
Are Writers Still “Righting?”: A Moral Perspective to Adichie’s *Americanah*

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Abstract

*While some scholars in the past believed that art should be a vehicle for moral control, some writers and critics in recent times appear to be saying that literary works should only entertain. This shift is reflected in the publication of literary works with controversial moral contents and a seeming lack of moral critique of them. This study, therefore, makes a case for a moral criticism in African fictional studies through an insightful moral critique of Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah*. The critical offerings of scholars such as T.S Eliot and especially Plato were referred to and the tenets of the moral concept namely: restraint, discipline and order were extracted from them, with emphasis placed on restraint. Through a moral critique of the selected text, it is established that the novelist does not apply restraint in describing sex scenes and seems not to have adequately punished sexually immoral characters in the novel. While this could be a trend in the post-modern period, this study holds the opinion that the novel *Americanah* could be a negative influence on some readers.*

Introduction

Over the years, African literature has adjusted to accommodate the socio-political and economic realities in Africa. At its oral stage, African literature, in addition to the entertainment it offered, also performed “integrative function” (Abiola Irele 2009: 1). At the pre-

colonial stage of African literature, writers used their works to affirm African traditional values. The novel, especially, was used to teach the whites who believed that Africans had no culture that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from them. Achebe, who arguably spearheaded this phase, has this to say:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially those set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them... Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind (Morning Yet on Creation Day 45).

Achebe believes in the utilitarian function of literature. He is of the view that “the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done” (45). Other novels in this stage of African prose fiction include Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, Camara Laye's *Radiance of the King* among others. In these novels, the writers try to right the distorted view of the African people and cultures by presenting the greatness and beauty of the African continent.

The history of Africa is not complete without the account of colonialism. Nwahunanya (2003) asserts that “the period of colonialism constituted a crucial phase in the experience of West Africa” (67). At this point in the history of Africa, writers began to use their works to condemn imperialism. This was necessary because imperialism inhibited the growth of Africans, and so writers fought against it with their works, as it were. Novels such as Ngugi wa Thiong'O's *Weep Not Child*, Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* and of course, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* readily come to mind in this phase. With the fight for independence won, most African countries became sovereign

states. Sadly, the much expected freedom deluded the masses; the paradise lost was far from being regained. This condition gave rise to a category of novel sometimes referred to as post-independence novels. Focusing on this phase of history, writers began to use their works to expose the bad governance of their individual countries. Novels like Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* among others served this purpose too. This brief overview of the African prose narratives was done to make a statement to the function of literature in Africa. Literature has always served as a response to the communal needs of the people at any point in time. However, with the observable shift in thematic preoccupation in the contemporary African novels, scholars are divided over the roles of the African writers. While some are of the opinion that like its oral precursor, African literature should be a veritable tool for social and moral control, others have argued that the African writer should not bear the burden of a teacher. This paper takes a stand on this issue.

Mediating in the Discordant Voices on Morality

“What is morality in any given time or place? It is what the majority then and there happen to like and immorality is what they dislike” (Alfred North Whitehead, Quoted in Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows*). Whitehead’s submission on morality is perhaps close to the school of thought that posits that what is good or bad is defined by a society or an individual. For this group, according to Joseph Omoregbe (1989), “different moral principles operate in different society(ies)” (66). This view of morality is also held by Normal Dahl (1996) who conceives morality as “something that is socially constructed or socially constructible” (87). The above submissions by Whitehead, Omoregbe and Dahl on morality are summed up in the theory of moral relativism. The extreme form of moral

relativism is individualism which claims that “morality is an individual affair, a personal matter which every man decides for himself” (Omogbe 1989:67). Hamlet in William Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* may have indulged in moral relativism when he says to his friends Guildenstern and Rosencrantz that “there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Act 2, Scene 2). But here is William Lawhead’s reservation on moral relativism:

If morality is based simply on individual or social opinion and there are no objective standards against which to measure that morality, as the relativist claims, then why would people be inclined to believe that their present morality is wrong? In other words, how might the relativist explain changes in people’s moral outlook? (2011:441).

