Writing a book has always been a lifelong dream of mine. But most importantly, I’m passionate about changing the conversation on this topic amidst popular rhetoric on race and immigration swinging dangerously to the right.

Though the book isn’t out for a while yet (early 2017 to be precise) I’m so excited to take my writing about race, equality and liberation to the next level. A special

thanks to those of you who have supported my work over the past few years. I hope to do it justice. (Eddo-Lodge)

Although the title of the post “Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race” is still visible in her website, the text itself is not available, so it is difficult to verify if the printed Bloomsbury version is completely identical in length, phrasing or structure to the original.

As for the texts that remain available on her blog, visitors to Eddo-Lodge’s page will notice that her blogposts vary in topic and layout, but they share the informal, conversational style, captivating titles, and the absence of dates of publication. Her blog is a section of her larger website that provides the bulk of the information and uses the blog feature to keep users updated and engaged. The majority of her posts are about her work or engagement in societal issues provided in short, terse sentences as noticeable for instance in the post “Fear and Ferguson” that reads: “I’ve written a piece on fear and the Ferguson protests for the Telegraph, and a piece on the narratives around sexual abuse in Rotherham, for openDemocracy” where “Telegraph” and “openDemocracy” are hyperlinks to the corresponding electronic documents. This self-advertising for her work denotes a political and social engagement as well as a firm intent to broaden her digital audience’s awareness of matters and concerns that are under-reported in the mainstream narration of present events. In this manner, she is offering to curate her audience’s education on neglected current events: Eddo-Lodge is thus promoting a consistent brand with its own product catalogue and promises of improved discernment, intellectual growth and a human connection with the author, something that was avoided by Ifemelu.

As for longer posts, besides the usual informal, conversational style, they are organised in small and medium-long length paragraphs, and are characterised by an ironic and reproachful tone as detectable for instance in the post “An open letter to BBC3” where Eddo-Lodge harshly criticises the programming offered to its audience at the time she wrote the post. In addition, like a print media open letter, in this digital open letter, hyperlinks are not embedded in the text. The difference in medium, however, does not seem to change the impact this public criticism may have on the actual addressee. For the author, it obviously represents an opportunity to make her point of view known to the digital, general audience. Although, open letters can be powerful advocacy tools, over time they do not seem to have made substantial changes. Conversely, the difference in

medium ensures their publication, and a degree of notoriety for the author, and because of this, Eddo-Lodge is therefore afforded visibility and an opportunity to express her disappointment and displeasure vividly and at times impolitely:

I used to feel confident in trusting the BBC. I and many others my age enjoyed our late 90s childhood years. We were quite comfortably over saturated with CBBC's after school entertainment- the eye catching, bright colours, the chirpy, spirited young presenters who seems to relate to us all so well. It suited our demographic well and I don't think any of us, at 8 years old, had any complaints.

However, we are not children anymore. The BBC's mission statement maintains that they aim to 'enrich people's lives with programmes that inform, educate and entertain'. [...] I can only assume that, in the case of BBC3, these programmes have been carefully designed for idiots. Let's not beat about the bush here- it's pretty much an 'either/or' situation.

BBC3 seems to take the BBC's mission statement and manipulate it ever so slightly; instead of these programmes being informative, educational and entertaining, they are educational or informative or entertaining. [...] To put it simply, almost all of their programmes are so incredibly cretinous that I often wonder, whilst watching, if BBC3 are actually just playing some kind of cruel joke on me. [...]

Get your act together BBC3, because I am not informed, not educated and certainly not entertained by these poor excuses for television programmes. [...] There appears to be such a lack in quality British programming for young people- in turn giving way to vapid, soulless, condescending MTV style programming for the masses. Is this the way forward for youth television?

Reprising the original post in question, and presuming that the content of the post has been truthfully reproduced, Eddo-Lodge's post can be read as the U.K. continuation of Ifemelu's blogposts that resemble open letters addressed to an anonymous "Dear American Non-Black" (Adichie 405) on the subjects of racism, discrimination, politics, white privilege and social injustices and mostly intended for a general, white readership. The London-based journalist makes Ifemelu's topics flow into the concept of structural racism also known as systemic or institutional racism.

The term institutional racism was first coined in 1967 by civil rights leader Stokely Carmichael (who later adopted the name Kwame Ture) and Charles Vernon Hamilton (political scientist and civil rights leader) in their *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* seen at that time as a "radical manifesto" (Bhavnani *et al.* 28). This revolutionary work

exposes the depths of systemic racism in the United States and provides a radical political framework for reform: “true and lasting social change would only be accomplished through unity among African-Americans and their independence from the pre-existing order” (Kwame and Hamilton 45). Defined as an eloquent document of the civil rights movement, more than fifty years after its first publication, it still remains a work of profound social relevance as well as an examination of the roots of racism in the United States. In their work, the Trinidadian-American activist Ture and the African-American activist Hamilton shed light on the endemic practices of racism in the United States and aim at reforming the traditional political process for the future because

Institutional racism relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group position prevails: whites are “better” than blacks; therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites. This is a racist attitude and it permeates the society, on both the individual and institutional level, covertly and overtly. (Kwame and Hamilton 21)

Nevertheless, structural¹⁸ racism is not confined to the borders of the United States. In Europe, as Eddo-Lodge remarks, it is a deeply ingrained reality that persists within various societal institutions, perpetuating discriminatory practices and inequalities faced by racial and ethnic minority communities. Structural racism refers to the systematic discrimination and disadvantage faced by racial and ethnic minority groups within social, economic, and political structures. In Europe, this manifests in multiple forms, including discriminatory immigration policies, racial profiling by law enforcement agencies, educational disparities, and labour market exclusion. Marginalised communities experience disproportionate rates of poverty, limited access to quality healthcare, housing, and barriers to social integration, all of which reinforce the cycle of discrimination and exclusion.

In contrast to Ifemelu’s fictional blogposts, Eddo-Lodge’s post – “Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race” – has managed to reach a real and a much wider audience, and the achieved goal surprised and relieved the young journalist-blogger:

¹⁸ The adjectives structural, institutional and systemic have equal meaning, in every practical and functional sense. In her writing, Eddo-Lodge relies on the adjective structural. In this section the same adjective is employed.

After I pressed publish, the blog post took on a life of its own. Years later, I still meet new people, in different countries and different situations, who tell me that they've read it. In 2014, as the post was being linked to all over the Internet, I braced myself for the usual slew of racist comments. But the response was markedly different, so much so that it surprised me.

There was a clear racial split in how the post was received. I got lots of messages from black and brown people. There were many 'thank yous and lots of 'you've articulated my experience'. There were reports of tears and a little bit of debate about how to approach the problem, with education being rated highly as a solution to bridge the communication gap. Reading these messages was a relief. I knew how difficult it was to put that feeling of frustration into words, so when people got in contact and thanked me for explaining something they'd always struggled to, I was glad that it had served them. I knew that if I was feeling less alone, then they were feeling less alone too.

What I wasn't expecting was an outpouring of emotion from white people who felt that by deciding to stop talking to white people about race, I was taking something away from the world, and that this was an absolute tragedy. 'Heartbreaking' seemed to be the word that best described this sentiment. (ix-xiii)

The responses to Eddo-Lodge's post corroborate George P. Landow's thoughts: "online democracy and large-scale collaboration" (362). Individuals from different backgrounds and origins gathered in Eddo-Lodge's virtual space to engage in conversation, exchange ideas, life experiences and personal feelings. However, this digital public sphere seems to have allowed only what García Landa defines as "networked literature" (11) as introduced in the previous section. It is a fact that bloggers engaged in the digital conversation and expressed their thoughts in written words, but the surprising reaction by her white readers, the sense of loss and heartbreak they had when Eddo-Lodge felt she could no longer do the time-consuming and emotionally demanding work of educating the white public on anti-racism on their behalf, it becomes sadly obvious her post did not succeed in bringing about significant societal change. It did, however, offer a possibility to the often marginalised black members of society "to put that feeling of frustration into words" and be heard. The pervasiveness of new media and the Internet have democratised and increased literary practices engendering in return new forms of literature, confirming that Caryl Phillips's view of literature¹⁹ can be applied also to these free, digital and expanded literatures. As the digital space enables and fosters these new forms of literary practice and participation, then it may be envisioned as a sophisticated laboratory where

¹⁹ Cf. Chapter 2 "Postcolonial Digital Humanities as Contemporary Manifestos"

all human knowledge converges and consequently ensures every individual the right to say a word along with “the right to be understood” (Phillips 2011, 16).

Apropos of the sophisticated, digital laboratory, an additional reflection may be taken into consideration. The right granted by digital connectivity simultaneously allows forms of activism. Organisation of people, ideas and other resources are at the core of activism. The English scholar in social anthropology and communication Brian Alleyne employs the notion of activism in the form of a “type of politically-oriented action that is conceived and deployed largely outside of established state structures” (2). Furthermore, in relation to activism, Alleyne acknowledges at the same time the crucial role played by new, advanced technologies in current social movements. In this particular case, the blogger Eddo-Lodge and her audience become a group of persons, even better, an online community willing to “debate about how to approach the problem” (Eddo-Lodge xiii) of racism. Undoubtedly, the introduction of the subject of racism in the education system would be an impactful first step. Nonetheless, because of its democratic feature, in terms of representing the benefit of the people at large, the Internet’s expansiveness renders Eddo-Lodge’s blog accessible to everyone and, to some extent this represents a starting point of approaching the persisting issue of racism in Western societies.

In the “Preface” to her volume, Eddo-Lodge focuses on the “communication gap” (xiv) perceivable in the numerous and unexpected replies to her post. One plausible reason behind it may be due to the lack of knowledge also as a consequence of an education system that systematically excludes the histories of those peoples who are not white, because as Eddo-Lodge reminds her white audience, History was and is written by conquerors (xi):

There seemed to be a misunderstanding of who this piece of writing was for. It was never written with the intention of prompting guilt in white people, or to provoke any kind of epiphany. I didn’t know at the time that I had inadvertently written a break-up letter to whiteness. And I didn’t expect white readers to do the Internet equivalent of standing outside my bedroom window with a boom box and a bunch of flowers, confessing their flaws and mistakes, begging me not to leave. This all seemed strange and slightly uncomfortable to me. Because, in writing that blog post, all I had felt I was saying was that I had had enough. It wasn’t a cry for help, or a grovelling plea for white people’s understanding and compassion. It wasn’t an invitation for white people to indulge in self-flagellation. I stopped talking to white people about race because I don’t think giving up is a sign of weakness. Sometimes it’s about self-preservation.

I've turned 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race' into a book – paradoxically – to continue the conversation. (xiv-xv)

For a blogger, the return to print media may sound like a paradox, as readers' response is not immediate and direct, feedback is given basically in terms of copies that have been sold only. Nevertheless, in so doing, Eddo-Lodge seems to recognise the prestige and authority conferred on traditional forms of literature. Thus, she intends to shed light on the issues of race and racism reaching an ever-increasing number of readers, possibly white readership, who may take actions and, in Eddo-Lodge's words, stop believing "their skin colour is the norm and all others deviate from it" (ix).

Eddo-Lodge's disappointment at the white readership's responses corroborates to some extent some researchers' criticism for a real efficaciousness of communication via blog posting. As Jodi Dean points out in her work *Blog Theory* (2010) blogs are a medium and because of this, they merely provide content for an audience. Furthermore, as a media, blogs coexist and interlink with other media:

Blogs are part of an open set of communicative practices and technologies [...] blogging is a medium for and practice of communication [...] the medium enables the production of content potentially accessible to anyone who happens to find it. Blogging opens possible encounters with the different and unexpected, whether in the form of the blogger's own reflection on what she posts or in the reactions of others [...] What most realize is that blogging is the illusion of connections, publishing into a void and thus doubly isolating. [...] People are driven to communicate with others, others who may even be themselves, through blogs. (46-47)

In her analysis of the practice of blogging, Dean asserts that when bloggers aim at forms of participatory public discussions, most of the time they seem to disregard the fact they are engaging in conversations occurring in a digital space that allows written and not in real time exchange of ideas, reflections or feelings. This feature is crucial because dealing with a written text, sometimes

it's difficult to tell when a blog or a post is ironic and when it's sincere, when it's funny or when it's serious. Terms and styles of expression that make sense to an "in-group" can shock, insult, or enrage folks who just happen upon a blog. Moreover, the uncertainty, the potential for unexpected meanings, provides its own affective intensity. (5)

Despite the misreading of her post, Eddo-Lodge has managed to draw attention to what she calls structural racism in Britain. Due to her digital, in person and written activities, she engages in a new-media, multimodal authorship. Her published volume along with her website, blog, social media accounts and podcasts are interconnected platforms where a collaborative, at times complex storytelling process occurs. For instance, Eddo-Lodge asked Nick Griffin for an interview, after having “watched in disbelief” (121) the former British National Party leader on television, who

in his Question Time monologue [...] appealed to that British sense of fairness to conjure images of an embattled white minority under attack, losing control of their heritage and culture. Even more insultingly, he used the struggles of black and brown people who were colonised, raped and beaten by white British people to preserve white British culture. (121)

Since Griffin – a notoriously conservative, anti-migration advocate – “hardly ever goes to London, as it’s ‘largely a foreign country’” (122) to him, they agreed to speak on the phone. That “surreal” (123) phone conversation is faithfully reported in dialogically form by Eddo-Lodge in her volume *Why I’m No Longer talking to White People about Race*. Over the interview, Griffin expresses the mainstream right-wing concerns for mass migrations from non-Western to Western countries such as for instance: “white British people will become an ethnic minority in Britain” (123), or “it’s self-evident that all the people of the world have a right to remain the dominant people, culturally and ethnically, in their own homeland” (124), or in regard to racial integration “I think that either nature or God made people separate, unique and wonderful, all of them, then it’s a shame if we’re all simply obliterated into one indistinguishable mass all over the world” (125) along with “I think that the identity of all the peoples of Europe is under threat from mass immigration, integration, and mixed-race relationships” (125) and in his closing remarks he suggests Eddo-Lodge leave the United Kingdom:

I would recommend that you get the hell out of this country and you go and have kids somewhere decent, probably somewhere connected with your own heritage, because Britain is, to be crude, utterly fucked. (129)

Griffins’s recommendation is summarised in Theresa May’s succinct phrase “hostile environment” unwearyingly opposed by the “Refugee Tales” project, which will be

investigated in chapter 6. Furthermore, his standpoint has become an internalised belief uttered by those Western individuals who reject migrants, refugee and asylum seekers in their societies as poetically expressed by Warsan Shire in her kinetic poetry “Home” that will be analysed in the next chapter.

It must be said that new media have also legitimised informal writing style strategies. Unlike in a novel, for instance, where word choice, register and tone are carefully observed and crafted to conform to the prevailing edicts of literature, the interlocutor, as the Norwegian scholar in media studies Knut Lundbly suggests, allows people to tell their own personal stories in their own words, in new accessible ways, regardless of whether or not these stories satisfy accepted literary conventions. Eventually, this storytelling reflects and welcomes forms of community communication, thus ensuring democratic participation (124).

Moreover, Alleyne calls attention to the relevance acquired by the technological dimension in contemporary, ordinary life. Consequently, the ability to use new media is decisively important for activists wanting to constitute, expand and sustain their projects. In point of fact, “these new technologies are ‘force multipliers’ for the collective generation of knowledge in which all activists must engage in order to pursue goals for social change” (80-81). Evidence of these “force multipliers” are detectable, for instance, in Eddo-Lodge’s denouncements of racism, police brutality and social injustices in Britain but also in the United States where

the burgeoning Black Lives Matter movement had gone global, with the new technology of smartphones shining a harsh light on long running injustices inflicted by law enforcement onto black communities, the blurry footage posted on social media, igniting the righteous rage of a new generation of activists. (228)

Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race may be defined as a collection of articles whose topics are racism and blackness as the Other. Eddo-Lodge deals with the British history of slavery and colonialism, racism, the feminism question, social class injustices and inequalities. Eddo-Lodge’s articles contain dates and detailed facts on racism or, as defined by the author, “structural racism [that] is about how Britain’s relationship with race infects and distorts equal opportunity” (81). Through these topics Eddo-Lodge openly takes a stand and states: “I consider myself to be part of

a movement, and I think that if you are deeply touched by what you read in this book, then you are part of that movement too. It's happening right now" (238).

The freelance journalist, blog writer and activist Eddo-Lodge commits herself to the cause of social justice becoming an advocate for those individuals who are discriminated against and marginalised in white, Western societies. In doing so, she relies on both the Internet, print and visual media. In 2017, right after the publication of *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, as a part of her book promotion, the Internet hosted videos that show her face looking at the interviewer who is not visible, not even audible. With a serious, at times verging on indignant, facial expression, she continues to denounce issues of race and racism within British society from a personal perspective, and because of this, she can candidly admit that "British society is shaped by race [and] it's something we're in deep denial about" (02:28-02:32). Her showing up and taking a stand is based on first-hand stories about living in a white society and being black. Speaking from personal experience, Eddo-Lodge clearly states that

racism is not coincidental; it exists for social purpose to basically compound power in the hands of people who are white [...] that's the problem of racism; it has a social point [...] and actually it's very effective if you look at the bastions of power in this country there's barely anybody who isn't white in those arenas (03:26-03:47).

She goes further denouncing an emerging fear of a black planet especially at present time that witnesses the rise of far-right politics:

I think that, in terms of global politics, it really [is] pertinent. And a fear of a black planet is essentially people who on one side deny the power relations of race in this country but on the other side are very very scared of white people becoming a minority. Almost as if they recognise that being a minority in this country means treatment that is not preferential [...] there is an understanding there from people who might dedicate their lives' careers to white supremacy, frankly, there is an understanding that being a racial minority means – means structural disadvantage [...] And so I think that far right politics and its sort of resurgence across the globe is almost that – almost the last dying cry of monocultural society. (08:49-10:14)

Over the years, Eddo-Lodge realised that "in the moment you start naming the problem, that is race and racism, then you become the problem" (08:09-08:14); however, this has

not stopped her to publicly assert her unyielding support of the black cause, defence of women rights, and opposition to structural racism.

In 2018, during an interview on Channel 4 News and available on the YouTube platform, she provides her main reasons behind the post: “I am first and foremost a journalist I’m interested in the big picture of things and so you know I... I can’t say to you all I suffered [...] what I’m interested in it is how race affects life chances [...]” (09:18-09:30). The conversation initiated in her blog continues in her print media version, as the articles included in the volume are the objective outcome of research, interviews and talks with members of racial and ethnic minority groups within British society.

In the previously mentioned 2017 interview as a part of her book promotion, and available on the YouTube platform, the author retraces those days after the publication of her work with emotion:

Since it came out, one magazine called it ‘The Black British Bible’ which was awesome... It seems like there’s been a... an exciting new resurgence of anti-racist activism... but we’ve got a long way to go. I did the first event for the book at Wow like three months before the book even came out, and you know it was much anticipated there, I remember it was like a sold-out venue and very emotionally charged, and I remember my partner telling me like when you were speaking you could hear a pin drop. It was a few months after like the first women’s March in London, and that atmosphere in that room was a very stand-out to me, I think it made me think about how much my work was going to be anticipated from me to the festival... (01:19-02:05)

However, the enthusiastic, prolific writer Eddo-Lodge seems to have transformed into a passive, less visible observer. Five years later at the Fenwick event, she openly and publicly states that she has nothing to add to the conversation started on her blog, as she needs time to pause and reflect on events:

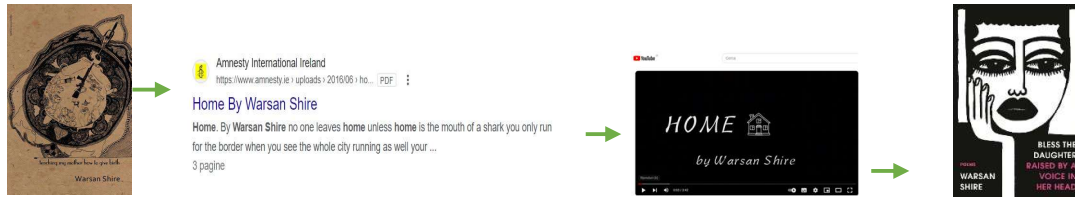
I’m not producing, I’m also not sharing on social media anymore... I just literally don’t post, but I’m paying attention to what everyone’s talking and thinking about all the time um and it’s all just going in, it’s, I don’t... as a writer I feel I have to take time and space to observe. I have to and that that observation is actually more important than necessarily being involved in the conversation right... um and I know that kind of sounds a bit strange because people are here in this room listening to me talk right now um but and I don’t feel drawn so much these days into contributing to the conversation. I feel... I feel like I’m in my listening stage and like sooner or later that will wrap up and I’ll be like I have something to say,

now I've listened to, I've done a lot of listening and I have something to contribute (58:18-59:45)

It may be argued that Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* emphasises some drawbacks to this digital environment. At first, the ease of erasing and editing blog texts is the very definition of ephemerality; secondly, the allegedly boundless space of the Internet that offers the possibility of global-wide visibility, in the end played the minor role of mere introductory prologue to Eddo-Lodge's reflections and writing. As a paradox, the former blogger owes her widespread reputation to the publishing industry. In fact, within a few years, she has become "the author of the triple award winning *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*" (Eddo-Lodge) thanks to a print media work that has sold one million copies.

5 The Literary/Digital Case of Warsan Shire

Algorithm # 3: From one Short Story Published to Video Collage to Published Poetry



Flowchart of transformations of a literary text

Warsan Shire (Kenya, August 1, 1988)



2011: *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*,

Flipped Eye, London



Conversations About Home

(At the Deportation Centre)



2016: the literary text was uploaded as a poem on the website of Amnesty International Ireland (June 2016)

2017: circulation of an unauthorised video by YouTubers for unspecified purposes. The video reproduces recordings of a public reading plus background music and graphics



2022: as a reworked text, but with the same title,

the poem is included in the poetry collection

Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in her Head,

Random House, London

5.1 Warsan Shire: A Digital Poet

“When I first heard it, it encouraged me to think of myself as whole and unhyphenated: Afropean. Here was a space where blackness was taking part in shaping European identity at large. It suggested the possibility of living in and with more than one idea: Africa and Europe, or, by extension, the Global South and the West, without being mixed-this, half-that or black-other. That being black in Europe didn’t necessarily mean being an immigrant.”

(Johny Pitts 1)

The current digital, cultural context has shaped Warsan Shire’s literary production and outlook. Indeed, it has to be emphasised that the biographical information mentioned in this section does not rely on authoritative sources, namely the type of sources non-digital natives, or digital immigrants as defined by Marc Prensky,²⁰ would refer to in this situation. Shire embodies the typical digital native citizen, this means that all details on her private, public and social life are traceable on the author’s social media accounts, interviews given to international online magazines, videos posted on the Internet platforms and or podcasts. Moreover, further evidence of Shire’s casualness and symbiotic relationship with new media, is provided by the American journalist and staff writer at “*The New Yorker*” magazine Alexis Okeowo who recounts:

Reyes-Manzo, Shire’s husband, shared her poems with a youth group that he was working with in California’s Central Valley, in 2001. After hearing that Shire had been looking for music recommendations, he sent her a playlist. The two dated long-distance for years before Shire moved to L.A. to be with him. I told Shire that I was struck by the fact that many of her closest friends had initially been online fans. “I didn’t really think about it,” she said. “I’m happy that – whatever it is I’m doing with my work – it’s bringing the right people to me” (Okeowo, 2022)

²⁰ Cf. chapter 1 Introduction

Shire was born in Nairobi (Kenya) on 1st August 1988 to Somali parents. At the age of one, she emigrated with her family to the United Kingdom because her father – a political journalist – was facing imprisonment due to a publication that displeased the local government (Okeowo, 2022). Shire grew up in London. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing, and is among a generation of young poets who have attracted a larger audience by initially publishing their poetry online. This production of literary works that relies chiefly on electronic devices has made her a distinguished representative of multimodal storytelling. Besides providing immediate visibility, Internet platforms such as social media and YouTube also encourage poets to track their follower counts and engagement rates. Shire first became prominent through Tumblr, which functioned as a sort of a virtual mood board where selfies, music, and poetry could be posted randomly, and later on X(Twitter) and Instagram which count thousands of followers. Surprisingly, those numbers are more akin to a television or movie celebrity than to those of a poet. Nevertheless, being also an activist, Shire relies on the Facebook platform to reach Somali refugees and support their cause. She also supports the cause of the African women feminist movement along with engaging herself in conversations in the form of interviews or podcasts about migration, racism and gender-based violence every time an opportunity is given to her (Okeowo, 2015).

In late 2013, the popularity she had gained on the Internet led to her appointment as “London’s Youth Poet Laureate” and, as reported on the BBC news website, “The Londoner was announced by the current poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy at an event in Parliament as part of National Poetry Day” (BBC news London). In the same year, Shire received Brunel University’s inaugural African Poetry Prize, and was chosen as Queensland, Australia’s poet in residence in 2014 (Okeowo, 2015). Shire’s work gained mainstream recognition, and to a larger audience, she is best known for collaborating in 2016 with the American singer Beyoncé on “Lemonade,” a visual album in which the singer’s music is intercut with Shire’s poetry. This creates a sort of sisterhood with Adichie’s similar performance. In the same year, Shire moved to Los Angeles (U.S.A.) to join her future husband Andres Reyes-Manzo (Okeowo, 2022). In 2018, Shire was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in its “40 Under 40” initiative (Alison). In 2019, Shire wrote the screenplay for her short film, *Brave Girl Rising*, which depicts the lives of Somali girls living in one of Africa’s largest refugee camps, that is to say the

Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Kahn). In 2020, her poetry was included, once again, in Beyoncé's visual album "Black is King" and "read aloud" by the singer (Thompson).

Shire's digital, social and political engagement does not exempt her from exploring alternative ways of storytelling. Her literary production has been composed for a variety of media, ranging from print distribution to audio recordings to online circulation. In 2011, she released her first printed work: the pamphlet *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth* published by the London based Flipped Eye Publishing, a company that promotes original poetry and prose on a not-for-profit model. In addition, through her role as London's first Young Poet Laureate, Shire turned her attention to the city, investigating the capital and its continuing transformation, while lending her voice to its often unheard and under-represented communities and spaces. All of this merged in the chapbook titled *Her Blue Body* (2015).

Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth, a brief publication, barely over thirty pages long, contains poems and short stories that chiefly elicit the dichotomy of longing for home while searching for a new place to call home. In her narration Shire deals with the issues of migration, war, trauma, patriarchal violence, racism and language from a feminist point of view as emerges, for instance, in the two-line poem *In Love and In War*:

To my daughter I will say,
'when the men come, set yourself on fire'. (34)

Allegedly, this motherly advice might be an aftermath of foremothers' memories caught in the worst turmoil of conflicts that have taken and are still taking place in Africa, or, as supposed by "The New Yorker" journalist, a recollection of memories of mothers caught in the worst turmoil of Somalia's conflicts (Okeowo, 2015).

Then, it may be argued that Shire's lyrical, feminist writing might be based on the American sociologist Michael Scott Kimmel's theorisation on patriarchy. Kimmel asserts that patriarchy is a system deeply rooted in imperialism, racism and capitalism. Furthermore, as one of the facets of patriarchy, manhood (or the composite of qualities, such as courage, determination and vigour that are supposed to personify adult male humans)

is created in culture. Manhood means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of “others” – racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women. (59)

That being said, within contemporary feminist discourse, thinkers like Ellen Willis (left-wing political essayist, journalist, activist, feminist, and pop music critic) and Shulamith Firestone (radical feminist, writer and activist) have been articulating the response and resistance to the constricting norms of patriarchal society. In January 1969, the two American women started a group called “Redstockings of the Women’s Liberation Movement” whose “Manifesto” is a call to action to end male supremacy, as clearly stated in the following extract:

III We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. (<https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/rs-manifesto>)

Although very little has changed since the Manifesto above was published with a declared intent to end women’s subordination to men, attention has to be drawn to Kimmel’s, Willis’s and Firestones’s shared perspective: they all recognise women as an oppressed class.

The main concept – “men dominate women” (Willis and Firestones) – however, represents a double oppression for colonised women who live within a patriarchal community:

Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford have used the phrase ‘a double colonisation’ to refer to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. [...] the phrase ‘a double colonisation’ refers to the fact that women are twice colonised – by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too. (McLeod 201)

As is Shire’s case, women become a visible minority in a country with a colonial history where white, Western culture is omnipresent. Shire’s poetic voice remarks on the unbalanced female-male relationship through the usage of metaphors of the woman’s

body, which, in her poetry, is both the metaphoric and the literary location of pain as detectable in the poem *My Foreign Wife is Dying and Does Not Want To Be Touched*:

Her body is a flooding home.
[...]
She is a boat docking in from war,
her body, a burning village, a prison
with open gates. (30)

as well as in the poem *Ugly*:

You are her mother.
Why did you not warn her,
hold her like a rotting boat
and tell her that men will not love her
if she is covered in continents,
if her teeth are small colonies,
if her stomach is an island
if her thighs are borders?

What man wants to lie down
and watch the world burn
in his bedroom?

Your daughter's face is a small riot,
her hands are a civil war,
a refugee camp behind each ear,
a body littered with ugly things.

But God,
doesn't she wear
the world well? (31-32)

The above extracts are undisguised examples of Shire's employment of metaphors with references to conflicts and, as offered earlier for consideration by Malkki,²¹ to the effects of colonialism: "her hands are a civil war, / a refugee camp behind each ear, / a body littered with ugly things." In relation to physicality, Shire seems also to reproduce in her writing one of the Australian, postcolonial studies theorist, Bill Ashcroft's observation

²¹ Cf. 2 "Postcolonial Digital Humanities as Contemporary Manifestos" The anthropologist Liisa Helena Malkki argues that "the emergence of the Third World" represents one of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies especially after "the end of official colonialism." (504)

that “the body itself has also been the literal ‘text’ on which colonization has written some of its most graphic and scrutable messages” (289-290).

Through the feature of physicality that distinguishes Shire’s stories and poems, she seems to emphasise that the violence experienced on an emotional level can manifest itself on the human body as if to gain visibility. If we read this last reflection from a phenomenological perspective, physicality is nothing other than “the Ego that makes the body the essential experience of the ‘presence-in-the-world’” (Merleau-Ponty 106).

In addition, Shire’s act of addressing her homeland as a female entity is arguably a relic of the colonial past. Within the realm of postcolonial criticism, the colonial space or the occupied territory is personified as female, whereas the act of conquering and colonising are associated with male human endeavours. This binary opposition – female/male as well as object/subject (the latter in terms of the one who performs, or controls the action) – goes back to the eighteenth century when the increase in sea voyages for scientific purposes or for the spread of Christianity allowed a more extensive encounter with the Other. The consequent collision of cultures along with the subjugation of peoples considered ‘inferior’ was grounded on the Eurocentric supremacist perspective, as put forth by three of the founding exponents of postcolonial theory:

Such knowledge [of the overseas countries] also directly facilitated exploitation and intervention, processes whose real effects are reflected in phrases like ‘the opening up of Africa’. Such a phrase also suggests the gendering of landscape and the associations between sexuality and exploration and conquest. ‘Virgin territories’ (never virgin, but the inhabitants were considered to be uncivilized and thus having no legal rights of ownership) were opened up by exploration to trade and settlement their original inhabitants killed, displaced or marginalized within European settler communities. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Helen, 2007 89-90)

In her poetry, besides the employment of metaphors, Shire relies also on the literary device of repetition. Words such as “men”, “boat”, “home” might be referred to as keywords recurring frequently throughout the other poems and short stories collected, for instance, in *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*, and clear evidence can be found in *Conversation About Home (at the Deportation Centre)* explored in the next section.

Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth also provides an insight into the use of colonial language by non-native speakers while simultaneously presenting first-hand, personal narratives of journeys by African migrants intended for a Western public. Shire’s

collection allows for a reflection on the role played by the English language over the centuries. In the colonial past, it functioned as a tool of subjugation, as already mentioned and as emphasised by Bénédicte Ledent: “colonized by language, and excluded by language” (99). In present times, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are still excluded by language, specifically by the bureaucratic language spoken by European immigration officials as pointed out, for instance by Noo Saro-Wiwa, the daughter of Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa:

They are dealing with an asylum applicant who might talk about ‘witchcraft’ and ritual violence in a ‘dreamlike’ language that challenges the bureaucratic grammar of human rights. (128-129)

The legal criteria for assessing migrant or refugee status correspond to an idealised perception of what an asylum seeker should conform to. At the borders of Western societies different cultures – the white supremacist culture and cultures of the Other – collide. As Noo Saro-Wiwa asserts, applicants are questioned, “tested and quizzed like crime suspects” (127). Communication barriers make applicants anxious as “their sense of identity is not wedded to birth certificates or utility bills” (128) and somehow conscious of the fact that the asylum process is thus marked by subjectivity: “Asylum seekers are seen as liars, vectors of disease or religious fanaticism; economic ‘migrants’ who are capitalising on war to enjoy the benefits of life in the UK” (127).

Furthermore, the issue of language still haunts, on different levels, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants even after they manage to enter the United Kingdom. After having mastered the previous coloniser’s language and culture, even only for overcoming the complexities of different asylum processes, as the London-based journalist, broadcaster and editor Kieran Yates points out, when migrants are allowed to enter British society, then they are constantly reminded of being the Other:

I know that language can be painful, and so too do a generation of immigrants who have arrived here through different pathways. For them, language is the great battle to fight, and for many it’s a war you always feel like you’re losing. Even when you get the language, unless you shed your accent, you’re continually reminded of your difference. [...] The only problem with this is that those who speak the language of their homeland first, before the language of the coloniser, are made to wade in thick, asphyxiating shame. That they should fall victim to the threateningly punitive ‘learn-or-get-out’ deal that political rhetoric is ramping up,

is obvious. For anyone who has actually seen someone learn a language, it's safe to say that school of 'well you live here, just learn the language!' thought isn't quite as easy as that. And remember, even when you get it, people will still take the piss. (109-110)

In her description of the many effects of dealing with your own mother tongue and the language of the host country along with the attempts to negotiate between them, Yates appends: "Opening your mouth reveals more than you might like about who you are and where you come from. We've created routing responses for the monotonous, bordering-on-parodic regularity with which we are asked where we're 'from'" (115).

At current times, language and culture still perpetuate practices of racism and alienation. Nikesh Shukla, British author and screenwriter among others, emphasises the constant anxiety migrants, as well as people of colour of second or third generation, have to manage "because the universal experience is white" (unnumbered pages).

The unwelcome reality at large experienced by current migrants is crystallised by Shire in the word "surrealism." In 2015, during an interview with the journalist and staff writer at the US magazine "*The New Yorker*", Shire talked about her London childhood

where she has always felt like an outsider, [Shire] embodies the kind of shape-shifting, culture-juggling spirit lurking in most people who can't trace their ancestors to their country's founding fathers, or whose ancestors look nothing like those fathers. In that limbo, Shire conjures up a new language for belonging and displacement. What she has described [...] as the "surrealism of everyday immigrant life – one day you are in your country, having fun, drinking mango juice, and the next day you are in the Underground in London and your children are speaking to you in a language you don't understand. (Okeowo)

The eclectic author takes advantage of new media to reach a wider audience, but chiefly to inform and raise awareness of current migrations; her main aim is to increase public understanding of the reasons behind migrants' journey through performing literature and activism. Besides being a migrant herself, although she cannot remember the reasons behind her family journey that brought her in the United Kingdom, Shire has been experiencing since the age of one what being black in London and in a broad way in the European Union means. She has become a well-known digital poet and activist who delivers first-hand narrations of the senses of displacement, non-belonging and fragmented identity. It seems that she is able to preserve a bond with her Somali roots

chiefly through interactions with her relatives, friends and individuals who share her Somali origin but also with all those human beings who suddenly found themselves in the position of forsaking their home. From her prolific and multimodal production emerges a driven desire to restore the chronicle of European residents from non-Western countries. Shire told to “*The New Yorker*” journalist that

she is most interested in writing about people whose stories are either not told or told inaccurately, especially immigrants and refugees, and so she brings out her Dictaphone when relatives come to her with tales from their experiences so that she can record them faithfully before turning them into poetry. (Okewo, 2015)

Her digital and print media works, adapted and inspired by these stories collected in her recordings, expound and make known what it means to be displaced, disconnected from home, and incredibly vulnerable both at home and in the host country. She does so through portraits of her own family and community members in a way that blurs the boundary between blood relations and a greater cultural history, and this is easily perceived especially in *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022). In addition, she is a first-generation immigrant woman who constantly transits from past to present time, from private to common traumatic life experiences. In her “*The New Yorker*” interview with Okeowo, Shire explains the temporal and perspective shifts that are central to much of her work:

I either know, or I am every person I have written about, for or as. But I do imagine them in their most intimate settings [...] my work [...] is a project of documentation, genealogy, preserving the names of the women came before me. To connect, honor, to confront. (Okewo, 2015)

She is indisputably the representative voice and face for all black women who are still being oppressed and left powerless and invisible.

5.2 Contextualising “Home” in the Digital Environment

*“Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in.”*

(Robert Frost)

Denotations, referents and ideas associated to the concept of home are multifarious. Within the field of postcolonial studies and criticism, home is synonymous with identity, sense of belonging, integration. Furthermore, when the concept of home is discussed in migration studies, home represents the safe place *par excellence*. In our globalised and digitalised world where distances are shortened, boundaries are hypothetically non-existent and movements of goods and people should be commonly affordable and accessible to an always larger part of the global population, the lexical item “home” that should imply sympathetic, compassionate and unhesitating acceptance has become instead the place of origin that estranges its inhabitants and turns “home” into an unattainable place.

Clear evidence of this can be found, for instance, in Shire’s *Conversation About Home (at the Deportation Centre)* included in her first published pamphlet *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, which is titled after a Somali proverb. During an interview with the American, but UK-based essayist and blogger Katy Evans-Bush, Shire elucidates the meaning saying that in Somalia the “life parades through sisters and mothers and grandmothers, aunts and cousins and brothers and uncles [...] in my work each of us creates the mother in the other” (Evans-Bush).

Written in 2009, *Conversation About Home (at the Deportation Centre)* was inspired by a visit Shire made to the abandoned Somali Embassy in Rome where some young refugees found shelter and turned that building into their home (Facing History & Ourselves). The refugees’ deliberate act of occupation of a safe African location in a hostile host country seems an incongruous even surreal act of agency and community building by a group of individuals accustomed to legal limbo and precariousness. In *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, Shire distributes this conversation over four pages. Arguably, this arrangement resembles a short story made of four paragraphs. Shire’s strategy to distribute the conversation over four pages might be read as an attempt

to emphasise the refugees' sense of displacement and fragmented identity. Each page hosts a paragraph arguably so as to mirror one of the legs of migrants' discontinuous journeys that are often characterised by perilous travel conditions and stopovers where they are dehumanised by their abysmal condition along with unwelcoming arrival destinations. In point of fact, the first paragraph begins with the narrating voice's discouraging statement:

Well, I think home spat me out, the blackouts and curfews like tongue against loose tooth. God, do you know how difficult it is, to talk about the day your own city dragged you by the hair, past the old prison, past the school gates, past the burning torsos erected on poles like flags? When I meet others like me I recognise the longing, the missing, the memory of ash on their faces. No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there's no space for another song, another tongue or another language. I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs. I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with language I can't afford to forget.

*

(24)

On the following page, the narrating voice introduces the second paragraph questioning her/his point of origin in a way that corroborates Ashcroft's concept of the body as the literal text as put forth in the previous section:

They ask me *how did you get here?* Can't you see it on my body? The Libyan desert red with immigrant bodies, the Gulf of Aden bloated, the city of Rome with no jacket. I hope the journey meant more than miles because all of my children are in the water. I thought the sea was safer than the land. I want to make love, but my hair smells of war and running and running. I want to lay down, but these countries are like uncles who touch you when you're young and asleep. Look at all these borders, foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate. I'm the colour of hot sun on the face, my mother's remains were never buried. I spent days and nights in the stomach of the truck; I did not come out the same. Sometimes it feels like someone else is wearing my body.

*

(25 emphasis in the original)

Carrying on in analogies between senses and the body as a literal text, the third paragraph focuses on the issue of identity along with the dichotomy belonging/longing that manifest itself in the host country:

I know a few things to be true. I do not know where I am going, where I have come from is disappearing, I am unwelcome and my beauty is not beauty here. My body is burning with the shame of not belonging, my body is longing. I am the sin of memory and the absence of memory. I watch the news and my mouth becomes a sink full of blood. The lines, the forms, the people at the desks, the calling cards, the immigration officer, the looks on the street, the cold settling deep into my bones, the English classes at night, the distance I am from home. But Alhamdulillah all of this is better than the scent of a woman completely on fire, or a truckload of men between my legs, or a gun, or a promise, or a lie, or his name, or his manhood in my mouth.

*

(26)

Lastly, in the fourth paragraph the narrating voice elucidates the awareness of being *persona non grata* that immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers carry with them as soon as they have to deal with the hostile host community:

I hear them say *go home*, I hear them say *fucking immigrants, fucking refugees*. Are they really this arrogant? Do they not know that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth upon your body one second; the next you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and old currency waiting for its return. All I can say is, I was once like you, the apathy, the pity, the ungrateful placement and now my home is the mouth of shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun. I'll see you on the other side. (27)

Besides giving rise to unreconcilable and fragmented identities, this hateful, inhospitable reception develops into a further act of psychological violence that increases and exacerbates their sense of displacement and insecurity, as put forth by Caryl Phillips:

The first time one is called a 'nigger' or told 'go back to where you come from', one's identity is traduced and a great violence is done to one's sense of self. Thereafter, one fights a rearguard action to keep other elements of oneself in focus, and it's hard to get through the day without the shoulder coming into play. I don't mean the 'chip on the shoulder', I mean the 'the glance over the shoulder'. Once

somebody has mounted a stealth attack on a part of who you are, you had better be wary for you know it's coming again. (Phillips 2011, 123-124)

In *Conversation About Home (at the Deportation Centre)*, readers cannot miss Shire's employment of figures of speech that shed light on the distress of individuals who have been forced to leave their home country in search of a new place to call home. Already in the first lines, the use of personification immediately provides the drastic and dramatic reasons behind migrants', refugees' and asylum seekers' journey, as both "home" and "your own city" are endowed with negative human qualities: the home that forcefully expels its residents from its mouth/door and the city that chases them away. However, human qualities are conferred to Western countries as well, as described in the expression: "I want to lay down, but these countries are like uncles who touch you when you're young and asleep" (25), emphasising both gender-based violence – in this example targeting children – within the culture of the female migrant's narrating voice and abuses and violence directed at similarly vulnerable individuals in need of protection within Western societies. A powerful personification is conveyed in the phrase "the stomach of the truck" (25) that after having managed to cross Western borders, delivers a psychologically altered human being.

Proceeding with figures of speech, the stylistic device of metonymy is recognised in the sentence: "I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel" (24) where the act of swallowing the bureaucratic document that establishes the individual's origin symbolises refugees' intent to incorporate and fasten their own identity before entering a Western country. Then, the figure of speech of paradox discerned in the sentence "the sea was safer than the land" (25), or in the English classes taken as an attempt to come closer to the culture of the host country while quickening "the distance I am from home" (26). The double meaning of the sentence: "I'll see you on the other side" (27) which implies that the speaker and the listener will meet again in the future, possibly in a different place or under different circumstances, but also as a way of saying goodbye to someone with the understanding that you will meet them again in the future, especially after death. The powerful metaphor "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark" (24) makes Western readers mull over current mass migrations. Shire also points out the sense of disconnection caused by the unwelcoming, hostile environment found in the host country as perceived in the bewildering recognition that "Sometimes it feels like someone else is

wearing my body” (25). But it is not only her body that seems to have been confiscated, her history and past are intrusive, unwelcome reminders of events her host country and Western History in general have often rendered invisible, absent, forgotten. The consequences of the European colonial legacy on former colonised individuals and cultures are uncomfortable to acknowledge and reminders of its reality are met with resentment, denial or inversion of guilt, as captured by Shire’s realisation that she is “the sin of memory and the absence of memory” (26). These nightmarish Kafkian juxtapositions of bodies that are not really bodies, or of past evidence erased from the records and guilt ascribed to victims described by Shire reflect the poet’s and many other migrants’ predicament escaping desperate situations.

In response to the global refugee crises of the twenty-first century, in 2016 the conversation represented as a short story was uploaded on the Amnesty International Ireland website as a poem. This transformation into a new prosodic structure applied to the text provides it with more dramatic impact, if recited. The presence of the text on a public and authoritative website is certainly one way in which the digital environment produces, disseminates and amplifies information in our contemporary world. Amnesty International is a well-known worldwide advocate for human rights, as stated in their homepage: “Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who are committed to creating a future where human rights are enjoyed by everyone” (www.amnesty.org/en/about.us/). It is not surprising that they have chosen Shire’s text as a sort of manifesto. In addition, this specific Amnesty International webpage is in itself a digital product of our times.

Later in 2017, the text underwent another transformation.²² A group of YouTubers, who name themselves Garrett M., Halle V., Haley P., and Abigail P., decided to produce a video, using the audio of one of Shire’s reading performances, which apparently was already accompanied with soft music, and then to add graphics drawn by an anonymous hand, in order to animate what otherwise would have been a mere podcast.

²² The Internet is a virtual, free and unbounded space that can host content produced from scratch or as a digital adaptation of a work that was originally thought and developed for print media. Because of the free quality, an agreement between the original and the digital author is not always arranged. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie saw the publication of a website curated by the Belgian scholar Daria Tunca, which competes with her own official website, although being reliable and comprehensive of academic works on Adichie’s literary production. Contrariwise, in the case of Shire, a video circulates on the Internet with her performance that she has neither authorised nor disclaimed so far.

The video is a self-standing autonomous production, even though it is based on a pre-existing and pre-recorded public recital by Shire. This unauthorised operation, in the sense that Shire has never acknowledged it, is one more example of the functioning of the Internet and of the digital environment. This appropriation of an artist's oral performance and subsequent manipulation, with the aim of producing a multimedia digital product for the Internet and its wide audience, is evidently one modality allowed by the digital environment at current times. The result of this operation was that this recital-*cum*-images has become viral, amplifying once more and once again an already famous poet's voice.

The same text undergoes a third transformation when it is later reworked for her collection of poems *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* published five years later by Random House, London and New York.

Going back to the poem "Home", it is a literary text that captures the pain and trauma of the refugee experience, and as Shire averred during an interview for the British daily newspaper "*The Guardian*", she "wrote the poem for them, for my family and for anyone who has experienced or lived around grief and trauma in that way" (Bausells and Shearlaw).

As far as the unauthorised video "Home" is concerned, it might be said that it is also a graphic account of the constant struggles of the life of refugees and aims at developing Western audience's awareness of present-day migrations.

As web product and collage, the multimodal video is clearly one possible individual interpretation of the text. Moreover, at the end of the performance, a woman's voice stresses the powerful effectiveness of the poem and of its content, while also claiming that it respects some of the features typical of the poetry genre, even though she mentions that no rhyming scheme and/or set meter are present (www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo), as a way to produce a further interpretation for the general audience.

Going back to the oral dramatisation of the poem, as presented in the video, we can detect: that the poem indeed has no rhyme scheme or set metre but contains literary devices such as metonymy: "you only run for the border / when you see the whole city running as well" (00:12-00:14); personification: "no one leaves home / unless home chases you" (00:28-00:29); metaphor: "home is the mouth of a shark / home is the barrel of a gun" (01:59-02:02); anaphora: "no one could take it / no one could stomach it / no

one skin would be tough enough” (01:21-01:25); alliteration: “than rubble / than bone / than your child body” (01:53-01:56); enjambment: “and even then you carried the anthem under / your breath” (00:33-00:34) or “ than fourteen men between / your legs” (01:49-01:51); imagery: “no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land” (00:48-00:49). Furthermore, migrants’ place of origin, that is to say their domicile and national identity, can become so hostile that “you only leave home when home won’t let you stay” (00:24-00:26) and makes the unwanted resident and citizen wish to be somewhere else as “anywhere is safer than here” (02:40-02:41).