Another objection made against moral relativism is by Robert Solomon and Jennifer Greene (1999) who insist “that not all values are relative”. (26) They further explain that even though different societies have different sets of customs, “there are some moral claims that we might assert to be universally valid” (26). If the relativist position is anything to go by, it becomes difficult to judge one society as better or worse than the other. The implication is that there will not be a standard against which different cultures are evaluated. Even in a culture, there are sub-cultures. Members of deadly cult groups, for instance, belong to a sub-culture within the main culture. The submission of ethical relativists implies that the nefarious activities of these cult groups should be tolerated as what is good or bad is defined by the society or individuals. But Lawhead (2011) submits that:

Minimally, a society needs some common standards of morality to which all its members are subject, to allow them to rise above the conflicts that are inevitable between

individual whims, idiosyncrasies, preferences, and desires (434).

At a time in history, America and some European countries saw nothing bad in slavery and slave trade, so they bought and sold blacks who were used as beasts of burdens in plantations. Such acts are presently considered not only immoral but also inhuman. It does not mean that slavery was moral in the past but immoral now, it is best to think that they had different perspective of the act then. A veritable argument in favour of moral relativism is that it promotes the spirit of tolerance, which creates room for peaceful coexistence. However, one can only tolerate from others behaviours that do not cause one harm or pain.

The school of thought opposed to moral relativism is moral absolutism. Proponents of this school hold the view that there is a single moral standard which is applicable to all men, at all times and in all circumstances (Agulanna Christopher. 2000:47). The claim of this group is that there are universally and objectively valued moral principles that are neither relative to the individual nor to the society (Lawhead 2011:427). This school of thought does not agree that morality (what is good or bad) is like the taste of food, which is different from one mouth to another. Hence, there is an ultimate moral standard against which an individual and the society weigh their actions. Lawhead distinguishes between ethical objectivism and ethical absolutism. The absolutist, he explains, claims that not only are moral principles objective, but they cannot be overridden and there cannot be any exceptions to them.

On the other hand, the ethical objectivist could say that a rule like "do not tell lies" is an objective moral principle, but that this principle can be overridden when it conflicts with a more pressing obligation such as saving a life (2011:443). Lawhead seems to put an argument against absolutism when he says:

Even though other societies have moral codes very different from ours, many of them seem to flourish and provide a basis for human happiness. Doesn't the existence of such societies suggest that there are no moral absolutes, but that morality is a matter of what works for a particular society? (453).

To mediate between moral relativism and moral absolutism, it should be submitted that while individuals and societies have the right to view matters the way it works for them, there are principles that apply to everyone no matter where they come from. Agulanna's submission on moral universals seems to agree with Lawhead's conception of ethical objectivism. Agulanna(2000) submits that moral universal entails "that there are acceptable standards by which we determine what is right or wrong in *particular cases*" (Emphasis added.147-158).

So far, we have looked at various ideas of the concept of morality. While some schools of thought believe that an individual or society determines for itself what is right or wrong, some are of the opinion that an act is either wrong or not in itself, irrespective of how an individual or a society sees it. What appears to be a common ground on morality according to Solomon and Greene (1999) is that it "has to do specifically with rules of conduct" (1).The contentions remain: Who has the right to decide whether an action is good or bad? Is there an ultimate standard for what is right and wrong?

This paper agrees with the concept of moral universals which entails that there is a general moral standard against which an action is adjudged either good or bad, in particular cases. In Africa for instance, such standard of morality cannot be discussed outside the society and a sense of a divine being. This position is

strengthened if one considers that the African society is a highly religious and communal one.