The published version of the poem can be found in *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (Random House, 2022). In this first full-length poetry collection, Shire weaves together a narrative of what it means to be displaced, disconnected from home, and incredibly vulnerable. She does so through depictions of her own family and community members in a way that blurs the boundary between blood relations and a larger cultural history. Drawing from her own life, as well as pop culture and news headlines, Shire provides vivid, unique details of the experiences of refugees and migrants, mothers and daughters, black women and teenage girls. The collection is split into four parts: “What Doesn’t Kill You,” “This is Not a Love Song,” “Are You There, God?” and “Testament.” It may be argued that this organization simulates a sort of progression. Based on this assumption, the four sections may refer to four following stages of migrants’ and refugees’ lives: the awareness of having survived the journey; the sense of alienation experienced in the host country; the sense of bewilderment at first and mimicry later that develop at the encounter and clash of different cultures and expressed with a slight spiritual tone; the condition of being deprived or bereaved of something or someone. Ultimately, the last stanza in the first poem – *Extreme Girlhood* – seems to encapsulate both the title of Shire’s poetry collection and the content of her previous poems:

Mama, I made it
out of your home
alive, raised by
the voices
in my head. (16)

Presumably in an ironic slant blended with the full awareness of being alive after the journey, “Home” has been placed in the first part of the volume – “What Doesn’t Kill You” – but, as mentioned earlier, it has been reworked and given a different structure.

Besides being subdivided into two parts, this last version of “Home” that gathers together the content of its two earlier versions is arranged in seven stanzas, it still does not have rhyme scheme or set metre, but contains the same literary devices as mentioned above: personification, metonymy, alliteration, imagery and enjambement. The first part provides the reasons behind the journey, whereas the second part, which is composed of one single stanza, emphasises the feeling of displacement as depicted in the lines: “I don’t know where I’m going. Where I came from is di- / sappearing. I am unwelcome...” (26); the unpleasantness and anguish of life in the host country is listed in the lines:

I watch the news and my mouth
becomes a sink full of blood. The lines, forms, people at
the desks, calling cards, immigration officers, the looks
on the street, the cold settling deep into my bones, ... (26)

There is, too, a resignation and awareness that despite all of the hardships having managed to be granted asylum in a hostile host country is synonymous with being alive: “Alhamdulillah, all of this / is better than the scent of a woman completely on fire...” (28).

Shire’s poetry is a continuous search for home which is explored through the figure of her mother and her own experience of walking out and taking care of her own life and her own family. Indeed, she has managed to have her own family. Currently, she lives in Los Angeles with her husband and their children, but, as she said to the American writer and editor Mattie Kahn on the occasion of International Women’s Day in 2019:

For me, home is Somalia. I’m living in L.A. now, but London was home for a really long time, and now I’m living in America under Trump. So it’s double. I miss London, but I miss *home* home, which is Africa. It’s really important for me to listen to old Somali music and to speak in my mother tongue. It gives me a lot of pride. I like looking at old photographs of Somalia. I love to eat Somali food. I love to put on Somali incense. It’s all the time reminding myself a little bit of where I’m from, and the richness of it. [...] I spend a lot of time on YouTube looking for Somali videos. And whenever I want to connect with London, I hope for rain. It’s rainy today in L.A., and it always makes me feel comforted. I just have to stay connected so I don’t forget where I’m from. (Kahn)

Although Shire has also managed to deal with her feeling of in-betweenness, her social and writing engagement functions as a means of lending her voice in favour of silenced human beings. In our Western societies, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are often perceived as intruders who take advantage of Western public assistance and are likely to rely on social welfare. Moving to a different country not only means impoverishment and displacement, but, especially for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, it implies discrimination and isolation. Shire's line "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark" has received international attention, and has become the worldwide rallying call for refugees and their advocates.

The above-mentioned video collage had another result: Shire's text started circulating among the Italian digital audience in response to the extreme right parties' intent to remove protection status from national laws, after February 26, 2023, when a boat capsized at a short distance from the Calabrian coast and almost 120 human beings, including children, died. More precisely, one among the many boats carrying migrants to Europe crashed against rocks near the southern Italian coast of Cutro. (https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2024/02/23/il-naufragio-di-cutro-dagli-archivi-dellansa_4dde03c8-db5a-42b4-b4be-e5a5af3e4b33.html).

Since then, the video with Shire's recital has regained strength, and has become viral in Italy too and in the local news, as a launchpad to reactions and responses to the official government position and policy.

5.3 The Video Collage as “Digital Storytelling”

“I’ve never been to Somalia, and I’m Somali. So the poems for me are a way of creating a connection to a country I’ve never been to. I don’t know how it feels to belong, or to be home or anything like that.”

(Warsan Shire 2013, qtd in BBC news)

The video “Home”, as a digital case, is a modified and multimodal version of *Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)*. It was uploaded on the Internet on March 14, 2017, as understood in the “comments”/further information section on the YouTube page where additional details about the video are provided. It reads: “contains pictorial cinempoetic renderings and analysis. Audio is author reading her own work. Created by Garrett M., Halle V., Haley P., and Abigail P.” Moreover, the video contains drawings sketched in white on black background by an anonymous hand, with unclaimed purposes.

When Internet users google “Home by Warsan Shire”, if on the header of the search engine website they click on the internal link “video”, they are redirected to a quite impressive number of videos with the same title and content. Due to its wide appeal with an international, general audience, over the years the lyrics have been recited at public events by Shire, actors (such as for instance Benedict Cumberbatch, Sir Jonathan Price, Sinéad Cusack), activists and common people with the manifested intent to take a stand against the mainstream narration on current migrations.

In regard to the text, there are faithful transcriptions available, as already mentioned on Amnesty International, and Emergency International websites. Actually, on these websites, the written text was allegedly uploaded a year earlier than the video created by Garrett, Halle, Haley, and Abigail.

In addition, as happens within this digitalised world, where content may be widely known but the anonymity of its creator/s can be preserved, the creators of Shire’s video have not provided details about themselves and/or their professional projects. Neither have they worded their own intentions and purposes.

Putting possible inconsistencies that may occur in the digital space aside, the video “Home”, according to its authors’ interpretation, is a “pictorial cinempoetic” rendering, and a graphic account of the constant struggles of life of migrants, refugees and asylum

seekers and presumably aims at developing Western audiences' awareness of present-day migrations. The video collage consists of the (a) oral text recited by Shire, (b) soft music in the background, (c) one-line graphics in white on a black screen, (d) a final comment spoken by a woman's voice. This multimodal final product can well be considered a digital collage.

In the text (a), the employed words, figures of speech and stylistic strategies vividly depict the arduous journeys made by human beings fleeing conflict, persecution and brutal living conditions. While watching the video on an electronic device screen, the virtual audience is present at Shire's performance and listen to the rhythm of Shire's voice that becomes more intense when she explains the reasons behind current migrants' journey in search for fair, equitable, unprejudiced life conditions:

you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well
your neighbours running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body; (00:10-00:23)

besides, they listen to her voice that breaks when she describes painful moments experienced by human beings who have been forced to leave their homes:

i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
[music]
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
[music]
leave your clothes behind; (01:57-02:15)

they listen to her voice that slowly fades out in the closing lines:

i dont know what I've become
[music]
but I know that anywhere

[music]
is safer than here
[music] (02:36-02:43)

The nearly three-minute long performance is accompanied by soft, instrumental, background music (b). This multimodal intermixing of poetry recital, music, moving images, graphic art combined in one digital product may be envisioned as a return to orality, particularly due to the dramatization and the use of voice intonation, pitches variations and melody, or borrowing the Northern Irish linguistic anthropologist Ruth Finnegan's definition: a return to "oral art as literature" whose vehicle of transmission becomes the given performance (3-6).

The past couple of decades have witnessed an accelerating shift in perspectives on the dynamics of storytelling and calls for a better and more just future in general. However, this shift is particularly evident in the field of postcolonial studies and human rights advocacy. The recent performance-centred perspective bolstered by everyday, common uses of always up-to-date technologies and free and available platforms on the Internet allow for a growing awareness of the role of individual creativity. This video collage and poem recital represents a clear example of all of the above.

Furthermore, "Home", although unauthorised by Shire, is an obvious example of the junction between literature and new media. As English scholars Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins emphasise in their introduction to *Digital Storytelling, Format and Content* (2017), this junction involves storytelling and technology that meet to point in a new direction enabling authors to craft personal stories using imagery, text and the spoken word (4).

The video collage "Home" is a spoken narrative which is less rigorously marked by formal poetic conventions of meter and line construction. This medium allows a jointly participatory visual-auditory act of narrating, conveying the same, but amplified, message that can be heard and seen on the screen of an electronic device repeatedly. These features make "Home" an example of multimedia, metamorphic literature. In fact, digital capabilities such as interactivity, multimodality or algorithmic text generation has been used aesthetically by Garrett, Halle, Haley, and Abigail who in a cooperative and participatory manner have taken part in the production and release of "Home".

In his study on *Electronic Literature* (2019), the American, digital artist and scholar of literary, and aesthetic studies Scott Rettberg illustrates the difficulties encountered in providing a clear and unambiguous definition of literary works produced in cooperation with new media and advanced technologies after the 1990s. At the end of the last century, the term “electronic literature” started to catch on and circulate. However, as Rettberg points out, the definition is imprecise and general. This difficulty in conferring a fixed and comprehensive definition is chiefly due to always up-to-date technologies and the speed they are replaced. As a consequence, literary works that have just been produced and delivered to an audience in a certain moment are likely to become obsolete within a short time. Then, as a further consequence, for types of literary genres emerged within the global, digital network their categorisation proves to be complicated (3-4).

In 1999, Rettberg, Robert Coover, and Jeff Ballowe founded The Electronic Literature Organization – ELO – “to foster and promote the reading, writing, teaching, and understanding of literature as it develops and persists in a changing digital environment.” Six years later, a committee within the ELO established a definition that could be applicable to all forms of literary practices within the digital context, all the while remaining cognisant of the impossibility of providing an exhaustive and permanent categorisation:

Electronic literature, or e-lit, refers to works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the standalone or networked computer. Within the broad category of electronic literature are several forms and threads of practice, some of which are:

- Hypertext fiction and poetry, on and off the Web
- Kinetic poetry presented in Flash and using other platforms
- Computer art installations, which ask viewers to read them or otherwise have literary aspects
- Conversational characters, also known as chatterbots
- Interactive fiction
- Literary apps
- Novels that take the form of email, SMS messages, or blogs
- Poems and stories that are generated by computers, either interactively or based on parameters given at the beginning
- Collaborative writing projects that allow readers to contribute to the text of a work
- Literary performances online that develop new ways of writing. (4-5)

Relying on the above categorisation as a starting point, Rettberg expands his reflections, and suggests that “works of electronic literature are native to the digital environment – for the most part they could not easily be produced or consumed in print literary context [...] as these works depend in some essential way on the computer” (5). However, the dependence on the computer implies adjustments to constant changes that occur in a relatively short span of time. Electronic literature has developed and expanded since its inception, and it has given rise to various forms and genres that expand beyond traditional print literature. This enlargement of literary genres can be detected in some key aspects of electronic literature, such as for instance,

- interactivity: users/readers can manipulate or participate in the narrative, making it a dynamic experience;
- multimedia: digital literature often employs a range of multimedia elements such as images, videos, sound, and hypertext;
- networked communication: electronic literature pieces often utilise the Internet and digital technologies to create communities or connect with other works;
- generative and algorithmic systems: authors may use algorithms or software programs to develop dynamic and constantly changing texts. (3-4)

Based on these assumptions, it may be asserted that electronic literature is fundamentally experimental literature, a sort of testing and challenging of the potentialities offered by up-to-date media and how these can act together with authors toward a common end, that is to say the dissemination of literature to an always wider audience. According to Rettberg’s reasoning: “the writers and artists producing these works are centrally concerned with new narrative forms and poetic approaches that could not exist in the absence of this computational context” (5).

Nonetheless, if on the one hand, the digital environment allows, encourages and fosters new narrative forms and poetic approaches, on the other hand, it has to be remembered

that these genres connect with and expand upon prior movements. Kinetic digital poetry could not exist in its current form without traditions in concrete poetry. Lettrism, visual poetry, and sound poetry emerged well before there was a computer in every home, much less a smartphone in most pockets. The aesthetics

of combinatory poetry may not have been explored so extensively were it not for the Dadaist desire to overcome language, or the surrealist yearning to uncover the logic of dreams, or the Oulipian fascination with writing under constraint. Electronic literature not only takes us forward to explore new horizons but also on a retrospective journey that can lead to better understanding of how the past of literature propels us toward its future. (Rettberg 6)

As established above, technology has advanced, just as the way literary works are created, disseminated, and consumed too has changed significantly, and the video collage “Home” represents a clear example of this evolution. It explores the specific multimedia capacities of contemporary electronic devices as a poetic environment for both composition and reception. In point of fact, as mentioned earlier, it is possible to find numerous Internet videos in which the poem “Home” is performed or recited after 2016, the year Shire’s text was uploaded on the Amnesty International webpage and later released as a performance on the YouTube platform in the new form forged by the three aforementioned YouTubers. This phenomenon of content being shared, interacted with, transformed and transmitted by viewers is a distinct feature of this digital age.

As electronic literature refers to literary works composed and devised for digital platforms, but also to literary works that are adapted and transformed by Internet users, that typically involves the use of interactive and multimedia elements, in this ongoing digital age, literature has evolved as a distinct form of avant-garde artistic expression. In truth, the literary genre of poetry is particularly suitable for expressing and performing in a virtual space.

The American poet, scholar and multimedia artist Christopher Funkhouser provides a definition of digital poetry starting from the assumption that digital poetry is a literary genre complicated by the variety of forms it embraces:

digital poetry, as a literary and artistic form, is an equivocal organism, with many identities or iterations. As an expressive form, it matters not only as a free-ranging serious practice, but because it invites vibrant, transformative multimodal engagement for its practitioners and audience alike. (4)

Shire’s “Home” has become digital poetry from the moment it was appropriated and transformed into a video collage. It features literary, visual, and sonic attributes where the audience privately absorb the text forms of artistry along with inviting and uniting processed interconnections between sound, image and language. As Funkhouser states,

“engaging with digital poetry requires more from readers, who face multimodal, human-to-machine transcreations where texts initially presented in one state transform into others” (12). In regard to the audience, they are asked to reform conceptions, extend parameters and dimensions of reception beyond those they usually use to absorb or experience poetic expression. The prosody of digital poetry implies the applications of various visual and sonic attributes. In addition, some other aspects of poetry composed, produced and adapted for the virtual space of the Internet are kinetic, multimedia and interactive (Funkhouser 14-15).

As Rettberg emphasises, “these forms of digital poetry have rich relationships with antecedent movements, particularly those that are concerned with the materiality of the text as image, with the granularity of language, and with the relationship between poetry, sound and music” (118).

The adaptation of Shire’s text into a video collage may be categorised as kinetic poetry. According to Rettberg, kinetic poetry

reconfigures the text as a moving image in space and time and thus work with registers of signification more familiar to visual and performance art. Words and letters are not only carriers of meaning but material objects that themselves have variable properties. Movement in digital poetry functions as a metaphorical figure with as much semantic intent and affect as the words. (118)

The act of watching “Home” challenges the audience’s reception of poetry, as texts change through animation, and animation itself conducts meaning as remarked by Funkhouser in his reflections on kinetic poetry:

we have always imagined our letters as objects, as material forms in constant movement, pulling themselves together into thoughts, words, and poems. Kinetic poetry enables us to see and experience this process, which has until now lived in our imaginations, before our very eyes. (151)

For that matter, the video “Home” proposes black and white anonymous drawings (d) that despite their simplicity – even childish or child oriented – might be seen as meaningful and explicative. By chance, the use of white icons onto a black background reminds us of the graphic style used in the maps produced for the AI exhibition “Calculating Empires:

A Genealogy of Technology and Power, 1500-2025”.²³ Moreover, this technique might be arguably a universal reminder of children’s experience and use of blackboards and chalks at school.

Although the graphics resemble children’s drawings, it may be argued that it is instead purpose-built. The simplicity of the icons is another way to interpret Shire’s text, and, in this specific digital case, the icons are universally understandable. Also, in the text one can detect a juvenile language ascribable to former ‘children’ of the British Empire. This idea is based on the Victorian concept of childhood which itself was part of a larger moral world view that hierarchised racial differences and justified the colonisation of overseas populations, i.e. ‘the colonial children’.

Sean Purchase, English scholar in Victorian literature, states that the Victorian concept of childhood “links the idea of childhood to another form of wild or rather ‘primitive’ innocence in British consciousness: the ‘noble savage.’” At the encounter with “the Other” in the Americas, British colonists and anthropologists conceived the term “noble savage”. Through this linguistic coin, the subjugator established that the differences in customary manners and practices were due to native peoples’ primitive innocence. The definition of noble savage, somehow, prolonged the infantile state of those ‘uncivilized’ individuals and allowed the coloniser to regard them as the childhood of humanity. If at the beginning, the policy and practice of treating and governing colonised people could resemble a fatherly conduct, it soon revealed itself as an instrument to camouflage the true purpose of the imperial project, namely the oppression and exploitation of colonised peoples. In that imperial context, where family represented the framework of Victorian society, both inside and outside the island, in order to justify its presence and its function as bearer of culture and civilization, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland developed into the figure of the Mother Country that nurtured the childhood of humanity. Consequently, as it happens in the familial bond between a mother and her offspring, the language spoken by the parent became the mother-tongue of the British Empire (17).²⁴

As investigated in chapter 2 “Digital Humanities and Sociopolitical Context” where it is argued that present-day migrations are a direct consequence of colonial and

²³ Cf. “Introduction”

²⁴ The concepts of Mother Country and children of the Empire were already discussed in a previous publication of mine, *History and Race in Caryl Phillips’s The Nature of Blood*, Ibidem Press, 2020.

neo-colonial practices of economic and cultural domination, at current times, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are still regarded as inferior human beings by the master narrative. It may be argued that the juvenile technique of the drawings perceivable in “Home” while the images flow is not coincidental. The same might apply to the specific use of a simple and direct lexicon, in the spoken word, that is to say a language that could not engender misunderstandings. Unquestionably, the video is meant for a Western audience. Then, borrowing the Indian-born British-American novelist Salman Rushdie’s definition of postcolonial literature, “Home” may typify an act of writing back to the centre, where in this context the act of writing is made of the spoken word-*cum*-image. The creators employ cultural in-betweenness to critically re-map the asymmetrical relations between the centre and the periphery, i.e. Western societies versus non-Western societies. The very first drawing delivered to Western audience is the outline of a structure serving as a dwelling for a family:



As perceptible in the screenshot above, the word “home” is placed next to the icon of a Western house that stands both for a dwelling place and one’s legal residence. Some frames later, when Shire recites the following lines:

you have to understand
[pause]
no one would put their children
in a boat
unless the sea is safer than the land (00:43-00:49)

the creators rely on the following drawing:



In the above screenshot, the designer creates a parallel between Western and non-Western parenting, emphasising at the same time the importance of being born in a Western country. The image of a tub with a floating toy alludes to a Western domestic routine where the small boat entertains the child while she/he is taking a bath. However, at the same time, her spoken word reminds the audience that outside their safe Western bubble there are parents who feel compelled to let their children embark on a long, uncertain, perilous journey on a boat only to ensure their survival. Evidence of this assumption is the accusation explicitly made by members of the Italian government, who claimed that migrants are guilty of indifference towards the destiny of their own children. As a response, the community of Internet users made the video collage viral.

Proceeding with parallels that provide opposing situations, when Shire recites the following lines:

no one spends days and nights in the
gallbladder of a truck feeding on
newspaper
unless the miles travelled means
something more than journey (00:55-00:59)

her spoken word is displayed in the following image:



which implies a sort of dark recycling. Refugees who manage to cross a Western boarder hidden in the lowest part of a truck “feeding on newspaper,” become successively journalist’s food/writing material for their editorials and articles published in Western newspapers that are later delivered by paper boys and left on doormats, as visible in the above screenshot. Although this image mainly pertains to British culture, it is universally understandable.

In addition, the image of the newspaper on the doorstep can be perceived as a visual representation of criticism towards state power and its propaganda. This image might remind us of Jack London’s photograph, “People of the Abissys” (1902), representing homeless people in London:



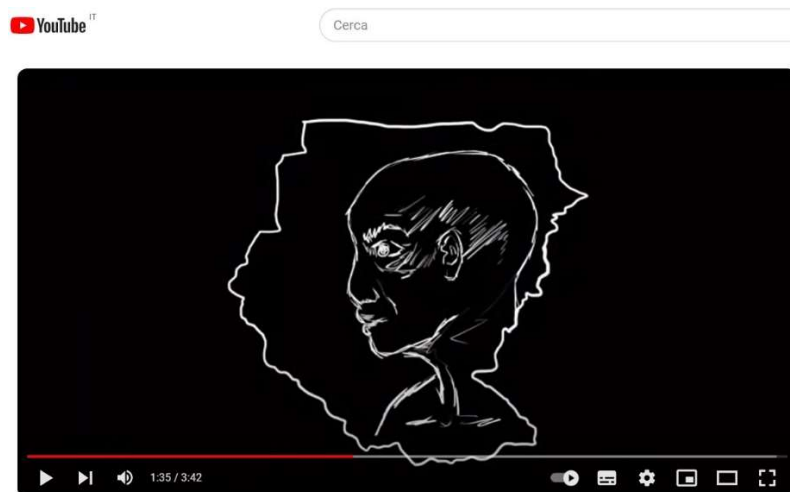
As visible in the picture, a homeless man sleeps on the doormat of the “*Truth Weekly Newspaper*” as advertised on the window above (Carrara 117-118). Thus, the newspaper ends up representing power and communication control over the life of those who are

silenced by History. It is easy to substitute the homeless lying on the pavement with migrants asking for admission who are depicted and regarded as trespassers in the news. Obviously, the newspaper's title "Truth" is an ironic reference to the gap between the media discourse and the real world.

As an act of reclaiming a correct narration of past events, Shire's spoken word:

they smell strange
savage
they messed up their own country
and now
they want to mess up ours? (01:35-01:39)

are accompanied by the following drawings:





In the above screenshots, the borders of the countries of Sudan, Egypt and Libya frame a human face so as to emphasise the solidifying tie between people and their land. A similar connection is detectable for instance in NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel *We Need New Names* (2013) where African immigrants are not called by their names, as a way to emphasise their unwelcome presence, and the declared lack of interest in their cultures:

And because we were illegal and afraid to be discovered we mostly kept to ourselves, stuck to our kind and shied away from those who were not like us. [...] we had paid so much to be in America and we did not want to lose it all. [...] We know you despite this job, Sudan, but deal with it, man. Come, Ethiopia, move, move, move; Israel, Kazakhstan, Niger, brothers, let's go! (242-243)

Reprising Shire's text, those drawings convey a dense message. At first, borders of African countries were established by Western powers. As the Anglo-Irish historian

Thomas Pakenham delineates in his study *The scramble for Africa White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912* (1991), in the middle of the 19th century European cartographers saw Africa as a continent of blank spaces rich in natural resources to exploit. Disregarding the fact that Africans were living on those so-called 'blank spaces' and were divided into hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups, and that these groups spoke more than 1,000 different languages, and politically, they ranged from large empires that united many ethnic groups to independent villages, the European domination of Africa took place undeterred. In the span of time of around twenty years the most dramatic instance of the partition of Africa inaugurated a significant revolution in the relationship between European and African peoples, and it sent out political, economic and social shock-waves, which continue to be felt in Africa to this day. The European domination of Africa is defined by historians with the metaphor "the scramble for Africa", that is to say the frantic competition for African land that arguably marked the most rapid period of imperial expansion in history and the pinnacle of European power and self-confidence (xxi-xxv).

The portraits of black men outlined in white may be connected to the Francophone Afro-Caribbean, psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon's most important work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon's central argument is based on the presupposition that centuries of racism and dehumanisation, inherent in situations of colonial domination, have deeply affected the black human psyche. Undisguisedly, Fanon blames the white Europeans who "set off for the colonies because they can get rich over there in a very short time, and that, with rare exceptions, the colonial is a trader or rather a trafficker, [...] the man who produces the "'feeling of inferiority' in the native" (88). Moreover, the Francophone Afro-Caribbean intellectual places emphasis on the sense of inferiority that is reinforced every time natives are addressed as "dirty nigger!" (89) and regarded as "an object among other objects" (89), both in their own country and in the host country. In the chapter "The lived experience of the black man" Fanon expands his criticism asserting:

In the twentieth century the black man on his home territory is oblivious of the moment when his inferiority is determined by the Other. [...] And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us. The real world robbed us of our share. In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body

is solely negating. It's an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (90)

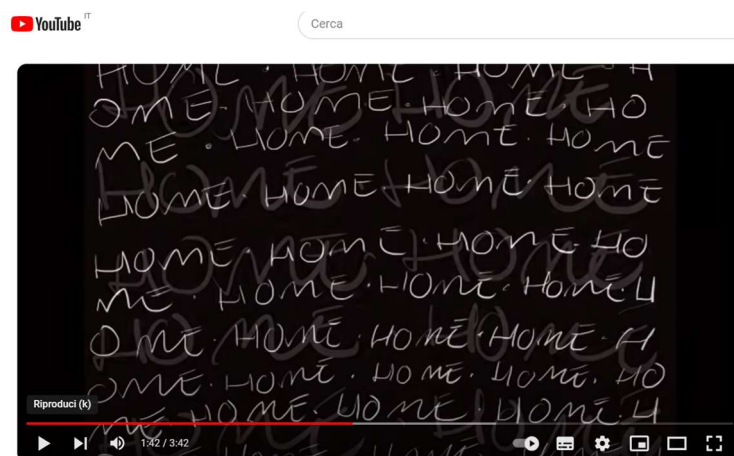
This “image in the third person” is perceivable in Shire’s writing too, as put forth in the previous section in the introduction to her poems “My Foreign Wife is Dying and Does Not Want To Be Touched” and “Ugly”. Both poems do not only shed light on the body as a literary location of pain, but also on Fanon’s contention. The black human body, and especially the female body as depicted in Shire’s “Ugly”, “encounters difficulties in elaborating [her] body schema” as it is the live manifestation and exhibition of the effects of centuries of subjugation and exploitation. Fanon’s later statement “I wanted quite simply to be a man among men. [...] I wanted to be a man, and nothing but a man” (92) can be unquestionably found in present-day migrants’, refugees’ and asylum seekers’ righteous request as they are human beings who are solely in search for better and just life conditions in places that are not their home countries.

Shire’s text transformed into a kinetic poem may be simultaneously defined as multimodal narration. Starting with the concept of language as a means of conveying a message, in his work *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (1978), the British linguist Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday marks the connection between language and social structure. He argues that the context of a situation rather than as a “theoretical construct for explaining how a text relates to the social processes within which it is located” consists instead of three main components: the social activity taking place, the people involved in it and their relation to one another, and eventually what part the text is playing (10). These variable contextual aspects “serve to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged” (11). In effect, the variable contextual aspects can be found in the poem “Home” and characterise the way Shire uses language: she advocates for present-day migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in a Western anti-immigratory political context, and her activity takes place in the form of a text that provides cause-effect relationship behind migrants’ journey.

Traditionally, the term “text” has been used to refer “mono-modally” to verbal text. However, according to Gunther Kress – professor of English, language and communication – and Theo van Leeuwen – professor of language and communication –, all texts are multimodal, meaning that all texts always and without exception involve the

interaction and integration of more than one semiotic system, or mode, to convey a message. These modes can include written language, visual imagery, audio, spatial arrangements, and gestures. The integration of these different modes allows for a more complex and enriched communication experience and meaning-making (1-2).

As communication has changed in the age of Internet and new media, Anthony Baldry and Paul J. Thibault – both scholars in English linguistics – point out that “specific choices and combination of choices – e.g. movement, colour, and so on – realise or express meanings (e.g. actions, evaluations) in multimodal texts” (xv). In relation to the video collage “Home”, one of the first visible features is the choice of colours. The YouTubers rely on the binary opposition of black and white not only in the written and spoken word but also visually. In the video the black colour dominates both the scenery and the narrative so as to remind the audience that they are dealing with a text composed by a black woman about her black peers who are doomed by darkness and might find light at the end of the tunnel in a white place as suggested in the following screenshot where the word home is written in white:



According to Baldry and Thibault, the meaning-making realised by multimodal texts does not simply consist in adding together a number of different modes. Multimodal semiosis results from a far more complex interplay of the modes involved and “These resources are not simply juxtaposed as separate modes of meaning making but are combined and integrated to form a complex whole which cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of the mere sum of its separate parts” (3).

The video “Home” represents “a complex whole” where the visual and sound components cooperate in a synergic manner. As argued earlier, Shire’s spoken word plays a crucial role both in the act of transmitting and perceiving her message expressed in poetry. As the Slovene philosopher, psychoanalyst, cultural theorist and film critic Mladen Dolar points out in his study on the human voice in its multifaceted dimensions:

The voice appears to be the most familiar thing. When I say “voice,” when I use this word without further qualification, then the most immediate thing that comes to mind is no doubt the most usual one: the omnipresent use of the voice in everyday communication. We use our voices, and we listen to voices, at every moment; all our social life is mediated by the voice, and situations where reading and writing actually take over as the medium of our sociability are, all things considered, much less common and limited (the Internet notwithstanding), even though, in a different and less tangible sense, our social being depends very much on the letter [...] We constantly inhabit the universe of voices, we are continuously bombarded by voices, we have to make our daily ways through a jungle of voices, and we have to use all kinds of machetes and compasses so as not to get lost. (13)

The audience carefully listening to Shire’s spoken word is able to perceive what Dolar calls “the drama of the voice” (28). In her recitation of the poem, Shire’s tone becomes sombre in the lines: “you only leave home when home won’t let you stay (00:23-00:25) or “the blow is softer than a limb torn off / or the words are more tender than fourteen men / between your legs” (01:45-01:49) that describe the physiological distress and physical pain felt by human beings whose lives are suddenly in danger. Then the pressure and the need to “run away” from home is emphasised by her accelerated tone as perceivable in the frame of time of ten seconds that gather together the following lines:

you only run for the border when you see
the whole city running as well
your neighbours running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats and the
boy you went to school with who
kissed you dizzy behind the old tin
factories holding a gun
bigger than his body (00:13-00:21)

Furthermore, in his study, Dolar offers for consideration the feature of authority ascribable to the voice as

the sender of the voice, the bearer of vocal emission, is someone who exposes himself, and thus becomes exposed to the effects of power which not only lie in the privilege of emitting voice, but pertains to the listener. The subject is exposed to the power of the other by giving his or her own voice, so that the power, domination, can take not only the form of the commanding voice, but that of the ear. (81)

Indeed, Shire exposes herself to the power of the listener, or to the audience's ability to perceive, absorb her message and later take a stand in order to welcome and offer a shelter to anyone who arrives at their Western borders asking for protection and just living conditions. Undoubtedly, this implies a political stand, and Shire's literary works may be defined A LITERATURE OF RESISTANCE where her activism/artivism is embodied in "the written word [that] has no power if it is not preceded by, and based in, the living voice. The authority of writing depends on its being the faithful copy of the voice [...] and only the voice transforms them from mere constative statements into performatives" (Dolar 109).

Taking all into account, the scholars in political studies Camelia Crisan and Dumitru Bortun define digital stories as strong pieces of evidence to support a particular cause: the narrator/performer is the interpretative advocate for the case which is uploaded online and made available for anyone browsing the Internet and watching. Furthermore, digital stories can be tools in calling to action because they elicit emotions, they reveal the journey of their narrator, they provide first-hand account of events (156).

Although in this case Shire's work has been manipulated by others, the video collage maintains the original call to action of the poem, advocating the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

6 The Digital/Literary Case of the “Refugee Tales” Project

Algorithm # 4: From the Website to “Walks in Solidarity” to Published Tales



Flowchart of transformations of a web project and its digital commitment

1995: <https://www.gdwg.org.uk/>



2014: Anna Pincus & David Herd <https://www.refugeetales.org/>



2015: Annual solidarity walks with storytelling along the way

2018: <https://www.refugeetales.org/28-for-28>

a call for action and twenty-eight
readings of first-hand stories



First-hand stories published
by Comma Press, Manchester

2016: *Refugee Tales*

2017: *Refugee Tales II*

2019: *Refugee Tales III*

2021: *Refugee Tales IV*

6.1 The “Refugee Tales” Project on the Web

“You were transported in a wooden vessel across a broad expanse of water to a place which rendered your tongue silent. Look. Listen. Learn. And as you began to speak, you remembered fragments of a former life. Shards of memory. [...] You dressed your fractured memory in the strange words of the new country.”

(Caryl Phillips 2000, 220-221)

Present-day migrations are often triggered by political and/or economic crises occurring as a direct result of colonial rule, neo-colonialism, or decolonisation. For the reasons specified, it may be argued that feelings of displacement and discontinuities, already experienced by human beings who unwillingly and forcibly took part in the Atlantic slave trade, are still experienced by contemporary migrants upon arriving in Western, ‘civilized’ countries. If contemporary migrants after a perilous, long journey manage to reach a Western society, one that in most cases “colonized [and] plunder[ed] for centuries” (Metha 3) their countries of origin, upon their arrival they are regarded as unwelcome outsiders. The imperative forms of “Look. Listen. Learn.” employed by Phillips to describe the senses of displacement and bewilderment felt by African slaves who were allocated to overseas lands to become the property of colonisers, represent, at the present time, three of the numerous key words that characterise the “Refugee Tales” self-advocacy project.

Unlike the Atlantic slave trade, current migrations are characterised by a voluntary intention to migrate. Nevertheless, most of the time these migrations are driven by causes of force majeure, and without a prior consent acknowledged by Western, local authorities. In his study on migrations and borders, Ruben Andersson – an English social anthropologist – argues that at a time when global culture, highly developed technologies and general freedom of movement characterise Western societies, paradoxically, borders are being redefined, reinforced and sometimes militarised; cross border and international circulation intensifies and simultaneously becomes more complex, creating mixed, transitional, and pending statuses that impact people’s destinies (4). Under these

circumstances, unrestricted travel across borders is granted to individuals – passport owners – who can prove their status as legitimate, Western citizens. The frontier area separating political jurisdictions or geographic regions functions as a sorting zone in which the identifying characteristics of a region disappear.

In 2015 Thomas Nail, American scholar who focuses his research on the philosophy of motion, theorised the concept of kinopolitics or the analysis of social motion. This politics of movement suggests that regimes of social motion have historically created the material conditions for social and political formation. Kinopolitics recognises the migrant as the primary constitutive figure of social history and transformation. Instead of analysing societies as primarily static, spatial, or temporal, kinopolitics understands them primarily as regimes of motion (4).

Nail expands his thinking in his *Theory of the Border* (2016) where he analyses the nature of borders as a result of kinopolitics processes of expansion and expulsion. Nail argues that borders, as a crucial feature of this globalised, theoretically unbounded world, are a process of social division:

We live in a world of borders. Territorial, political, juridical, and economic borders of all kinds quite literally define every aspect of social life in the twenty-first century. [...] there are more types of borders today than ever before in history. [...] particularly since 9/11, hundreds of new borders have emerged around the world: miles of new razor-wire fences, tons of new concrete security walls, numerous offshore detention centers, biometric passport databases, and security checkpoints of all kinds in schools, airports, and along various roadways across the world.

Contemporary social motion is everywhere divided. [...] It is politically expelled by military force, border walls, and ports of entry. It is juridically confined by identification documents (visas and passports), detention centers (and prisons), and an entire scheduling matrix of bordered time zones. (1)

The theorised free circulation of goods and human beings as synonymous with openness has engendered in actual fact self-enclosure and the boosting of entry restrictions. Nail broaches a variant definition of border. For Nail, borders can be understood as a system that appears to be stable, but which can undergo a rapid change if somehow disarranged:

For me, a border is a process that modulates the circulation of things. [...] The border is a process in the sense that it is a metastable state. [...] Borders, political and psychological, are always eroding in various ways and have to be repaired,

reformed, and refortified. [...] The border is the process of continual repair, maintenance, and defense. Even when people or things pass across the border undetected their status on the other side changes. [...] When [people across borders illegally] they are criminalized for it and begin to circulate inside a world of detention centers, private deportation industries, immigration enforcement raids, and capitalist exploitation. The border is not just at the limit of society, but borders are like webs that weave through all society. For an illegal border crosser, the border inside a country is anywhere where one can be reported and removed (2022, 2).

Detaining foreign nationals for the purpose of immigration control is a practice that has a long history and has become common practice in high GDP Western economies. However, in our globalised world, where distances can be shortened, features of motion and mobility are rather a privilege granted to the rich countries and their peoples rather than to the whole worldwide community. David Herd, co-founder of the “Refugee Tales” project, strongly states that we live in “bordered world” (2021, 149) and as put forth by Nail “the border is not just at the limit of society, but borders are like webs that weave through all society” (2022, 2) and these in return render access to countries for individuals without the required documents difficult if not unachievable. On the contrary, for undocumented individuals who manage to cross frontier areas relying on human traffickers or on long improvised journeys, “the border inside a country is anywhere where one can be reported and removed” (Nail 2022, 2).

This is the exact scenario developed by Conservatives in the United Kingdom over the last two decades. On May 25, 2012, “*The Telegraph*” – a national British daily broadsheet newspaper – published an article titled: “Theresa May interview: ‘We’re going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception’”. In conversation with James Kirkup, Theresa May clearly stated her government position on the issue of migration, summarising it in a phrase coined for the occasion: “hostile environment”. The “Hostile Environment Policy”, was, and still is, a set of administrative and legislative measures designed to make staying in the United Kingdom as difficult as possible for illegal immigrants. Five years later, in August 2017, her announcement “was chosen as one of her most powerful quotes” as emphasised by the journalist Amelia Hill in her article for the British daily newspaper “*The Guardian*”:

‘Hostile environment’: the hardline Home Office policy [...] It is a boast that Theresa May has been repeating for the past five years. [...] she said in 2012 [...]

It was, the Telegraph noted, a rare moment when a politician who otherwise chose her language with “feline delicacy”, avoiding “a few stray words or a rash promise”, allowed it to become “uncharacteristically vivid”. Despite her “safety-first” approach to public statements, May obviously liked that vividness. She has taken to repeating the phrase on demand. (Hill)

In truth, the issue of illegal immigrants had already started to become a growing Western concern in the 20th century at the dawn of globalisation and in parallel to the redefinition, reinforcement and militarisation of borders. Illegal immigrant is a broad term, but as simplified by conservative governments’ rhetoric, illegal immigrants are all those human beings who cannot financially support themselves or do not represent a valid and profitable asset to the economy of the Western country in which they arrive. As they are perceived as parasites who take advantage of the host country’s welfare system, they are not allowed to stay and settle.

Within the above political and economic context, in 1995 in the United Kingdom “in response to the UK Immigration Services as it began to detain people at a small holding centre near Gatwick Airport”, the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (GDWG) was established. This is an online organization that instantly exhibited its militant and activist agency. The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group is a non-party organization that made itself known chiefly on the Internet and whose well-designed website is a recipient that gathers practical and legal information for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, updated news, links to social media such as Facebook and X (Twitter), along with other helpful contact channels. The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s mission is clearly stated on its website homepage, it reads: “supporting people during and after detention”, besides assisting newly arrived migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and those arrested for staying illegally in the United Kingdom. This registered charity is a project of humanitarian activism that reveals the entangled, and often impenetrable, links between language and culture that have created an inhumane immigration system in the United Kingdom, or the former coloniser that previously identified itself as the Mother Country.

Over the years, the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s website has gone through visual editing besides being constantly updated. The website reflects their organisation, their services and ultimately their social and political commitment. The website is visually appealing, polished and professional. It has uncluttered layouts with quality photographs and graphics that let the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s mission shine

through. They have created an obvious, logical navigation with a clear hierarchy. The website works well on any platform and offers multiple points of contact: telephone numbers, emails addresses, social media accounts, easy-to-use contact forms and google maps that provide precise directions. Above all, their information is readily available on the easy-to-find contact page as well on every page of their website. The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website is a well-functioning evidence of interactivity and applications of hypermedia. It has web components like buttons, dropdown menus, bright colour contrasts, forms, galleries, and interactive graphics to emphasise their humanitarian policy, their political stand on migration policies and activist agency.

In his volume on literary theory and computer technology, George P. Landow describes some instances of scepticism on the Internet put forward especially at the beginning of this digital age such as fears for the future of spreading knowledge, imparting education, democratising institutions and empowering users. The introduction of the Internet with its "egalitarian chaotic system" that has also radically reconfigured the cultural construction of learning by freeing readers from a subordinate relation to a particular expert in the field, has empowered users of the Internet both as producers and receivers of digital contents. Over the years, the Internet has become a crucial constituent of current forms of communication and, in some countries, it has brought back forms of censorship, extraordinary range of controls, along with denied access to certain websites (322-323). Landow asserts that

the history of information technology from writing to hypertext reveals an increasing democratization or dissemination of power. Writing begins this process, for by exteriorizing memory it converts knowledge from possession of one to the possession of more than one. (339)

The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website with its hypertexts represents indeed an example of "reader empowerment in educational applications of hypermedia" (Landow 321). On their website menu, which is a classic header menu across the top, when computer users click on the category cluster "get involved", they are redirected to the "Education" page that immediately shows its activist agency and availability to deliver talks in British schools in order to elucidate what has been instead falsely recounted by mainstream media on the issues of current migrations. The statement reads:

Talks and Events

Alongside GDWG's advocacy work, we work to create more understanding about the personal experiences of migration and immigration detention in the UK.

We often hear about immigration in the media. Yet, so many of us feel intimidated or confused by the terminology and laws in the news or are curious about learning more about the human impact of these stories.

GDWG staff and volunteers deliver free talks to people across a range of ages and experiences of migration in the UK; whether you are a teacher looking to talk with students about migration as part of PSHE, or a member of a group interested in exploring current affairs, we are happy to share the **knowledge gained from our advocacy work and the perspectives shared in the *Refugee Tales* volumes** to promote better awareness or address any questions you might have. (<https://www.gdwg.org.uk/education>)

In Landow's words, this website may "transform the world for the better" (321) and it is a clear example of the good use of new technologies. The up-to-date content available in the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website raises awareness of current migrations; it provides legal information in a clear and understandable language; it rouses individuals to action also in terms of donating goods and money; it represents an egalitarian and democratic access and use of the Internet. Furthermore, it is possible to draw a parallel between people behind this humanitarian project and the Francophone Afro-Caribbean, psychiatrist, and political philosopher Frantz Fanon's engagement in helping human beings in great distress. Their in-person and digital commitment sheds light on the human, social, and cultural consequences of fleeing own's home country only to arrive in the United Kingdom and face indefinite detention. Over the last thirty years, people behind this humanitarian project have given proof of the extensive potentialities of the Internet and new media along with putting into practical effect a good humanitarian etiquette.

The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website helps people from different backgrounds to express their perspectives and share their experiences on different Internet platform such as for instance YouTube, Facebook and X (Twitter). This in return empowers individuals by giving them a voice be they immigrants facing detention or Western citizens concerned with making the United Kingdom a welcoming and hospitable country. Relying on the website, people produce digital stories that are distributed through digital media. Depending on the digital media employed to tell a story, narratives consist of written text or combine text and images or text and moving pictures.

The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website contains and provides both multimodal and interactive, collaborative narrations.

As Knut Lundby – a Norwegian scholar in media studies – points out, these narratives change and challenge the relationship between authors and their audiences in terms of triggering a kind of mediatisation process. These narratives are characterised by “reciprocal influences between media practices and media affordances, thus, influencing both the production and consumption of stories” (6). Lundby expands his reflections arguing that this consumption of storytelling develops into an interactive practice: the audience can and is encouraged to write comments that lead to interactions with other audience members and authors (7). It may be argued that in this context, these digital narrations are employed as a tool to empower migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and help them to develop their own voice. The digital space provided by the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website functions as a safe place that allows them to talk about their experiences among like-minded people thus finding a measure of a community and psychological relief from the stresses of detention. Ultimately, the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group's website enables a broader audience to exercise its self-expression through media productions. In point of fact, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are given the opportunities for equal access to production resources as well as the prospect of demanding recognition through self-representation in the public-sphere.

The efforts of NGOs like the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group notwithstanding, Conservatives has managed to create a hostile environment: the number of Detention Immigration Removal Centres scattered across the United Kingdom (some are located near international airports) as well as the number of detainees have increased over the last years. Figures and data are available at <https://aviddetention.org.uk/welcome-avid>, a “network of voluntary organisations providing support for people in detention” whose website can also be accessed by clicking the link within the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group website. Further evidence of the “Hostile Environment Policy” is provided by a video uploaded on the Internet free platform of YouTube in 2019 by Detention Action group. Over a span of five minutes and forty-four seconds, Bella Sankey – director of Detention Action – brings the “Indefinite Detention Scandal” to viewers' attention. Among data, figures and statements, it is shown a disconcerting shot of a mobile billboard truck that reads:

In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest. Text HOME to 78070 for free advice, and help with travel documents. We can help you to return home voluntarily without fear of arrest or detention. www.promogroup.co.uk 020 7978 6399. (The Indefinite Detention Scandal 2019, 03:08)

In 2014, David Herd – poet, professor of modern literature, activist – and Anna Pincus – director of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group – launched a wider campaign in defence of migrants’ rights which is “an outreach project of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group inspired by the experiences of men held in immigration detention at Gatwick and the work of the group in 20 years of visiting” (<https://www.gdwg.org.uk/>).

Herd and Pincus increased the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s commitment to support people affected by immigration detention and expanded the original website by adding a new link to a further project of humanitarian activism named “Refugee Tales”, which draws on Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1388) for inspiration. Since 2015, every summer through the English countryside, “walks of solidarity”, as defined by Herd (2016, 133), have taken place over several days of trekking and telling stories along the way. The storytelling that occurs during the event is turned later into a collection of stories published by Comma Press, a not-for-profit, Manchester based publisher and development agency. Herd and Pincus have so far edited four volumes titled *Refugee Tales* (2016, 2017, 2019, 2021).²⁵

²⁵ The fifth volume is going to be published in the summer of 2024.

6.2 Crossing Digital and Political Borders

“The fact is, Europe is increasingly multiracial and multicultural, and this process of what the French call ‘metissage’ will continue with vigour into the foreseeable future. [...] It will be to the great social, cultural, and political benefit of Europe if the dawning of the twenty-first century marks a new age in which cities such as London, Paris, Copenhagen, Madrid, Stockholm, Berlin, and other European centres assume the responsibility of identifying themselves as places where difference is not only tolerated, but encouraged. Europe needs to replace her long-since-fled global economic and political sway with a moral leadership that is rooted in a tolerance of difference.”

(Caryl Phillips 2000, 133)

As argued earlier in this study, literature in the broadest sense includes any creative type of writings on any subject. In the narrow sense, literature denotes the body of written works of a language, period, or culture characterized by excellence of style and expression and by themes of general interest. Being an outcome of artistic and/or creative expression, the concept of literature may also convey the idea of a point of convergence of different fields of research and episteme, a centre around which other disciplines revolve, meet and merge. Borrowing from Caryl Phillips’s statements regarding literature, literature may represent for authors and readers both a medium “to know about people” (Phillips 2011, 111) and a means of “travelling furiously across borders and boundaries” (Phillips 2001, 5).

Following from this, it is possible to imagine that the figurative passing through lines that separate one country from another feasible when dealing with a literary work may be understood as another kind of crossing, that is to say the act of crossing different disciplinary boundaries to create a holistic approach. The latter is particularly evident in current migration narratives. Drawing knowledge from different fields of research allows the founding members and authors behind the “Refugee Tales” project to deliver an

elaborate and truthful account of events that are omitted, neglected or misinterpreted by mainstream narration. In essence, the “Refugee Tales” project represents an explicit instance of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to anglophone postcolonial literature.

The “Refugee Tales” is a humanitarian, activist project that relies on individuals with heterogeneous cultural backgrounds and knowledge who voluntarily cooperate employing in return a true synthesis of approaches to current migration narratives. In doing so, the “Refugee Tales” project aims at shedding light on the issue of immigration detention in the United Kingdom simultaneously giving voice to those human beings who experienced hazardous journeys made in a quest for better, dignified, just and unbiased life conditions only to arrive at Western immigration removal centres.

On that note, the purposes toward which the founders’ efforts are directed are crystal clear in the following quote taken from Herd’s essay “Calling for an End to Indefinite Detention: The Spatial Politics of Refugee Tales”:

Founded in 2014 by Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, Refugee Tales is a civil society project that calls attention to the fact that the UK is the only country in Europe that detains people indefinitely under immigration rules, and which in so doing calls for that policy to end. The way the project makes its call is by sharing the stories of people who have experienced detention, and the way it shares those stories is in the context of a public walk. (2019, 15)

The very first “public walk” took place on “13th-21st June, 2015”, “from Dover to Crawley via Canterbury”. Initially, the project was conferred the subtitle “A Walk in Solidarity with Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Detainees” (Herd 2016, 133), and for an educated audience, the name of the project and, to a certain degree its subtitle, reminds them of a well known English canonical literary work. Indeed, the Italian scholar in postcolonial literature, Lidia De Michelis describes it as follows:

Drawing inspiration from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, the project, which aims to raise awareness on indefinite immigration detention in the UK and reclaim its abolition, summons and combines the world-making power of storytelling and the extraordinary bonding potential of walking in solidarity to reconfigure the English polity as a welcoming space of listening and ‘appearance.’ (27)

Allegedly, the greatest contribution of *The Canterbury Tales* to English literature was the act of making the use of the English vernacular in mainstream literature attractive to general public. As the Italian literary scholar Gianpaolo Dabbeni elucidates in his work on England in the Middle Ages, at that time, in scientific and literary written productions the languages widely employed were French, Italian or Latin (29). Another analogy with Chaucer's collection of stories lies in the use of contemporary non-standard English, as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are not a monolithic group. It has to be kept in mind that they originate from many regions and speak different languages. Notwithstanding this fact, at the moment they face detention, they become a homogenous group: they have to speak and engage in the official language of the hostile environment, and, for the majority of them, English is their second language. The "Refugee Tales", following Chaucer's example, has, according to Herd's "Afterword" to the first volume, "Three fundamental elements: a culturally charged sense of space, the visible fact of human movement, and an exchange of information through the act of telling stories" (2016, 133). The latter allows migrants' reminiscences to emerge and be uttered, even though this develops into a means of "dress[ing their] fractured memory in the strange words of the new country" (Phillips 2001, 221). Nevertheless, as De Michelis points out,

the Refugee Tales project provides a forceful antidote. In its triple capacity as oral storytelling, written word and movement in space, the project is meant to heal and restore the very connective tissue which may help making up a new, and 'humane', shared imaginary of openness, respect and relationality, and aims to leave a mark on the discursive and cultural geography of the nation. (31)

Although painful and difficult, the possibility of telling anecdotes, life experiences, accounts of events spontaneously and at the individual's pace may represent a way "to reconfigure the English polity as a welcoming space of listening and 'appearance'" (De Michelis 27) and "the result is a space in which stories circulate and re-circulate, told and heard in such a way that they become the basis of the collective's experience" (Herd 2019, 21), that is to say a community of walkers who comes out into the open and shares a free, borderless space:

And what comes out of Southwark
it is a whole new language
Of travel and assembly and curiosity

and welcome.
To make his English sweete.
That's why Chaucer told his tales.
How badly we need English
To be made sweet again
Rendered hostile by act of law
So that even friendship is barely possible (2016, viii-ix).

The above quotation is an extract from Herd's prologue written for the first published volume. Herd wrote three prologues and one epilogue. Arguably, they are a tribute to the Father of English literature, as it may be inferred from an article written by the co-founder of the project for an online journal: "Chaucer inscribes into the language (which he was helping to create) a deep connection between poetry and human movement" (2015). Indeed, already in the first stanza of the first prologue, Herd evokes Chaucer's use of language:

This is not a poem
It is an act of welcome
It announces
That people present
Reject the terms
of a debate that criminalises
Human movement
It is a declaration
This night in Sheperdswell
Of solidarity (2016, v).

The above stanza may be read as the "Refugee Tales" statute delivered as a poetic document that sets forth the activist and welcoming nature of the project, a project that: a) stands out against the "Hostile Environment Policy" introduced by Theresa May in 2012; b) emphasises the significant and fitting relationship between literature and human movement; c) corroborates and pursues Chaucer's attempt to create a new language able to reach a general public in order "To make his English sweete. / [as] / we need English / To be made sweet again", or in other words, English as a welcoming language whose words do not convey complex and or ambiguous meanings.

Moreover, under a postcolonial reading, Herd's line "It is an act of welcome" seems to suggest something on the verge of a contradiction. The Mother Country, that educated the children of the Empire in its culture and language, rejects them in the

moment they need refuge; on the contrary, the children of the Empire in motion can now rely on the language introduced by the Father of English literature to be housed:

We set out to make a language
That open politics
Establishes belonging
Where a person dwells.
Where they are now
Which is to say
Where we are now
Walking
In solidarity (2016, v).

On their arrival in the United Kingdom, and, above all during the time they face detention, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have to deal with the official language of bureaucracy which is usually difficult to decipher for native English speakers and incomprehensible to most new arrivals. On account of this, Herd points out, “there is a more general sense, less easy to capture in particular details, in which the person seeking asylum in the UK is locked out of the language” (2017, 118), and the repercussion “isn’t metaphorical, the language is the border. It isn’t the whole border, nor its most manifest aspect, but it is absolutely a medium in which the border takes effect” (Herd 2017, 120).

In a podcast where she discusses the issue of migration in the United Kingdom for “*The Guardian*”, Ali Smith (one of the famous writers who recounted the stories of human beings caught up in the UK immigration system) states that “stories are welcoming in and walking alongside” (00:57-01:00). She quotes John Berger – English art critic, novelist, painter and poet – who at a public event at the British Library some time earlier expressed his point of view on current migrations through the example of the role of the storyteller:

I have been thinking about the storyteller and the storyteller’s responsibility is hospitality, you invite someone into a story, you must look after the person who is listening to you and you must also ensure the person’s ears are open because of the hospitality, hospitality goes two ways. (03:08-03:27)

Berger’s reflection materialises in the storytelling that occurs during the walk in the English countryside organised by the “Refugee Tales” project. Indeed, the annual walk turns above all into an act of hospitality. The improvised storyteller who can eventually walk free on the English land and cross, although local, boundaries releases thoughts,

feelings and reminiscences of his past and present life. In doing so, the impromptu storyteller invites the audience to enter his world and to know about her or himself. On this occasion, the hospitality argued by Berger that “goes two ways” manifests itself. Through this process, what Herd defines also as “an exchange of information” (2016, 133) there emerges a trust-based relationship between the teller and the listener.

Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Storyteller Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” (1936) exploring the art and practice of storytelling provides a definition that perfectly fits the walks of solidarity’s purposes:

Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers. Incidentally, among the last named there are two groups which, to be sure, overlap in many ways. And the figure of the storyteller gets its full corporeality only for the one who can picture them both. When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about. (83)

The act of storytelling that takes place during the annual walks “is not a filtering, it is a collaboration” (Herd 2016, 07:00) and above all it confers agency and visibility to “nameless storytellers” who still remain anonymous but, on this occasion, feel free to express themselves without the pressure of answering correctly the many and redundant questions made by Home Officers.

The concept of walking as an activity invested with specific qualities and values dates back to modernity. Walking in the landscape is never a bodily engagement alone. In his essay, *Studies of a Biographer - In Praise of Walking* (1902), Leslie Stephen (English author, critic, historian, biographer, mountaineer, early humanist activist and father of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell) provides a definition of a genuine walker:

The true walker is one to whom the pursuit is in itself delightful; who is not indeed priggish enough to be above a certain complacency in the physical prowess required for his pursuit, but to whom the muscular effort of the legs is subsidiary to the 'cerebration' stimulated by the effort; to the quiet musings and imaginings which arise most spontaneously as he walks, and generate the intellectual harmony which is the natural accompaniment to the monotonous tramp of his feet. (254-255)

In truth, “the intellectual harmony” argued by Stephen echoes Karl Gottlob Schelle’s thoughts developed in his *Die Spaziergänge oder die Kunst spazieren zu gehen* (1802) propounded a century earlier. Rooted in Kantian and Romantic aesthetics, Schelle – German philologist and philosopher – establishes the essential link between the corporeal and intellectual movement in leisurely walking and suggests that its pleasure relies on the relaxing and spontaneously wandering mind that responds to the stimulations from the surrounding landscape (31-34). Similarly, the contemporary, Scottish poet and visual artist Thomas A. Clark in his poem *In Praise of Walking* (1988), while reflecting on the activity of strolling and wandering, advocates for walking as an antidote to overthinking and as a means of reconnecting with place. Clark associates walking to harmony of mind and body, between the walkers’ bodies and the earth beneath their feet:

Walking is the human way of getting about.

Always, everywhere, people have walked, veining the earth with paths, visible and invisible, symmetrical and meandering.

There are walks in which we tread in the footsteps of others, walks on which we strike out entirely for ourselves.

A journey implies a destination, so many miles to be consumed, while a walk is its own measure, complete at every point along the way.

There are things we will never see, unless we walk to them.

Walking is a mobile form of waiting.

What I take with me, what I leave behind, are of less importance than what I discover along the way. (Clark)

Furthermore, in his theory of the productive and consumptive activity inherent in everyday life, Michel de Certeau – French scholar whose work combines history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and the social sciences, – devotes his reflections to the practice of walking in an urban space:

These practices of space refer to a specific form of *operations* (“ways of operating”), to another “spatiality” (an “anthropological,” poetic and mythical experience of space.) (93) [...] Places are fragmentary and inward-turning

histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. “I feel good here”: the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice. (108)

Michel de Certeau’s “poetic and mythical experience of space” along with the above-mentioned scholars’ reflections on walking can be applied to the British countryside that hosts the annual walks organised by people involved in the “Refugee Tales” project. The hostile environment advocated by Theresa May, for a brief moment, becomes instead an open and borderless, pastoral and bucolic space evoking a moment of arcadian contentment that makes migrants, refugees and asylum seekers “feel good.”

Conversely, detention centres as closed spaces have boundaries both physical and mental mirroring those of a prison. Detainees are held in small cells with barred windows, where they are locked in for several hours during the day and at night. Healthcare services are often under-resourced and access to legal support and contact with friends and family are extremely limited.

In 1992, Marc Augé coined the neologism “non-places” or anthropological spaces of transience where human beings remain anonymous, and that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as “places” in their anthropological definition, i.e. places characterised by an ideal balance between spatial arrangement and societal organization. Although the French anthropologist focuses on refugee camps, British detention centres too are non-places or “extended transit camps where the planet’s refugees are parked” (33-34). Thirty years after Augé’s assertion, Detention Immigration Removal Centres can still be regarded as non-places. They are not endowed with historical meaning and creative or social life. As put forth by Augé, these are places that cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity. An example of non-places is provided in “The Observer’s Tale” as told by N:

The first days of my life here were spent trying to find a reason to be detained. I didn’t have a motive for going to the bathroom. Even if I had, I had no clothes to change into. They just gave me a set of black undergarments. Just wearing these degrading clothes, my senses of helplessness was greater. Now it is around a week that I have been detained. Somebody is looking for me with a file, as today the caseworker talked with me.

Perhaps I am being released.
Somebody is translating his words – ‘This place was just temporary, now we are going to move you to the permanent wing.’

It is a bitter news.
I say to myself –
‘Every day is worse than the one before.’

I put my stuff in a rubbish bag and follow officers.
After a complicated path, a small door opens into a huge space with three floors instead of two.
More crowded. (125-126)

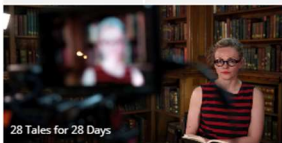
As we learn in the section “About the Contributors”, N was given refugee status in 2018 after two long years spent in detention. As stated in the third volume, he is now a volunteer at the “Refugee Tales” project and one of the few individuals who managed to write his own story. N’s sentences are weighty and characterised by bewilderment when he tries “to find a reason to be detained”; by a sense of vulnerability and depression that is detectable in the noun “helplessness”; by a sense of transience as a consequence of being moved from one centre to another only to be parked and left waiting for a decision; by a sense of claustrophobia perceived in the terse phrase “more crowded.” Furthermore, clear evidence of homogenisation is given in the breakfast table episode:

Officers open the doors for the rooms for breakfast.
I am looking at other detainees to know what to do.
Everyone has a plastic container in their hand.
Downstairs, down the staircase.
People with different shapes and nationalities, but the dishes are all the same colour.
Some are walking loose along the wing, as if eating takes their energy. (124)

Having breakfast, or simply sitting at a table and having dinner with other human beings, should be a moment of conviviality; on the contrary, it is depicted as an exhausting activity. Then, the contrast between different physical aspects and identical dishes denotes indifference. A multi-ethnic group should have been served with different dishes according to the dietary habits linked to their culture, ethical and moral values, religion, health issues. Furthermore, as in the previous extract, N’s sentences are concise, his thoughts mark discontinuity and the double space between reminiscences (in the previous extract) may indicate a break in the narration taken because of a sense of displacement.

Whatever the circumstances, being held in prison-like conditions without a time limit causes anxiety and distress. Many people in detention already have traumatic backgrounds, and the psychological impact of being held is absolutely damaging.

The “Refugee Tales” activist, political commitment is also one important example of transmedia and visual communication. “The Refugee Tales Statement”, created to draw attention to indefinite detention carried out by the British government, was recorded in front of a camera, uploaded both on the for the occasion created 28for28.org website and on the YouTube platform. The video runs two minutes and forty-seven seconds and in this frame of time, famous activist writers and actors who have about five/six seconds each join together to spread the voice of the often-voiceless Others. In the span of approximately three minutes, they claim justice, human rights, and call for a change in the law in addition to suggesting immigration detention be limited to only to twenty-eight days. Concurrently with the launch of the campaign in order to attract a wider audience and raise awareness about indefinite detention, each day for twenty-eight days a tale was released, posted on their website whose opening lines read: “Come back each day to hear why the law must change. End indefinite detention.”

		1 Prologue	2 The Arriver's Tale	3 The Appellant's Tale	4 The Lorry Driver's Tale	5 The Barrister's Tale	6 The Migrant's Tale
7 The Student's Tale	8 The Friend's Tale	9 The Detainee's Tale	10 The Lover's Tale	11 The Witness' Tale	12 The Chaplain's Tale		
		13 The Dependant's Tale	14 The Abandoned Person's Tale	15 The Voluntary Returner's Tale	16 The Social Worker's Tale	17 The Embroiderer's Tale	18 The Support Workers' Tale
19 The Interpreter's Tale	20 The Refugee's Tale	21 The Visitor's Tale	22 The Soldier's Tale	23 The Walker's Tale	24 The Unaccompanied Minor's Tale		
		25 The Lawyer's Tale	26 The Mother's Tale	27 The Deportee's Tale	28 The Smuggled Person's Tale		

Visiting the 28for28 website, the first thing that strikes the audience is that the homepage looks like a calendar, a table showing thirty-three squares which are actually hyperlinks. If Internet users click on squares labelled by numbers from one to twenty-eight, they are then redirected to a video that is none other than the reading of a tale performed by participants in “The Refugee Tales Statement” (the first square in the third row). Some of them are also contributors whose names and short biographies are listed on the last pages of the four volumes. The first square – “Refugee Tales” –, that redirects visitors to the project’s aims and purposes, is followed by the numbered hyperlinks. Emulating the structure of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, in the first video the multi-award British actor and activist Jeremy Irons reads the “Prologue” written by Herd and published in the first volume. It is an introduction to the project that clearly states in black and white the activist nature of “Refugee Tales” and detectable in keywords such as “welcome”, “criminalises”, “human movement” and “solidarity” (Herd 2016, v and 2018, 00:06-00:24).

The “act of welcome” and “of solidarity” also manifests itself in the acceptance of being in the presence of the Other. The face-to-face relation is a concept in the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas’ thought on human sociality. According to Lévinas, the encounter of otherness occurs in the face-to-face. This otherness – which he calls alterity – is something to celebrate. Rather than looking for commonality to ground our moral concern, we should recognise that another person is a universe of mystery to us. Something to fill us with awe, care and concern as pointed out in his work *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1979): “The Other precisely reveals himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness” (150). In a later collection of essays *Alterity and Transcendence* (1995), Lévinas further develops a new approach to arrive at the transcendent. The search for the beyond is usually mediated through the sacred, but for Lévinas it is in the face of the Other that we encounter and directly experience the beyond. To Lévinas, this is not an abstract reality, since that would be a false transcendence. The Other “demands me, requires me, summons me” (25). Lévinas explains how “the face-to-face is a relation in which the I frees itself from being limited to itself” (56). In the encounter with the other person an “exodus from that limitation of the I to itself” (56) is experienced. According to Lévinas, the challenge lies in “working on oneself” in order to “go toward the Other where he is

truly other” (88). It is “the proximity of the other, origin of all putting into question of self” (99) that gives rise to a “new spirituality” (88). Lévinas argues that “the tranquillity of the perseverance of my being, in my egoism” (97) is shocked by the encounter with the Other, as I am provoked to go outside of myself, and it is then that “all thought is subordinated to the ethical relation, to the infinitely other in the other person” (97). Lévinas’ emphasis is on the priority of the Other: “the transcendental I in its nakedness comes from the awakening by and for the other” (98).

Besides attracting a wider audience and raising awareness of indefinite detention, “The Refugee Tales Statement” video along with the twenty-eight segments uploaded on the Internet aims at shedding light on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as human beings and not as the Other.

These series of digital actions show how the pervasiveness of new media affects storytelling and literature. The involved synergy among disciplines that gives rise to a new, accessible and inclusive literature, not to mention opening the canon to new forms of writing is increasingly emphasised in the contemporary phenomenon known as transmedia storytelling. This is a concept coined by media scholar Henry Jenkins. Transmedia storytelling (also known as transmedia narrative or multiplatform storytelling) is the technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies. This concept focuses on how transmedia extends to attract larger audiences (Jenkins 2007).

According to Jenkins’s theories, transmedia storytelling is a process whereby the elements of a fiction or a non-fiction narrative are dispersed systematically across multiple media for the purpose of creating a unified experience. Transmedia storytelling integrates two dimensions: (a) the construction of an official narrative that gets dispersed across multiple media and platforms, and (b) the active participation of users in this expansive process. User participation may adopt different forms: simple viral reproduction of content, manipulation of a text (remix, parodies, and so on) and, specifically in this context, redistribution, active participation in online communities, creation of narrative extensions (Jenkins 2007).

The “The Refugee Tale Statement” video is itself a digital example of active participation of users and political engagement. Furthermore, it is an example of inclusion in all its meanings (the alternating with genders as well as the alternating with white and

black individuals, with migrants and black British citizens, with famous and ordinary people) and eventually an example of the convergence of new media and traditional storytelling. In addition, the video comes with default subtitles, a preset value that undoubtedly allows for a fuller understanding of the statement, not to mention the yellow-highlighted keywords that contribute to the comprehension of the recorded message.

On the assumption that “the medium is the message” (9), as argued in the early sixties of the last century by the Canadian philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan, the demand for a time limit to immigration detention is made through the agency of “The Refugee Tale Statement” video. The media theorist brought forth his reflection as follows:

The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the “content” of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, “What is the content of speech?,” it is necessary to say, “It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal”. [...] When the light is being used for brain surgery or night baseball is a matter of indifference. It could be argued that these activities are in some way the “content” of the electric light, since they could not exist without the electric light. This fact merely underlines the point that “the medium is the message” because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. (10-11)

McLuhan’s affirmation that “the medium is the message” finds a concrete example in the digital campaign for the abolition of unlimited immigration detention terms in the United Kingdom. Applying the Canadian thinker’s idea to current times, the Internet can be seen as both medium and message: when current migration narratives are delivered by means of videos posted on the Internet platforms, the audience receive a realistic as well as a first-hand account of events. In this context, these videos might be understood as “activities” that are the “content” of the Internet. Moreover, this virtual medium has become dominant in our daily lives. It accelerates and enlarges the scale of previous human functions along with accelerating the transit of information in space and time. In our global culture, McLuhan’s observation on the “movement of information” (70), which occurs between the author as the sender and their audience as the receiver of the

message, is both important and crucial especially in regard to enduring issues of racism and migration that characterise current Western societies.

In the early nineties of the last century, the American, art historian and media theorist William John Thomas Mitchell developed the concept of the “pictorial turn” that has also had a bearing on the production of literary works. To Mitchell the pictorial turn is

a trope or figure of thought that reappears numerous times in the history of culture, usually at moments when some new technology of reproduction, or some set of images associated with new social, political, or aesthetic movements, has arrived on the scene. (14)

Although, the pictorial turn describes an intricate but related series of transformations in the production and understanding of culture, it reflects at the same time a restored interest in pictures and images in an age of an extensive and diverse visual culture where images may be on the same level of language (16-18). Expanding his reflection, Mitchell conceives the pictorial turn as

forces of media, capital, and culture [that] swirl about us like massive storms of images. We know more about the world now than ever before, just as it seems to be more than ever escaping our comprehension, much less control. (14)

These “forces of media” enable alternative image/information providers to compete with and to circumvent the mainstream narrative of present-day migrations depicted by the public press. In the ongoing digital age, the potentialities of the Internet allow a multimodal and multimedia narrative, with the latter implying visual narration as well. The American pioneer in criticism and theory of electronic literature, hypertext and hypermedia George P. Landow argues that the Internet as a host for videos becomes a multimedia platform, “therefore [...] it has an identifiable logic—a McLuhan-esque message in the medium—the Web certainly is significantly pictorial” (88-89).

The “new technology of reproduction” (14), as argued by Mitchell, greatly simplifies the creation and dissemination of multimodal and multimedia forms of narration. Relying on this new media technology, activists – be they well known postcolonial authors, intellectuals, actors or merely volunteers participating in the above-mentioned digital statement – address issues of racism and migration and produce

transnational political dialogue that travels across digital space. In so doing, they create a new way to stand out in the cultural industry by engaging Western audiences, scholars and intellectuals in new ways of reading literary works. In other words, “new technology of reproduction” generates an open and egalitarian site for activism or, to put it in a more colloquial way, for showing up, taking a stand and raising awareness.

As migration narratives are rediscovering and exploiting the audible and, above all, visual dimensions of storytelling, the faces of the silenced, marginalised *personae non gratae* in Western societies are becoming visible and humanised. Websites and Internet platforms such as YouTube, for instance, become a safe, welcoming site where migration narratives are delivered by means of visual communication. This visual-digital narration is a manifestation of the German, cultural historian and philosopher Thomas Macho’s ideas on contemporary societies. Macho argues that constantly developing technologies have facilitated the shifting into “facial societies” which primarily act through the recognisability and representation of faces (1996, 90). The Internet and social media platforms have created a culture of extreme visibility, this means that the human face has an agency and has become a significant interface for human communication. Macho goes further suggesting a face-to-face contact that is transferred to the Internet platforms and/or social media whereas mass media often tends to be concerned with large concentrations of non-individuated bodies (such as are seen in public celebrations, protests, populations escaping natural disasters or wars), and one of the fundamental habits of our perception involves the need to recognise faces and to maintain our own identity. These needs are satisfied by means of cultural techniques of self-reflection that

differ from all other techniques through their potential self-referentiality, a pragmatics of recursion. From their very beginnings, speaking can be spoken about and communication be communicated. We can produce paintings that depict paintings or painters; films often feature other films. Even today, the majority of cultural techniques serve as vehicles of self-description, self-legitimation, and authentication, whether in the form of pictures, writings or numbers: be they portraits and passport photos, signs of the body (such as fingerprints), seals, stamps, coats of arms or logos, signatures and signs, or numerical codes (ranging from one’s personal and social security number to the PIN-code at the ATM). (1996, 31)

As Macho points out, we live in a society of portraits and in a saturated image culture, in other words, what the Canadian scholar in cinema studies Alice Maurice labels as a “facial

society” (3). Or, to quote Laini Burton – Canadian scholar in body politics, contemporary art practice and criticism, performance and body/spatial relations – we are living in a time where the act of “standing out from the ever-growing crowd of faces may be read as a last radical act” (4).

Furthermore, the visual-digital storytelling in current migration narratives relies on posted videos that employ strategies such as close-up shots in which the face is predominant, and this form of visual art of videomaking fits Macho’s “facialization” neologism. By this term, the German scholar refers to the feature of “faciality” enabled by new media and digital technologies. As Macho asserts, these approachable means of communication have also developed and increased individuals’ need to see and be seen especially in original virtual spaces where end users of electronic devices can act, give vent to attention-seeking, and eventually to self-representation. In this manner they signal their membership and participation in facial societies (1996, 87-108).

Macho’s further reflections on facial societies represent the crucial essence of “The Refugee Tales Statement.” Being prevented from entering Western societies, then marginalised, or made visible in a distorted manner by the press and mainstream narrations, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers by means of digital, cultural techniques can be instead “vehicles of self-description, self-legitimation, and authentication” (2013, 31).

Moreover, this re-humanisation of Others through video friendly technology also echoes Burton’s suggestion that this centring of the individual, the identifiable face over an anonymous mass of people is in itself a “radical act” (4). It is no coincidence that authors, actors, journalists and activists join their faces together to read a statement simultaneously demanding twenty-eight days as limited time for detention. This visual-digital narrative mirrors Landow’s definition of the Web as being “significantly pictorial” (89). As mentioned above, “The Refugee Tales Statement” video shows individuals who put their faces in front of a camera and read lines of the statement. This tracking shot shows a sequence of faces that resembles Macho’s face-to-face contact. The audience’s faces in front of an electronic device’s screen see only close-ups of the activists’ faces. Nevertheless, some of them, as is the case of Abdulrazak Gurnah or the 2019 Booker Prize’s winner Bernardine Evaristo, have their eyes on the camera constantly; whereas actors like Sinéad Cusack or Nima Teleghani add emphasis moving their hands if to

accent the meaning of the expressed words. In addition, in order to make the message understood by everybody, default subtitles are visible with key words highlighted in yellow to direct the audience's eyes on important issues and concepts. This formal oral and written declaration provides figures of human beings detained as well as the death toll from detention, the length of time spent in custody along with the amount of money spent to financially support this inhumane, illegal system as "people who are detained indefinitely *are not charged with anything*" (00:39-00:43 emphasis in the original). The faces and voices go further, asserting that

By every measure and every charter, indefinite detention is a breach of human rights. 'No one,' as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, 'shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.' Indefinite detention denies due process and is a breach of the rule of law. (01:12-01:32 emphasis in the original)

The closing request in the statement is expressed by Jeremy Irons who, relying on his acting skills, as if he were performing in a stage play, demands that: "The law must change, *now*" (02:28-02:32 emphasis in the original). Unfortunately, the law still has not changed. However, they did manage to direct the audience's attention to the matter of migration along with the atrocious detention system. As a matter of fact, over the years, thanks to its digital visibility, the project has reached an international audience and has given rise to similar activist movements worldwide.

In 2020, whilst those were all very scary times lived in isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the annual "walks of solidarity" moved online on the YouTube channel where the "Refugee Tales" community virtually gathered to "call for a future without detention", and following Herd's suggestion, participants sent photographs of bridges intended as symbols of crossing and making connections:

If there is one good consequence of lockdown Refugee Tales, it is that this year at least, anybody can join in. [...] this year people are joining from across the world, joining in solidarity in the call for a future without immigration detention. In order that we can make that shared call vivid, please let us know via our website, where you are and where you are walking. And please, when you see one, take and send us a photo of a bridge. We are making bridges this year, and we are crossing borders. (Herd 2020, 06:24-06:49)

Despite of the Covid-19 restrictions, the organisers and volunteers did not give up “like all other large-scale public events, Refugee Tales 2020 had to be re-thought” (Herd 2021, 146), and Internet and digital technologies allowed the walk to be dispersed:

instead of gathering in one location and collectively following a shared route, people walked where they could, drawn together across a three-day weekend by a series of online events: talks calling for A Future Without Detention. (Herd 2021, 146)

At the end of the online event, as “the project plotted their location on an online map” (146), the annual walk was done “in over twenty countries worldwide” (146). In fact, the fourth volume is a collection of international tales collected during the border-blind Covid-19 pandemic. Interestingly, “the publication date of *Refugee Tales IV* marks a significant international anniversary [...] the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees” (149) signed in 1951. This document reasserted the values of human recognition and sanctioned refugees’ rights and the international standards of treatment for their protection. The fourth volume brought to the surface the international reality where too many countries continue to deny human rights and close their borders to “human movement”. In opposition to this hostility to Others, the virtual walks allowed to make figurative bridges across the world, as bridges can be crossed and the network of sharing stories along the way can be widened. On account of this, Herd in his fourth “Afterword” affirms the intention of pursuing “Refugee Tales” initial quest:

the act of sharing stories cannot stop. And nor can the walking because, as the project walks, so in walking, it looks to reclaim the ground. The ground is solidarity to which the sharing of stories is crucial. The walk continues. Detention must end.” (Herd 2021, 152)

The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s initial process of collaboration becomes a collective endeavour especially because it is an integral stage in the creation of a public space of social action. Thirty years after its foundation, the charity continues to advocate for the end of indefinite detention and to organise yearly walks of solidarity and telling stories in the British countryside, not to mention the assistance provided to human beings who are facing detention. The “Tales” have attracted media attention, active participation and involvement, while exploring new forms of storytelling that draw on, overlap and

intersect with different disciplines, mirroring an openness to experimentation with form and content that has often characterised literature, and in the process, the “Refugee Tales” project itself has become a legitimate expression of literature in equal standing and conformity with established traditional print-based practices of making literature.

6.3 The Published Storytelling from DigiLit to the Page

“Under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing cultural background. [...] narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.”

(Roland Barthes 1977, 79)

“If I’m a storyteller it’s because I listen. For me, a storyteller is like a passeur who gets contraband across a frontier”

(John Berger)

From a literary point of view, the digital, activist and humanitarian “Refugee Tales” project that originated on the Internet, generated a remarkable role reversal. It has given a platform and humanity to the often-voiceless Others, outsiders – the typical characters of postcolonial literature – who now have the chance to become the storytellers and/or authors of their own narratives grounded in their life experiences. Their account of events, anecdotes or mere fragmented thoughts are told to volunteers who all share the values at the core of the “Refugee Tales” project. Among these volunteers, there are also well famous postcolonial writers such as Abdulrazak Gurnah (the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2021), Ali Smith, Patience Agbabi, Jackie Kay, Kamila Shamsie, Monica Ali, Bernardine Evaristo along with intellectuals and activists such as Philippe Sands, Maurizio Veglio and many other relevant writers. These first-hand life experiences told by impromptu storytellers are later faithfully written down, and the result is a pure collaborative, synergetic relationship between the improvised teller and the celebrity writer. The latter, that is to say the well-established and by now canonical postcolonial

author, momentarily sets aside her or his own writing style and the proper narrative techniques to let the teller's voice predominate on the page. In contrast to how the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are muted, or written out of legal and bureaucratic discourse, the tales open up space for their voices, and their language, to be heard. These are stories told and shared so that people will listen to a new discourse, but above all, they give voice to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who can ultimately talk about their no-win situations to listeners who have ears to hear and willingness to transmit that experience without distortion or prejudice.

The oral storytelling that occurs during the annual "Refugee Tales" walks in the British countryside has undergone interactive, participatory and multimodal transformations including publication in print media. The latter has been entrusted to Comma Press, a publishing house based in Manchester and one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations for the funding period from 2018 to 2022.

Comma Press has published four volumes. On the back cover of each volume next to the price, the publishing house informs readers that "all profits to go to Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and Kent Refugee Help"; while inside each volume – before the contents page – readers are told "proceeds from this book go to the following two charities: Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and Kent Refugee Help." The Kent Refugee Help is another charity that can be reached and contacted on the Internet through their website whose text link "About KRH", on the main page header, reads,

Kent Refugee Help supports refugees and migrants held in London and Kent prisons. We help people access legal advice and representation to fight their case and stand with them throughout. After release we continue to help in other ways – signposting to services in the area where they are living, supporting them and providing small cash sums for emergencies. We offer telephone legal advice for immigration via an advice line, which is open two days a week, and also one to one immigration legal advice either by visiting the prison or by video link. We are regulated to give immigration legal advice and representation by the OISC.²⁶ [...]

²⁶ The acronym OISC stands for Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner that "regulates immigration advisers; ensuring they are fit, competent and act in their clients' best interests. We investigate complaints about immigration advisers and can prosecute those who operate illegally. We were set up under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Under this act the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 and the Immigration Act 2014 we have powers to: limit or vary levels of work advisers may undertake; lay a disciplinary charge against a regulated adviser; apply for a restraining order or an injunction; prosecute for illegally providing immigration advice and/or services; prosecute for illegally advertising immigration advice and/or services; enter an adviser's premises; seize an adviser's records." (<https://kentrefugeehelp.org.uk/>)

Our support continues after release if requested. We welcome the involvement of refugees and migrants in our organisation; their ideas and experiences are crucial to informing and developing our policy.

This is clear evidence of the type of collaborative and participatory networking originated in the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group thanks to their digital, activist and political commitment.

The fifty-eight tales chosen for publication have been released in the timespan of five years, from 2016 to 2021. The titles of the tales follow a Chaucerian format; however, neither the tellers nor the persons in the tales are modelled on specific Chaucerian characters. *The Canterbury Tales* have merely been the source of inspiration for David Herd and Anna Pincus who organised the narrative emulating Chaucer's structure. Furthermore, due to the authenticity and urgency of the stories, the game of allusion cannot be played in *Refugee Tales*.

Notwithstanding that, the four collections of tales and to a larger extent the digital project represent clear evidence of intertextuality:

Theories of intertextuality suggests that meaning in a text can only ever be understood in relation to other texts; no works stand alone but is interlinked with the tradition that came before it and the context in which it is produced. (Allen n.pag.)

The English scholar in Romantic and Victorian literature, Graham Allen, immediately brings into focus in his work on understanding the meaning of a literary text according to theories developed over the centuries:

texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorist now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. [...] Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext. (1)

Literary theories evolve and adapt themselves to the cultural context in which they are conceived, and the concept of intertextuality is not an exception. Drawing attention to the nature of reading and in what manner the resulting act of finding meaning in literary texts

has changed, the English scholar sustains that intertextuality, as varying conceptualisation, “is bound to involve a process of naming and renaming” (214).

It is said that the origin of intertextuality dates back to the nineteenth century in the linguistics work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, but it is only in 1966 that the Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst, feminist, and novelist Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality (2-3). This coinage represents Kristeva’s attempt to synthesise and blend two different approaches to literary and cultural theory: de Saussure’s semiotics based on an objective, even scientific approach, and the Russian philosopher and literary critic Michail Michailovič Bakhtin’s dialogism based on subjectivity as literature is inherently unstable. De Saussure’s semiotics explores in what manner signs derive their meaning within the structure of a text; whereas Bakhtin’s dialogism suggests a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors (8-9).

In his reconstruction of literary theories related to finding meaning in texts, Allen also points out that the notion of intertextuality itself has been subjected to different interpretations. According to Roland Barthes, for instance, intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity in the moment readers realise that meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but instead is mediated through, or filtered by, codes imparted to the writer and reader by other texts. This intertextual view of literature supports the concept that the meaning of a text does not reside in the text, but is produced by the reader in relation not only to the text in question, but also to the complex network of texts invoked in the reading process (11-13).

Allen proceeds his exploration dealing with the concept of transtextuality elaborated by the French theorist and critic Gérard Genette whose “statement concerns not individual symbols or individual works but the ways in which signs and text function within and are generated by describable systems, codes, cultural practices and rituals” (92-93). As a structuralist thinker, Genette retains the belief in criticism’s ability to locate, describe and maintain a text’s significance, even when the significance concerns an intertextual relation between a text and other texts.

Moreover, the influential French literary critic and theorist Michael Riffaterre relates to intertextuality as a theory of the interpretation of poetry. For Riffaterre, intertextuality is a hermeneutic means of discovering the meaning of a poem, which

strictly regulates the ways of the reader's perception of poetic signs. The French literary critic engages in a structuralist approach proposing a method of text interpretation through which structures or poetic signs are recognised in the text that make the text literary (111-112).

However, in the ongoing digital age, within the context of new media studies and digital culture "the focus alters from text to media, from textuality to mediality and mediation" (Allen 214). The concept of intertextuality has merely shifted its focus on to the level of media design and analysis, and as the English scholar emphasises even though the act of understanding a literary text is "perpetually remodelled and renamed, intertextuality continues to lay its core role in the production and reception of meaning" (216).

Intertextuality as an interpretive practice is suitable for the analysis of the tales collected in the four volumes of *Refugee Tales*. Readers will find in them Bakhtin's most sustained arguments concerning the narrative's dialogical character, that is to say concepts of polyphony (each volume includes a diversity of migrants', refugees' and asylum seekers' simultaneous points of view and voices), heteroglossia (as detected in the coexistence of distinct styles of discourse within the English language or the storytellers' second language), double-voiced discourse (as perceived in the storyteller's voice that is autonomous from the contributor's voice as the majority of stories "are told to") and to some extent hybridisation (as a characteristic of English language and storyteller's culture). In his "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin questions the concept of hybridisation in the sphere of language and sustains that it is "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, within two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation" (358). Differently from Bhabha's theorisation of hybridity and the third space within the context of cultural studies, Sylvia Sasse – Swiss scholar in Slavistics literature – notes that "for Bakhtin, hybridisation is [...] an actual mixture, a new, inseparable combination" (908).

Keeping in mind the fact that *Refugee Tales*' readers are confronted with real life experiences and not with an outcome of artistic and or creative expression, readers of the tales do not find an authorial voice presenting relations and dialogues among characters. Instead, they are confronted with a world in which all characters, and even the narrator

herself or himself, are possessed of their own discursive consciousness. These polyphonic tales, as interpretations of the world, represent a response to the single, Eurocentric narrative of Western colonialist history books.

In a similar manner, both heteroglossia and double-voiced features can be detected in the *Refugee Tales* narrative. As Bakhtin puts forth in his essay “Slovo v romane” (1934-35): “language for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone’s else’s” (81). On that note, it may be argued that language in the *Refugee Tales* has the ability to contain within it many languages: the tellers’ languages that attempt to adapt themselves to the listener’s language. It is not the type of language as conceived by Kristeva that is to say a “language as a force of imagination and desire” (Allen 34). In these literary descriptions of the society of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, readers encounter different varieties of the English language, varieties associated with class and gender and above all with tellers’ country of origin. As mentioned earlier, English is their second language and unavoidably in their utterances the structure of the sentence frequently makes us guessing it perhaps emulates their native-language syntax; the clash of languages occurs and manifests itself in the hybridisation of the English language. This also leads to Bakhtin’s theory of double-voicedness or the dynamic interaction between different voices and perspectives, that is to say in this context, the tellers’ voices and the ambiguous, complex, legal and bureaucratic frame of reference.

The *Refugee Tales* multimodal, hybrid, cooperative and participatory narrative may be regarded as avant-garde artistic forms resistant to mainstream narrations of current forms of human movement. Emulating the structure of *The Canterbury Tales*, each collection of tales is introduced by a prologue. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “General Prologue” is a poem in rhyming couplets that, through a description of a wide variety of pilgrims from across different social classes, reveals the societal tensions present in late-medieval England. David Herd’s prologues (in volume I, II and III) are poems divided in stanzas that, differently from Chaucer, introduce the walk relying on free verses, and arguably in the form of a manifesto as it resembles the written declaration of the intentions, motives and views of the charity, as happens for instance in the following lines taken from volume I:

This prologue is not a poem
 It is an act of welcome
 [...]

It is a declaration
 This night in Shepherdswell
 Of solidarity.
 [...]

We set out to make a language
 That opens politics
 Establishes belonging
 Where a person dwells.
 [...]

And what we choose to walk for
 Is the possibility of trust
 In language
 To hear the unsaid spoken
 And the repeated
 Made
 Unambiguous and loud
 [...]

Because the hearings
 In the British immigration system
 Are not courts
 Of record.
 So there are no stories
 [...]

And what we call for
 Is an end
 To this inhuman discourse (2016, v-x)

In the second “Prologue”, Herd seems to shed light on the keywords – storytelling, space, language, welcome – at the core of the project as detectable in the following lines:

That a person
 Who has a story
 Requires space –
 To start
 We set this out
 A simple requirement
 In language
 [...]

A basic entitlement
 Like walking
 Telling stories
 Occupying the landscape
 In the heat of the sun –

Out of Canterbury
[...]
That the State
As it is constituted
Shall not detain
Indefinitely.
[...]
As they tell their tales
That hearing we might shape
A polity –
Tender
Real
Comprehending welcome. (2017, 1-2)

In the third volume, after three walks in the British countryside, the content of the “Prologue” shifts from a declaration of intent to a form of artistic expression that evokes conviviality, a sense of cohesion and inclusion. In addition, the last stanza, ending with a preposition (“towards”), if on the one hand, evokes a sense of suspension, like the one felt by detainees while waiting for positive decision on their asylum claim, on the other hand, it may infer a forward step:

THIS SONG IS TO ANYBODY
Whether alone
Or in community
[...]
It is from the trees
Who listen out
[...]
Anybody
Who seeks
[...]
Who stands
This dead of night
Whether left
Or in association
At that time
When it is committed
Who would walk
Towards (2019, 1-3)

Published in 2021, coinciding with the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention by the UK and other countries, the first post-Brexit and post-COVID-19 publication of the “Refugee Tales” project, opens with a tale rather than a

traditional prologue. “The Time Traveller’s Tale” told by Sharmishta Chakrabarti, a British politician, barrister, and human rights activist, is a “message” left by “A. Einstein” (ix) ten years after the end of the Second World War. A time-travelling Einstein has access to the past and future that are envisaged “as places and possibilities in themselves” (vii). He describes himself as a European refugee who “was refused asylum in the United Kingdom before accepting refuge here in the United States of America” (viii). He condemns the rooted practice of imprisoning individuals in “advanced Western European countries” (viii). The debtors’ prisons of the past have been replaced “in the enlightened world of the 21st century” (viii) by detention centres and refugee camps where human beings are detained indefinitely.

Temporality is, indeed, crucial in the experience of refugeehood to the point that, as argued by the English scholar Vinh Nguyen in his essay on the concept of *refugeetude*, the refugees’ condition goes beyond particular places or times, it becomes instead “psychic, affective and embodied, enduring in time and space” (114), and transgresses national and generational borders.

In the four volumes, the tellers’ voices express themselves spontaneously and freely in a language that most of the time is not their native language. The act of telling and sharing painful feelings and memories may be therapeutic, maybe liberating, but the act of actually hear them translates into an act of pure hospitality. However, as anonymity is crucial, names and or locations are omitted or expressed by initials as is the case, for instance, for “The Stateless Person’s Tale as told to Abdulrazak Gurnah” in volume III: “As you know, my country is G___ and I fled from there because my life was in danger” (5); or for “The Lover’s Tale as told to Kamila Shamsie” in volume II: “‘I’m from___,’ he said. ‘It’s a small country. The government is a kind of a dictatorship. It used to be a military dictatorship before supposed democracy came back in but it isn’t really a democratic country’” (11).

Among the fifty-eight tales, only eight tales – six in volume III and two in volume IV – are told by the teller. This reflects the slowness of the bureaucratic machine but also the small number of people who were given refugee status.

In the attempt to reproduce in written words what has been told in person, the fifty-eight tales have different writing styles and lack of proper narrative techniques. Sometimes they resemble an open poem defined by teller’s line lengths and rhythm as

detectable in “The Interpreter’s Tale as told to Carol Watts” in volume I where the interpreter describes her or his long, dangerous, exhausting journey:

I heard them threaten to take her organs.
I was shot at by snipers.
I waited in the house of a man with a tank in his garden.
I was packed in cartons of washing powder.
I saw people taken from containers and hung by the side of the road.
I was detained.
I was mobile (and therefore a criminal)
I was immobile (and therefore a criminal)
I wrapped my phone in plastic.
I flew over sand and now I meet the shore.
Now a leaky boat. Now a port. Now a train. Now a lorry.
Now you. (67)

Sometimes the tales resemble a stream of consciousness delivered by short, concise sentences without punctuation. The white space between sentences may reflect the time taken in bringing back memories as in “The Social Worker’s Tale as told to Bernardine Evaristo” in volume III:

I WAS BORN INTO an era of military coups and wars and the imprisonment of all opponents of the government

I was born into a country where the new government persecuted my businessman father for his connection to a previous one

I was born into the wrong tribe at the wrong time in history

I was sent to school in the countryside for safety until war broke out there too – between the rebels of the North and government forces from the South (151)

Sometimes tales are the materialisation of the teller’s sense of bewilderment, displacement and alienation as stated in the closing lines of “The Fisherman’s Tale as told to Ian Sansom” in volume III:

I came here in a refrigerated truck. In France, I learn to stitch up the truck using my shoelace. It was dark. There is no air. I was so cold. It was much colder even than Norway. [...] I thought I was going to die. It would be better for me if I was dead. In the cold, I realise that life is nothing. I realise that life makes no sense, that bad things happen, and that no one listens and no one hears and no one cares.

Now you have my story. And I still have nothing. (108)

A, one of the contributors to volume III, managed to obtain his legal status, and volunteers in community services and in the “Refugee Tales” project. He wrote his tale about his experience at the immigration detention centre where he “was terrified [...] I felt I was being put into some kind of human storage facility” (29). The deep sense of alienation emerges in the following lines:

After I was detained, I wrote a letter to my pre-detention self.
I needed to find out if he still existed.
Sometimes I think he might be coming back.
Other times I think it won’t happen. (30)

As mentioned earlier, Nguyen sustains that the refugees’ condition becomes psychic, it is embodied and permanent. This is clearly perceivable in A’s letter to his pre-detention self:

I think detention changed me a lot to be honest. I wonder if you’d even recognise me now if we saw each other. You’d probably think I was someone else. I wish we could get back together and hang out. I wish we could get back the old vibe we had, back then.

I miss you. Do you think I’ll ever see you again?
Wishing you all the best my friend,

My Post-Detention Self (32)

Still in volume III, “The Listener’s Tale as told to Gillian Slovo” is another oral history told by a volunteer. Jane (134) understands the feeling of being “a stranger in the midst of others” (131) as she spent some years with her divorced mother in a country she cannot name. She visits the facility and spends an hour a week listening to detainees even when they do not talk. She admitted to Slovo that she does it for herself both to detach momentarily from her routine and to learn “more about geography” (136). She seems to have started the crossing of bridges inaugurated online during the pandemic. Reaching out to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is another key concept that represents the aims at the core of the project.

This project is about activism, human rights, taking a stand, speaking up and giving a voice to those human beings who are marginalised and cannot make themselves visible. There are no names in the titles because it is simply too dangerous to put them in. Anonymity is vital. Most importantly, the writers or narrators are not listed as “authors” but as “contributors”, always to emphasise the spirit of collaboration and accurateness in a welcoming and hospitable project. The majority of tales are “as told to”, few tales are “as told by”. The fourth annual walk, marks a relevant change, as some of the storytellers wrote their own story which were then published in the third volume. This is a vivid tribute to the tireless work that has been done by Herd, Pincus and all the people who have been taking an active part in the project along with the strenuous efforts to develop people’s awareness of the “Hostile Environment Policy” introduced by Theresa May along with the proliferation of detention centres on English soil. The practice of holding people who are subject to immigration control in custody is an administrative process. This means, as stated in the “Refugee Tale Statement” video, that migrants and undocumented people are detained on the decision of an immigration official. In the United Kingdom there is no time limit on immigration detention and this time-length uncertainty causes serious mental distress. In his *Reflections on Exile* (2001), Edward Said – Palestinian-American philosopher, literary critic, and political activist – states that refugees have no definite identity, consequently, they are “without a tellable history” (176). As the twenty-first century is characterised by mass movements of people, Thomas Nail asserts that current migrants are defined by mobility, by “becoming and displacement” (4). On these grounds, the acts of storytelling and writing that occur within the “Refugee Tales” project become devices for articulating migrants’, refugees’ and asylum seekers’ subjectivity, for reminding us that their stories are “tellable” and worth telling. Verbalising and transcribing their experiences help them to construct their identity and claim their histories both at a private level and, on a broader level, as members of their larger community of origin.

7. Conclusion

“Most literature produced today is digital in almost every stage of its production. Most authors write on a computer, in a word processor; most of them submit their work to their editors on the form of a digital file; most editors enter their corrections into the same digital file; most edited texts are then laid out in desktop publishing programs; and these texts are then generally sent to printers as a digital file. If a book becomes analog at all, today, it generally does so at the output stage: at the printing house, where an object that has existed digitally from its inception is converted into an analog book.”

(Adam Hammond 133)

Global culture, cutting-edge communication systems, not to mention digital technologies, have substantially affected traditional forms of literature, the act of narrating, its production and dissemination. As the Canadian scholar in English literature Adam Hammond states in a provocative tone – employing the adjective digital in its broadest meaning, i.e. characterised by widespread use of computers – in current times literature is digital.

Contemporary authors are increasingly drawn to the possibilities offered by media technology and cannot help but reflect, consciously or unconsciously, models and norms of usage of the language which prevail in our contemporary world of digital media and digital production (Rylance 9-10).

Marshall McLuhan’s phrase “the medium is the message”, despite being an intuitive understanding of fast-paced, highly developed technology, becomes revealing in his further assertion:

the content of the medium is never the message because the content is always the old medium. The real change comes from the new medium itself which creates a new situation for human association and human perception. [...] *That*, is the effect of the medium has – *that* total, pervasive effect – *that* is the message, the social change that is brought about. (q.td in Hammond 3-4 emphasis in the original)

Regarding the medium as a specific communication technology for recording and disseminating messages, Hammond summarises McLuhan's thought as follows: "what the digital age has accomplished, above all else, is to defamiliarize the act of reading" (4).

Part of this de-familiarisation comes from the fact that the delivered multimodal and multimedia narratives, as the ones here discussed, require a composite reading. Driven by an intent to attract the attention of a wider audience, present-day migration narratives are rediscovering and exploiting the audible and, above all the visible dimensions of storytelling taking advantage of means of communication provided by digital technologies. The Internet in particular, as an accessible medium through which migrants, refugees and asylum seekers can find a voice to tell their stories in their own terms, offers a virtual space that is borderless and relatively unfiltered by the editorial slants associated with traditional media channels. As a consequence, these works of literature imply alternative ways of reading and a multi-layered interpretation.

Borrowing Marc Prensky's definition, digital immigrants – or people who have had to adapt to the new language of technology (2) – usually consider a work of literature to have reached a state of fixity and of completion, and the technology of the printed book epitomises the quality of fixity. Conversely, writing and producing literature in digital media can and will change over time. As Scott Rettberg argues:

A "publication" of electronic literature has at least one of the same effects as a publication in print, in that it involves something being brought forth to a public, but its publication does not imply fixity in the same way. The publication of electronic literature is not finished just because it has reached its public – it could change right before the reader's eyes. (7)

In truth, electronic literature projects, such as blogposts, kinetic poetry or websites created following an activist and political intent as analysed in the four case studies through the metaphor of the algorithm, have multiple iterations: print media, digital publications, digital performance, walks in the countryside, oral storytelling, video reading/performance. If on the one hand, this challenges the definition of literary genre, on the other hand, it expands the literary canon of postcolonial literature.

Indeed, the last decades have witnessed the proliferation of new literary trends and genres which highlight the enduring questions and concerns of racism, identity, belonging

and alienation. These emerging trends and genres will often weave together multiple storytelling forms including fiction, testimony, (auto)biography, orality, performativity and visuality. Furthermore, as George P. Landow argues:

the World Wide Web, provides a particularly important way for the empire to write back. [...] former colonies use the Internet as a means of defining and communicating a newly recreated identity. In essence, the smallest country with access to the Internet can speak for itself in ways impracticable if not virtually impossible in the world of print. (345)

Before the Internet became widely accessible to people at large, much of the literatures and criticism produced by former colonies' authors and scholars did not manage to enter the Western distribution channels for print media. In the last two decades, digital productions have complemented and, in some cases, even supplanted postcolonial print media. Pursuing his reflection, Landow pinpoints the open nature of hypertext as a paradigm for understanding postcolonial cultures and rejecting the binary oppositions (such as for instance belonging versus longing or white versus black) giving rise to an expanded criticism:

The postcolonial critique of unitary models of subjectivity reveals that all such models are based on binary thinking that creates categories like self and other, male and female, first world and third world where the first term is always the privileged term. Rejecting binary models, postcolonial theorists describe both subjectivity as well as experience decentered and pluralistic. The electronic media can be used as metaphor for describing what is happening to the culture at large as the Culture (represented by the dominant group) is being displaced by minority cultures which demand recognition of their histories as well as cultural productions. Just as in networked computers diverse, sometimes contradictory information, can exist simultaneously in hypertext format, so it is in culturally diverse societies with different, sometime contradictory narratives. The person's location based on race, class, and gender determines what the perspective will be taken. (Jaishree K. Odin q.td in Landow 351)

Postcolonial authors such as Caryl Phillips, for instance, maintains that for those people whose History and culture have been disregarded by Western, mainstream narrative, "the literature of a people often becomes its history", and adapting his thinking to the ongoing digital age, then literature produced within this new media environment and or by electronic media "can feed a sense of identity" (2002, 2).

Furthermore, the proliferation and pervasiveness of new media has coincided with and, to some extent, participated in the shift from a postcolonial writing as “a literature of emancipation, critique and transformation” (xiii), as put forth by Pramod K. Nayar, to a literature of commitment, taking a stand and raising awareness.

In regard to current migrations that are a consequence of colonial and neo-colonial practices, as argued in chapter 2, up-to-date technology places migrant narratives into a fresh, diverse and at times hybrid act of narrating. It is not surprising, therefore, that migrants’ journeys and their marginalisation that follows upon their arrival in Western societies are depicted and disseminated according to the features and possibilities offered by the Internet platforms and new media.

Although Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a non-digital native, she is, nevertheless, a clear example of the author who consciously reflects models and norms of usage of the language which prevail in our contemporary world of digital media and digital production. As argued in chapter 3, *Americanah*, Adichie’s third novel, represents an example of the interaction between new multimodal textual forms fostered by new media and postcolonial literature. Her narrative blends traditional writing and digital writing in the form of fictional blogposts. Specifically, the American fictional blog functions as a medium for recording and disseminating messages for the white audience on questions and concerns of racism and discrimination experienced by the female character Ifemelu within American society.

In doing so, Adichie relies on cross-media communication strategies. In actual fact, this is not her first effort to explore the norms of usage of contemporary digital language. Since the early two-thousands, she has been taking advantage of the possibilities offered by different social media platforms and the Internet. Her speeches at TED events have later been published, such as for instance her talk “We Should All Be Feminists”. Published in 2014 by Fourth Estate, “this highly acclaimed, provocative New York Times bestseller is adapted from the much-admired 2012 TEDx talk of the same name” (Adichie). As Anne Jerslev and Mette Mortensen – Danish scholars in media studies – points out “cross-media communication constitutes an effective way of spreading information about [authors] and their projects” (166). Adichie has also created her own website that actually functions as a showcase of her work. However, she has continued *Americanah*’s story on her website through a link to “The Small Redemptions

of Lagos.” On September 3, 2014 she announced the return of the blogger Ifemelu on her Facebook account creating in this manner a “collected narrative” (165), as defined by Jerslev and Mortensen. Moreover, as it happens with literary works, *Americanah* has been the source of inspiration for digital artists and directors who uploaded videos in the form of a song and of a short movie based on and adapted from Adichie’s novel.

Even though, Adichie’s website contains information on herself, and, above all, her work, it is important to acknowledge Daria Tunca’s extensive digital project on the Nigerian-American author. Hosted by the University of Liège within the postcolonial research centre CEREP, the Belgian scholar has created and continues to update an exhaustive and well-organised scholarly website that has often been mistaken for Adichie’s official website by Internet users. This is an indication of the proliferation of postcolonial criticism due to the multiple possibilities offered by new media and the Internet. Clicking on the “About this Site” webpage, readers are redirected to the introduction to Tunca’s project along with the invitation to the participatory culture envisaged by Henry Jenkins:

I have built this website, which is not official, mainly for two reasons.

First of all (and obviously), I would like to promote the work of an extremely talented writer.

Secondly, as both online and offline articles/reviews have proliferated over the years, I hope to be able to compile reliable and, as far as possible, comprehensive information on works published by and about Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, including scholarly essays.

[...]

I would like to encourage readers and scholars from all over the world to contribute items, either from printed documents, from Internet sites or from other sources.

[...]

(Please do not use this email address to send messages to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie - they will not reach her)

Thank you! (Tunca)

The transition from fictional blogposts, as a form of “augmented” text borrowing Alan B. Craig’s definition, to actual blogposts as hypertexts is explored in chapter 4. According to Hammond, hypertext is a narrative form that shares much in common with older forms, but whose subtle differences allow skilled writers to achieve poignant artistic effects not possible in print (163).

As a digital native, Reni Eddo-Lodge started her career as a free-lance journalist on the Internet. However, being comfortable with the use of the Internet as information medium, she turned to her blog to denounce practices of what she defines as structural racism in British society, not differently from Ifemelu’s fictional blog.

The new media environment is moving readers from a print to a digital culture in which the intertextual nature of texts is experienced at a more material level. As Landow states,

Scholarly articles situate themselves within a field of relations, most of which the print medium keeps out of sight and relatively difficult to follow, because in print technology the referenced (or linked) material lie spatially distanced from the references to them. Electronic hypertext, in contrast, makes individual references easy to follow and the entire field of interconnections obvious and easy to navigate. (3-4)

The reader of such linked textual pathways is, Landow argues, the modern equivalent of Barthes’s textual analyst, tracing the never-ending play of significance as it detonates in different directions:

Anyone who uses hypertext makes his or her own interests the de facto organizing principle (or center) for the investigation at the moment. One experiences hypertext as an infinitely decenterable and recentereable system, in fact because hypertext transforms any document that has more than one link into a transient center, a partial site map that one can employ to orient oneself and to decide where to go next. (56-57)

Along with this perspective that to some extent compares the digital reading of a text to a non-linear but free investigation, Landow further lists the peculiarities that distinguish a digital text that contains hyperlinks to other texts:

The use of hypertext systems like the Web involves four kinds of access to text and control over it: reading, linking, writing and networking. Access to the

hypertext begins with the technology required to read and produce hypertext, and this technology has only recently become widely available in the limited form of blogs. (358)

In his early discussion of hypertextual writing, Landow coins the term “wreader” to name the interactive reader who actively takes a path through a hypertext and is thus an agent in its construction. For Landow the wreader embodies the individual who is a writer and simultaneously reader as a web user. Consequently, this signals the end of the barrier set between authors and readers by classical literary aesthetics:

Yet, part of the charm associated with this new “writing space” also has to do with the capacity of “wreaders” to jump through links from lexia to lexia, forwards, backwards at will – a wreader in control of the cursor, a wreader who can freeze the text, who is aware of a Home button, as in HyperCard, or of the mapping features of Storyspace, a wreader who can gain an instant, transcendent perspective of the wreading trajectory. This control over experience, exemplified by the “function” of transcendence to detach the observer from the phenomena being observed, reminds one of the controls over the natural environment enabled by the calculus of Leibnitz and Newton, a control that enables astronomers to track the motions of the planets or comets forwards and backwards in time and gunnery officers to estimate the trajectory of shells in order to maximize their “effect.” So, all contingencies available to the wreader become domesticated by his or her complete control of the process of choosing direction. (1994, 274)

Since 1994 when Landow theorised the hybrid figure of the wreader, wreaders have been keeping up with fast, developing technologies. They respond to the writer, they may write, they may become the protagonists of their own storyline, they might even monopolise the blog. Each blog has its faithful followers, who may become co-authors by adding commentaries. As a result, blogs may be collectively authored to begin with, with several people, or just anyone, having the privilege to post.

In contrast with Adichie’s female character, Ifemelu, Eddo-Lodge engages in conversations with her audience. In 2014, her blogpost “Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race” became viral and caught the attention of the publishing house industry. If on the one hand, this direct dialogue with readers is a distinctive feature of digital communication, on the other hand, it also emphasises the ephemerality of the medium. Due to contractual constraints with Bloomsbury – her publishing house –, she erased the post and allegedly transcribed it word by word on publishing print media.

Eddo-Lodge's weblog or blog was a frequently updated webpage. Her last post is on George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis that took place on May 25, 2020. Her blogposts typically consist of fairly brief posts presented and archived in reverse-chronological order. They are primarily textual, but they also include photos and other multimedia content. Most are interlinked providing links to other sites on the Internet. Her blog was interactive, in that she invited and posted commentary on their contents.

As blogs are one of the latest forms of online communication to have gained widespread popularity, it can be said that Eddo-Lodge has managed to succeed. Her print media blogpost became an editorial event selling more than one million copies and in 2022 it was republished containing an additional essay on the consequences of the pandemic especially on marginalised, invisible human beings.

Warsan Shire is another digital native who has familiarised herself with up-to-date technology and new media since an early age. Shire is among a generation of young poets who have attracted a larger audience by initially publishing their poetry online. Shire also exhibits an activist commitment relying on the Facebook platform to reach Somali refugees and support their cause along with her advocacy on behalf of the African women feminist movement. In late 2013, the virtual visibility gained on the World Wide Web helped her receive the title of "London's Youth Poet Laureate". Besides her social and political engagement, Shire has been exploring alternative ways of storytelling. Her literary output has been composed for a variety of media, ranging from print distribution to audio recordings to online circulation. "Home", her work analysed in chapter 5, focuses on migrants' journey and the reasons compelling them to leave their country of origin.

The recent performance-centred perspective enabled by the use of widespread communications technologies and readily available platforms on the Internet allow for a growing awareness of the role of individual creativity. Shire's reworked and adapted conversations on the concept of home meets Rettberg's definition of kinetic poetry:

Kinetic and interactive poetry provide clear examples of genres and practices that flow comparatively seamlessly from twentieth-century avant-garde writing movements into a technologically mediated present. The digital poetry corpus weaves various traditions ranging from concrete poetry to sound poetry and animated typography into a multimodal tapestry of new forms. We can see in digital poetry the aesthetic effects of a kind of democratization of media as poets access digital tools that enable them to engage with modalities beyond text and

new methods to explore the poetic limits and capabilities of images, sound, time-based poetics, programmed processes, and interactivity. (151)

Shire's kinetic poetry may be defined as a cross-artistic form at the intersection of literature, visual arts, cinema, animation, and technology, across the Internet. This intersection suggests a transmedia approach to storytelling, and this mode, as argued by Álvaro Seiça – Portuguese scholar in media studies –, “does not place kinetic poetry at the heart of computational media and as a digital literature-specific genre, but rather as a temporal form that is media and language-specific, but also culturally and politically situated” (173). In regard to “Home”, the YouTube platform is the medium that delivers the forced migration experience in verses and in a language that exhibits its activist commitment.

The fourth algorithm explored in chapter 6 is arguably the more complex as “Refugee Tales” was set up as a digital project that along the way has crossed over into the Internet to temporally appropriate the space of the hostile environment and reach a state of fixity and of completion via four printed volumes. As David Herd puts it in his Afterword to Volume IV, “Refugee Tales” is primarily a spatial project, concerned with borders and boundaries, seeking “to extend the space in which such stories can be properly heard” (2021, 152).

The “Refugee Tales” project is a sign of empowered new media which strives to mobilise individuals who then lend their faces and voices in order to direct attention to marginalised human beings prevented from entering Western societies. In so doing, this online community fosters citizenship, social cohesion, political engagement, and visibility through digital media (Stephansen 1-2).

In this context of migration narratives, it may be argued that the digital engagement involves two agencies: authors and activists who commit themselves to the questions of migration and racism, and migrants who are given an opportunity to show up and take a stand.

The authors introduced in this study have managed to direct attention to issues of migration and racism relying on media and digital technologies, but they remain committed to more traditional print-based platforms, whether they be Adichie's, Eddo-Lodge's or Shire's book publications or the activists involved in the “Refugee Tales” project and their attachment to oral storytelling alongside the printed collections of

testimonials by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. They consciously rely on “the prevailing standards of expression” (as put forth by Barthes) because the Internet, which has become dominant in our daily lives, accelerates and enlarges the scale of previous human functions along with accelerating the transit of information in space and time. Nonetheless, this represents only the first but crucial stage of the process of welcoming, inclusion, right and fair treatment of human beings who are in search of a place to call home in our Western societies.

8. Works Cited

Primary Sources:

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*, Anchor Books, 2014 (2013).
- Bulawayo, No Violet. *We Need New Names*, Chatto & Windus 2013.
- Cole, Teju. *Every day is for the thief*, Faber & Faber, 2015 (2007).
- Cole, Teju, *Hafiz*, WEB/TWITTER – X, 2014,
<https://www.theverge.com/2014/1/8/5288234/teju-cole-orchestrates-his-twitter-followers-into-a-collective-short>. Accessed December 14 2023.
- Frost, Robert. *The Death of the Hired Man*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44261/the-death-of-the-hired-man>.
Accessed December 14 2023.
- Eddo-Lodge, Reni. *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. Bloomsbury, 2018 (2017).
- Herd, David and Pincus, Anna (eds.). *Refugee Tales*, Comma Press, 2016.
- Herd, David and Pincus, Anna (eds.). *Refugee Tales II*, Comma Press, 2017.
- Herd, David and Pincus, Anna (eds.). *Refugee Tales III*, Comma Press, 2019.
- Herd, David and Pincus, Anna (eds.). *Refugee Tales IV*, Comma Press, 2021.
- Levy, Andrea. *Small Island*, Headline Publishing Group, 2004.
- Selvon, Sam. *Lonely Londoners*. Penguin Modern Classics, 2006 (1956).
- Shire, Warsan. *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*, Flipped Eye Publishing Limited, 2011.
- Shire, Warsan. *Home*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo>, 2017.
- Shire, Warsan. *Benedici la figlia cresciuta da una voce nella testa*, translated by Paola Splendore, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, Fandango 2023 (2022).
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir*, Vintage Books, 2013 (2012).
- <https://www.gdwg.org.uk/>.
- <https://www.refugeetales.org/>.

Digital Criticism:

- Alleyne, Brian. *Radicals Against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics*. Berg Publishers, 2002.
- Baldry, Anthony and Thibault, Paul J. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis*. Equinox, 2006.
- Blood, Rebecca. “Weblogs: a history and perspective” *Rebecca’s Pocket*, 7 September 2000, http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html. Accessed 13 November 2023.
- Burgess, Jean and Green, Joshua. *YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture – Digital Media and Society Series*. Polity Press, 2009.
- Byrne, Brendan. “Retweeting Fiction”, <https://rhizome.org/>, April 23, 2014, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/apr/23/tweeting-fiction/>. Accessed December 14 2023.
- Cappello, Angelo Piero (ed.). *Matematica della Letteratura*. Mimesis Edizioni, 2021.
- Cole, Teju. *Known and Strange Things, Essays*. Random House, 2016.
- Cole, Teju. “A Conversation with Aleksandar Hemon”. *Known and Strange Things, Essays*. Random House, 2016, pp. 78-92.
- Concilio, Carmen. “New York: A Woman’s Dream”. Edited by Tiziana Caponio *et al. World Wide Women: Globalizzazione, Generi, Linguaggi*, Vol. 3, CIRSDe, 2011, pp. 77-85.
- Concilio, Carmen. “Riscritture del Mediterraneo: Beirut I love You: A Memoir di Zena El Khalil”. Edited by Cavone and Pontradolfo. *La scrittura romanzesca nella letteratura inglese*, Longo, 2012, pp. 55-67.
- Craig, Alan B. *Understanding Augmented Reality: Concepts and Applications*, Morgan Kaufmann, 2013.
- Crawford, Kate and Joler Vladan. “Calculating Empires: A Genealogy of Technology and Power, 1500-2025”, Osservatorio Fondazione Prada, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYS8b9J7Fto>
- Crisan, Camelia and Bortun, Dumitru. “Exploring the Potential of Digital Stories as Tools for Advocacy”. *Digital Storytelling, Format and Content*, edited by Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins, 2017, pp. 155-159.

- Dean, Jodi. "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics". *Cultural Politics*, Vol. 1, 1, Berg, 2005, pp. 51-74.
- Dean, Jodi. *Blog Theory. Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Polity, 2010.
- Dennis, Michael Aaron. "blog". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 Jan. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/blog>. Accessed 16 January 2024.
- Dunford, Mark and Jenkins, Tricia. (eds). *Digital Storytelling, Format and Content*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Elliot, Anthony (ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Celebrity Studies*, Routledge, 2018.
- Flew, Terry. *New Media*. Oxford UP, 2014.
- Funkhouser, Christopher. *New Directions in Digital Poetry (International Texts in Critical Media Aesthetics)*. Continuum, 2012.
- Gamson, Joshua. "The Unwatched Life Is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of the Ordinary in Celebrity Culture". *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 126:4, 2011, pp. 1061-1069, [doi:10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.1061](https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.1061).
- García Landa, José Angel. "Linkterature: From Word to Web or: Literature in the Internet / Internet as Literature / Literature as Internet / Internet in Literature". *SSRN Electronic Journal*, July 2006, pp. 1-26.
- García Landa, José Angel. "Literature in Internet". *The Texture of Internet, Netlinguistics in Progress*, edited by Posteguillo, Santiago / Esteve, María José / Gea-Valor Lluïsa, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 143-159.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Runaway World. How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*, Routledge, 2000 (1999).
- Grigar, Dene and O'Sullivan, James. *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities: Contexts, Forms, & Practices*, Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Guarracino, Serena. "Writing «so raw and true»: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *Between*, IV: 8, 2014, pp. 1-27.
- Hammond, Adam. *Literature in the Digital Age. An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory*, Routledge, 1992.

- Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Media Consumers in a Digital Age. Exploring Participatory Culture*, NYU Press, 2006.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Transmedia Storytelling 101*. March 21, 2007.
https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.
Accessed 14 June 2023.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, The MIT Press, 2009.
- Jenkins, Henry. “What Happened Before YouTube”. *YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture – Digital Media and Society Series*, 2009, pp.109-125.
- Jerslev, Anne and Mortensen, Mette. “Celebrity in the Social Media Age: Renegotiating the Public and the Private”. *Routledge Handbook of Celebrity Studies*, edited by Anthony Elliot, Routledge, 2018, pp. 157-174.
- Kökcü, Melih. “Global Transformation of the Public Sphere in the Digital World: From Public to Silent Sphere?”. *Academia Letters*, Article 3018, 2021, pp. 1-4.
<https://doi.org/10.20935/AL3018>.
- Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen Theo. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Landow, George P. *Hyper/Text/Theory*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.
- Landow, George P. *Hypertext 3.0 – Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, Johns Hopkins UP, 2006.
- Lundbly, Knut (ed.) *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories, Self-Representation in New Media*. Peter Lang, 2016, (2008).
- Macho, Thomas. “Vision und Visage: Überlegungen zur Faszinationsgeschichte der Medien”. *Inszenierte Imagination. Beiträge zu einer historischen Anthropologie der Medien*, Müller-Funk, Wolfgang et al. (eds.) Springer, 1996, pp. 87-108.
- Macho, Thomas. “Second-Order Animals: Cultural Techniques of Identity and Identification”. *Cultural Techniques*, edited by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young / Ilinca Iurascu / Jussi Parikka, Sage Journals, Vol. 30 (6) 2013, pp. 30-47. DOI: 10.1177/0263276413499189
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. University of Toronto Press, 1962.

- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Routledge, 2001, (1964).
- McPherson, Ella. "Advocacy Organizations' Evaluation of Social Media Information for NGO Journalism: The Evidence and Engagement Models." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59 (1), 2015, pp.124-48.
[DOI: org/10.1177/0002764214540508](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764214540508).
- Mitchell, William John Thomas. *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics*. The University of Chicago Press, 2018, (2015).
- Pedersen, Sarah. "A Comparison of the Blogging Practices of UK and US Bloggers." *Proceedings ELPUB2007 Conference on Electronic Publishing*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37676897>, pp. 1-11.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Foreword". *Mediating Multiculturalism Digital Storytelling and the Everyday Ethnic*, edited by Daniella Trimboli, Anthem Press, 2020, pp. xi-xii.
- Prensky, Marc. "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants." *On the Horizon, The International Journal of Learning Futures* 9 (5), MCB University Press, 2001, pp. 1-6 <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>.
- Rettberg, Scott. *Electronic Literature*, Polity Press, 2020, (2019).
- Sandoval, Chela and Latorre, Guisela. "Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color". Edited by Anna Everett. *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning, Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 81-108.
<https://doi.org/10.1162/dmal.9780262550673.081>.
- Seiça, Álvaro. "Kinetic Poetry". *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities: Contexts, Forms, & Practices*. Edited by Dene Grigar and James O'Sullivan, Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. 173-202.
- Stephansen, Hilde C. "Understanding Citizen Media as Practice: Agents, Processes, Publics". *Citizen Media and Public Spaces*, Monica Baker et al. (ed.), Routledge, 2016, pp. 1-17. DOI:10.4324/9781315 726632-2.
- Verma, Rishabh. *What is Blogosphere & Who coined the term Blogosphere?*, February 23, 2022, <https://mixwithmarketing.com/2022/02/what-is-blogosphere-who-coined-the-term-blogosphere/>. Accessed 16 January 2024.

- Zinnatullina, Zulfia. Davletbaeva, Diana and Mukhametshina, Reseda. “Literature and Cinema: Ways of Interaction in the 21st Century”, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 10 (4), 2019, pp. 357-369, www.jsser.org.
- <https://www.amnesty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/home-by-warsan-shire.pdf>. Accessed 14 November 2023.
- <https://eliterature.org/>. Accessed 29 December 2023.
- <http://www.emergencymilano.it/2016/12/25/casa-di-warsan-shire/>. Accessed 24 October 2023.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/mar/16/top-30-young-people-digital-media-nos-30-11>. Accessed 22 November 2023.
- <https://www.theroot.com/30-viral-voices-under-30-1790876670>. Accessed 15 November 2023.
- <https://ajr.org/2014/07/28/5-twitterers/>. Accessed 4 December 2023.

Humanities and Arts Criticism:

- Aguh, Uche. <https://ucheaguh.com/>. Accessed 24 November 2023.
- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality, the New Critical Idiom*. Routledge, 2011 (2000).
- Andersson, Ruben. *Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe*, University of California Press, 2014.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*, Chicago University Press, 1998 (1958).
- Arendt, Hannah (ed.). *Illuminations Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zoh, Schocken Books, (1968), 2007.
- Arnold, Markus. “Transdisciplinary Research (Transdisciplinarity)”. *Encyclopedia of Creativity, Invention, Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, edited by Elias G. Carayannis, Springer, 2013, pp. 1819-1828. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3858-8_337.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-places Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, translated by John Howe, Verso, (1992) 1995.
- Bakhtin, Michail. *Estetica e romanzo*. Translated by Clara Strada Janovič, Einaudi, 2001 (1975).

- Barthes, Roland. *Il grado zero della scrittura, seguito da Nuovi saggi critici, Le degré zéro de l'écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques*. Translated by Giuseppe Bartolucci, Renzo Guidieri, Leonella Prato Caruso, Rosetta Loy Provera, Einaudi, 2003 (1953).
- Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text*. Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, HarperCollins Publishers, 1977.
- Barthes, Roland. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives". *Image Music Text*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1977, pp. 79-124.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author". *Image Music Text*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1977, pp. 142-148.
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text". *Image Music Text*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1977, pp. 155-164.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Translated by Dennis Redmond, 2005 (1940) http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses_on_History.html. Accessed 14 July 2023.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov". *Illuminations Essays and Reflections*, Hannah Arendt (ed.), translated by Harry Zoh, Schocken Books, (1968), 2007, pp. 83-109.
- Berger, John Peter. *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, 1972.
- Burton, Laini. "The spectacle of anonymity: how the mask became a way for celebrities to control their image". *The Conversation: Academic rigour, journalistic flair*, January 3, 2023, pp. 1-4.
<https://theconversation.com/europe>. Accessed 14 July 2023.
- Carrara, Giuseppe. *Storie a vista. Retorica e poetiche del fototesto*. Mimesis, 2020
- Clark, Thomas A. *In Praise of Walking*. ArtWorks, 2016.
<https://poem4us.blogspot.com/2012/07/in-praise-of-walking.html>. Accessed 15 December 2023.
- Dabbeni, Gianpaolo. "Influenze Latine Sulla Cultura dell'Inghilterra nel Medioevo". *Aurea Latina Hereditas: Influenze latine nella cultura e nelle lingue europee. Come sopravvive il latino nel Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, in Alpe-Adria e in altre nazioni europee*, Bonvecchio, Claudio et al. (eds.), EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2004, pp. 25-47, <https://www.openstarts.units.it/>.

- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall, University of California Press, 1988 (1984).
- De Luca Picione, Raffaele *et al.* “Borders, Movement, and Being-in-Between an interview with Thomas Nail”. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis and Education: Subject, Action & Society*, Vol. II (2), 2022, pp. 2-6.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32111/SAS.2022.2.2.1>.
- Ellsworth, Marcus. *Art as Activism*, TEDxUTChattanooga TEDxTalks, 2004.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLg8LMK_Ct4 Accessed 31 July 2023.
- Ensler, Eve. *Politics, Power and Passion* 2011,
<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/12/02/opinion/magazine-global-agenda-big-question.html>. Accessed 31 July 2023.
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Open Book Publishers, 2012,
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0025>.
- Habermas, Jürgen. “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)”. Translated by Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox, *New German Critique*, 3, 1974, pp. 49-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/487737>.
- Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, Edward Arnold, 1978.
- Kimmel, Michael Scott. “Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity”, *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States an Integrated Study*, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg and Soniya Munshi, Worth Publishers Macmillan Learning, 2010 (2007), pp. 59-70.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne University Press, 1979 (1969).
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Alterity and Transcendence*. Translated by Michael B. Smith, The Athlone Press, 1999 (1995).
- Lucero-Montano, Alfredo. “On Walter Benjamin’s Historical Materialism”. *Astrolabio*. Revista internacional de filosofía, Núm. 10, 2010, pp. 125-131.
<https://raco.cat/index.php/Astrolabio/issue/view/14803>.
- Maurice, Alice. “Face and Mask: A Double History by Hans Belting” *ASAP Journal the open-access platform*, August 17, 2017, pp. 1-5.

<https://asapjournal.com/face-and-mask-a-double-history-by-hans-beltingalice-maurice/>.

- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. *Phénoménologie de la perception* translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012 (1945).
- Milohnić, Aldo. *Artivism*, Translated by Olga Vuković “Artivism”, 2005, n. 3, <https://transversal.at/transversal/1203/milohnic/en?hl=Aldo%20Milohnic>.
originally published in the *Performing Arts Journal* Maska, Ljubljana, XX: 1-2 (90-91), spring 2005, pp. 15-25.
- Nissani, Moti. “Fruits, Salads, and Smoothies: A Working Definition of Interdisciplinarity”. *Journal of Educational Thought*, vol. 29, No. 2, August, 1995. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23767672>.
- Otterson, Joe. “Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira’s ‘Americanah’ Adaptation Ordered to Series at HBO Max”. *Variety*, online edition, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/lupita-nyongo-danai-gurira-americanah-series-hbo-max-1203335299/>.
- Otterson, Joe. “Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira’s ‘Americanah’ Series Not Moving Forward at HBO Max (EXCLUSIVE)”. *Variety*, online edition, 2019. <https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/lupita-nyongo-danai-gurira-americanah-series-hbo-max-2-1234806145/>.
- Raciti, Andrea. “Il Fantoccio e il Nano sullo Stato di Eccezione in Walter Benjamin”. *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XXII, 2020, 1, pp. 155-180. DOI: 10.13137/1825-5167/30628.
- Rylance, Rick. *Roland Barthes*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994.
- Schelle, Karl Gottlob. *L’art de se promener*. Translated by Pierre Deshusses, *et al.*, Paris, 1996 (1802),
- Schmitz, Dennis and Aguh, Uche. *Americanah – Concept Trailer*. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlvf7acStiA>.
- Schmitz, Dennis and Aguh, Uche. *Americanah – Full Concept Film*. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2aDFZRAAtqM>.
- Stephen, Leslie. “In Praise of Walking”. *Studies of a Biographer Volume III* Leslie Stephen (ed.), Duckworth & Company, 1902, pp. 254-285.

- Weiwei, Ai. *Politics, Power and Passion* in “The New York Times”, 2011, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/12/02/opinion/magazine-global-agenda-big-question.html>. Accessed 31 July 2023.
- Willis, Ellen. “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism”, *Social Text. The 60’s without Apology*, No. 9/10, 1984, Duke University Press, pp. 96-97.
- <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>. Accessed 15 January 2023.
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>. Accessed 15 January 2023.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Nobel_laureates_in_Literature. Accessed 20 July 2023.
- <https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/rs-manifesto>. Accessed 20 July 2023.

Postcolonial Criticism:

- Achebe, Chinua. *Hopes and Impediments – Selected Essays*, Anchor Books, 1990 (1988).
- Achebe, Chinua. “The Novelist as a Teacher”. *Hopes and Impediments – Selected Essays*, Anchor Books, 1990 (1965), pp. 40-46.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Home and Exile*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Achebe, Chinua. “The Empire Fights Back”. *Home and Exile*, Oxford University Press, pp. 37-72.
- Achebe, Chinua. “Today, the Balance of Stories”. *Home and Exile*, Oxford University Press, pp. 73-105.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. www.chimamanda.com.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Home”, www.chimamanda.com.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. Official YouTube Channel for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <https://www.youtube.com/@chimamandangoziadichie6181>.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “The Danger of a Single Story”, July 2009, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “We should all be feminists”, December 2012, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists.

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, Beyoncé. “***Flawless”, *Beyoncé*, 2013
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyuUWOnS9BY>.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Personal Story, Notes on Grief”. *The New Yorker*.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*, librairie mollat,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rh5qNYU-_jI.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie About Love and Hair* | SVT, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KliB5hSCfZc>.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *The Power of Storytelling*. INBOUND annual event, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq27Ha07RHw>.
- Ashcroft, Bill. “The body and the performance: Introduction”, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, Routledge, 2006 (1995), pp. 289-290.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. *Post-Colonial Studies, The Key Concepts* second edition, Routledge, 2007 (2000).
- Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-colonial Transformation*. Routledge, 2001.
- Ayoinmotion. *Americanah* (Ifemelu), 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GTJ93wWjMo>.
- Bascaramurty, Dakshana. “Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on living and teaching feminism”, *The Globe and Mail*, March 6, 2017, online version.
- Bausells, Marta and Maeve, Shearlaw. “Poets speak out for refugees: ‘No one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark’” *The Guardian*, September 16, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/16/poets-speak-out-for-refugees-> .
- Bhabha, Homi K. “The World and the Home”, *Social Text*, 31/32 *Third World and Post-Colonial Issues*, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 141-153,
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/466222>
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Bhavnani, Reena; Mirza, Heidi Safia; Meeto, Veena. *Tackling the Roots of Racism: Lessons for Success*. Policy Press, 2005.

- Campbell, Rasheeda. “Meet Ayoinmotion”. *The Official Black Magazine*, online edition, 2022. <https://www.theofficialblackmagazine.com/poet-and-activist-ayoinmotion/>. Accessed 7 September 2023.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “Foreword”. *The Origin of Others*. Harvard University Press, 2017, pp. vii-xvii.
- De Michelis, Lidia Anna. “Reclaiming Human Movement, Restor(y)ing Hope”. *From the European South* 5, 2019, pp. 27-42, <https://www.fesjournal.eu>.
- Dingwaney, Anuradha and Maier, Carol. *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.
- Eddo-Lodge, Reni. <https://renieddolodge.co.uk/>. Accessed 18 January 2024.
- [Eddo-Lodge, Reni. https://twitter.com/renireni](https://twitter.com/renireni). Accessed 18 January 2024.
- [Eddo-Lodge, Reni. *Reni Eddo-Lodge: Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, Foyles, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vJZdeSqfFY.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vJZdeSqfFY)
- [Eddo-Lodge, Reni. *Reni Eddo-Lodge on race, social injustice and quotas*, Channel 4 News, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEG-U4TnuDM.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEG-U4TnuDM)
- [Eddo-Lodge, Reni. *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race Interview with Reni Eddo-Lodge, The Female Lead*, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xg6Qz7ztqew.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xg6Qz7ztqew)
- Eddo-Lodge, Reni. *Women and Power with Reni Eddo-Lodge In Conversation with Nancy Durrant*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRF-WLIdMvk>. October 17, 2022.
- Egbunike, Louisa Uchum. “Narrating the Past, Orality, History & the Production of Knowledge in the Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”. *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, James Currey, 2017, pp. 15-29.
- Emenyonu, Ernest N. (ed.) *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, James Currey, 2017.
- Evans-Bush, Katy. *Poet Warsan Shire*. <https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/>. Accessed June 3 2023.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, 2008 (1952).

- Feinberg, Walter. “Affirmative Action”. Hugh LaFollette (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Practical Ethics*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 272-299, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199284238.003.0012>. Accessed July 5 2023.
- Gianni, Daniele and Alvisè Armellini. “Migrant shipwreck in Italy kills at least 59, including 12 children”, February 27, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/27-dead-southern-italy-after-suspected-migrant-shipwreck-reports-2023-02-26/>. Accessed 27 April 2023.
- Glissant, Édouard. “History-Histories-Stories”, translated by J. Michael Dash, *Caribbean Discourse. Selected Essays*, University Press of Virginia, 1996 (1989), pp. 61-95.
- Hall, Stuart. “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” (1991), David Morley (ed.), *Essential Essays, Volume 2 Identity and Diaspora*, Duke University Press, 2018, pp. 63-82.
- Herd, David. “Modern day Canterbury Tales refreshes Chaucer to tell the lost stories of refugees”. *The Conversation. Academic rigour, journalistic flair*. Published Online, June 16, 2015. <https://theconversation.com/modern-day-canterbury-theses-refreshes-chaucer-to-tell-the-lost-stories-of-refugees-42981>. Accessed 15 January 2023.
- Herd, David. “Calling for an End to Indefinite Detention: The Spatial Politics of Refugee Tales”. *From the European South* 5, 2019, pp. 15-25, <https://www.fesjournal.eu/>.
- Hough, Karen Latricia and Le Louvier, Kahina. “Secure Borders, Safe Haven”. *Perceptions Policy Brief*, May 2022. <https://www.perceptions.eu/>. Accessed 18 December 2023.
- Ivison, Duncan. “postcolonialism”. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 20 May. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/postcolonialism>. Accessed 18 July 2023.
- Kahn, Mattie. “Let the Poet Warsan Shire Tell You About the ‘Bravest Girl in the World’”. *Glamour* online magazine, 2019. <https://www.glamour.com/story/warsan-shire-brave-girl-rising-tessa-thompson>. Accessed 23 September 2023.

- Kellaway, Kate. "Interview: John Berger: 'If I'm a storyteller it's because I listen'". *The Guardian*, 30 October 2016, online newspaper.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/30/john-berger-at-90-interview-storyteller>. Accessed 7 November 2023.
- Ledent, Bénédicte. *Caryl Phillips*. Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Ledent, Bénédicte. "Introduction: Thinking Caryl Phillips Out of the Box." *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 48 no. 3, 2017, p. 1-11. Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ari.2017.0034>.
- Malkki, Liisa H. "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1995, pp. 495-523.
- McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Mehta, Suketu. *This Land is Our Land. An Immigrant's Manifesto*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Origin of Others*. Foreword by Ta-Nehisi Coates, Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Morrison, Toni. "The Foreigner's Home". *The Origin of Others*. Harvard University Press, 2017, pp. 93-111.
- Nail, Thomas. *The Figure of the Migrant*, Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Nail, Thomas. *Theory of the Border*, Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*, Pearson India, 2008.
- Nguyen, Vinh. "Refugeetude: When Does a Refugee Stop Being a Refugee". *Social Text*, Volume 37 (2), Duke University Press, 2019, pp. 109-131.
- Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Nelson, 1965.
- Okeowo, Alexis. "The Writing Life of Warsan Shire, a Young, Prolific Poet", *The New Yorker*, October 21, 2015. <https://www.newyorker.com/>. Accessed 18 June 2023.
- Okeowo, Alexis. "Warsan Shire's Portraits of Somalis in Exile. The poet's new collection melds verse and reportage to capture voices of the Somali diaspora.", *The New Yorker*, February 14 & 21, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/>. Accessed 18 June 2023.

- Pakenham, Thomas. *The scramble for Africa White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912*, Perennial, 2003 (1991).
- Patel, Ian Sanjay. *We're Here Because You Were There – Immigration and the End of Empire*, Verso, 2022 (2001).
- Phillips, Caryl. *The European Tribe*. Vintage Books, 2000 (1987).
- Phillips, Caryl. "Introduction". *The European Tribe*. Vintage Books, 2000 (1987), pp. 1-9.
- Phillips, Caryl. "In the Ghetto". *The European Tribe*. Vintage Books, 2000 (1987), pp. 52-55.
- Phillips, Caryl. "How much more of this will we take?". *The European Tribe*. Vintage Books, 2000 (1987), pp. 92-99.
- Phillips, Caryl. "Afterword to the Vintage Edition". *The European Tribe*. Vintage Books, 2000 (1987), pp. 130-134.
- Phillips, Caryl. *The Atlantic Sound*, Vintage Random House, 2001 (2000).
- Phillips, Caryl. "Epilogue: Exodus". *The Atlantic Sound*, Vintage Random House, 2001 (2000), pp. 214-221.
- Phillips, Caryl. *A New World Order – Selected Essay*. Secker & Warburg, 2001.
- Phillips, Caryl. "Introduction". *A New World Order – Selected Essay*. Secker & Warburg, 2001, pp. 1-6.
- Phillips, Caryl. *Color Me English – Migration and Belonging Before and After 9/11*. The New Press, 2011.
- Phillips, Caryl. "Color Me English". *Color Me English – Migration and Belonging Before and After 9/11*. The New Press, 2011, pp. 3-17.
- Phillips, Caryl. "Necessary Journeys (2004)". *Color Me English – Migration and Belonging Before and After 9/11*. The New Press, 2011, pp.123-131.
- Phillips, Caryl. "John La Rose (2007)". *Color Me English – Migration and Belonging Before and After 9/11*. The New Press, 2011, pp. 147-153.
- Pitts, Johny. *Afropean Notes from Black Europe*. Penguin Books, 2020 (2019).
- Pulitano, Elivra. "Interview: Migrant Journeys: A Conversation with Caryl Phillips". *Atlantic Studies*, Taylor & Francis online 2009, pp. 1-27.

<http://www.carylphillips.com/selected-interviews.html>. Accessed 5 January 2023.

- Ponzanesi, Sandra and Colpiani, Gianmaria. "Introduction: Europe in Transition". Edited by Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpiani, *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe. Context, Practices and Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016.
- Popescu, Lucy. (ed.), *A Country of Refuge*, Unbound, 2016.
- Popescu, Lucy. "Introduction". Edited by Lucy Popescu, *A Country of Refuge*, Unbound, 2016, pp. 1-6.
- Purchase, Sean. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, Palgrave, 2006.
- Quayson, Ato. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?*. Polity Press, 2005 (2000).
- Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. Granta Books, 2001.
- Saro-Wiwa, Noo. "A Time to Lie". *A Country of Refuge* edited by Lucy Popescu, Unbound, 2016, pp. 125-132.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Translated by Terry McWilliams, Routledge, 2006 (1964).
- Shire, Warsan. *Brave Girl Rising*. 2019
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05Rp8YEMe9M>.
- Shukla, Nikesh. *The Good Immigrant*. Unbound, 2017 (2016).
- Shukla, Nikesh. "Editor's Note". *The Good Immigrant*. Unbound, 2017 (2016), unnumbered pages.
- Sorgoni, Barbara. *Antropologia delle migrazioni*, Carocci Editore, 2022.
- Tunca, Daria. "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as Chinua Achebe's (Unruly) Literary Daughter: The Past, Present, and Future of "Adichebean" Criticism", *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Winter 2018), pp. 107-126, doi: [10.2979/reseafrilite.49.4.08](https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.49.4.08).
- Tunca, Daria. (ed.), *Conversations with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 2020.

- Tunca, Daria. “The Novelist as Therapist: A Conversation with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”. Edited by Daria Tunca, *Conversations with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 2020, pp. 182-200.
- Ture, Kwame and Hamilton, Charles V. *Black Power. The Politics of Liberation in America*. Vintage e-Books, 1992 (1967).
- UNHCR, THE UN REFUGEES AGENCY. Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Geneva, UNHCR Communications and Public Information Service. 2011, pp. 4-5.
<https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Zakaria, Rafia. “Warsan Shire: The Somali-British Poet Quoted by Beyoncé in Lemonade” *The Guardian*, 27 April, 2016,
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/apr/27/warsan-shire-young-poet-laureate-beyonce-lemonade-london>
- Zimmermann, Klaus F. “Migrant Ethnic Identity: Concept and Policy Implications”, *Discussion Paper IZA*, no. 3056, 2007.
- Wa Thiong’o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey, 2005 (1981).
- Walcott, Derek. “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?”. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Feb., 1974), pp. 3-13.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/174997>.
- Yamazaki Mari And Owen Fran. “Bloomsbury will publish a new and updated edition of Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, which has now sold more than a million copies for Bloomsbury across editions, on 21 July 2022.” <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/connect/latest-news/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race-one-million-sold/>. Accessed 15 January 2024.
- Yates, Kieran. “On Going Home”. *The Good Immigrant*, edited by Nikesh Shukla Unbound, 2017 (2016), pp. 108-118.
- https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2024/02/23/il-naufragio-di-cutro-dagli-archivi-dellansa_4dde03c8-db5a-42b4-b4be-e5a5af3e4b33.html. Accessed 24 October 2023.

- <https://aviddetention.org.uk/welcome-avid>. Accessed 13 January 2024.
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-24375551>. Accessed 15 July 2023.
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-22358337>. Accessed 15 July 2024.
- <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/home-warsan-shire> “‘Home’ by Warsan Shire,” last updated January 5, 2017. Accessed 20 November 2023.
- <https://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/calculating-empires/>. Accessed 26 April 2024.
- <https://kentrefugeehelp.org.uk/>. Accessed 17 December 2023.
- <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>. Accessed 17 December 2023.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-families-apart>. Accessed 28 May 2023.
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9291483/Theresa-May-interview-Were-going-to-give-illegal-migrants-a-really-hostile-reception>. Accessed 28 May 2023.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2016/jun/24/migration-ali-smith-david-herd-and-wolfgang-bauer-listen-for-the-true-story-books-podcast>. Accessed 31 May 2023.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unless_the_Water_Is_Safer_than_the_Land. Accessed 20 July 2023.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cosby_Show. Accessed 15 January 2024.
- <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. Accessed 15 January 2024.