Recognizing the role of the society in determining what is morally right, Aristotle, in his *The Nichomachean Ethics*, asserts that "moral excellence is the result of habit or *custom*" (Emphasis added.⁸³) The concept of morality in Africa takes into account the society and a sense of a supreme being. In the light of these, attention will be given to the "Divine Command Theory" and the theory of "Utilitarianism".

The Divine Command Theory of morality holds that what is morally right is what God permits, and that what is morally wrong is what God forbids. This theory of morality is not without criticisms. If we conclude that God decrees something because it is good, then it seems to imply that God is not the ultimate source of goodness. If on the other hand we say that something is good because God decrees it, it seems to imply that God's decrees are arbitrary; he could just as well have decreed that the thing was not good (Brooke Noel Moore and Kenneth Bruder, 2011:262). In the first instance above, another critic has argued that if God approves certain actions because they are good, it means that God has a reason for approving certain actions-the reason being that they are good. If so, then we should be able to evaluate the good (or evil) of some actions and approve or disapprove of them for the same reason that God does (Lawhead 2011:421).

But if we believe that God is supreme and perfect, then we might be on our way to saving the Divine Command Theory of morality from the above criticism. Because man is imperfect, he may not be able to see the reason God approves of certain actions and disapproves of others. This same argument might be used to flaw the second criticism against the Divine Command Theory, that if we conclude that something is good because God decrees it

then it seems that God's decrees are arbitrary. If God has decreed that an action is good, then such action must be good. God is the ultimate source of goodness, and He stands a good position to direct man to goodness, since man's sense of judgment is skewed as a result of imperfection. What seems to be the strongest criticism against the Divine Command Theory is the claim by some that God does not exist; hence they do not believe in a supreme being who supposedly has the right to declare an action good or bad.

Suffice it to say that one way or the other, everyone believes in the existence of something supreme, whatever they choose to call it. If man believes that at a time he was not in existence, at least not in the present form, and that his existence has a beginning, from which ever creature he may claim to have originated, then something far greater than he must have made this possible. This may explain why man's action is primarily motivated by selfishness. Even when one gives to a beggar from whom one does not hope to get anything in return, such action is motivated by some deep-seated belief that good deeds beget good returns. The one who sees the good done even in a hidden place, is an all-seeing personality who repays every good deed done, even in secret. This brings into focus the issue of motives and consequences in assessing the morality of an action

The ill-motive behind an action diminishes under the weight of the consequences of such action, if it is beneficial to a good majority. Lawhead (2011) cites an example of Fred who shoves Reggie to the ground simply to be mean. Unintentionally, however, his doing so had the consequence of shoving Reggie out of the way of a falling brick that might have killed him. This act was ill-motivated, but this ill-motivation is not considered given the consequence of the action which benefits not only Reggie, but

his family members who would have been thrown into mourning if he had died. While sometimes the motive of an action is considered in assessing the morality of such action, it seems that the consequence(s) of an action is/are of greater importance. This is the high point of the theory of utilitarianism.

In summary, according to Omoregbe (1989), Jeremy Bentham claims that an action is moral if it produces pleasure or happiness and immoral if it does not. John Stuart Mill emphasises the social and altruistic aspect of utilitarianism. He explains that the happiness with which utilitarianism is concerned is not necessarily the happiness of the doer of an action, but the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people (Omoregbe 1989:236). Stumph (1994) emphasises this point when he says that:

The happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. "To do as you would be done by" and "to love your neighbour as yourself", constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality (709)

Perhaps, the strongest criticism against the Utilitarian Theory of Morality is that some actions in themselves are immoral, but produce happiness to a good majority. It is almost generally considered wrong to kill a fellow human. But consider the case of an unrepentant criminal, whose existence has posed a threat to many in the community. The killing of such one may bring happiness to a good majority, sometimes even to members of his own family. In this case, killing may not be considered a wrong act, given that it produces the greater good to the great number of

people. Agulanna's submission on "Moral Universals", which was earlier adopted, entails that there are acceptable standards by which people determine what is right or wrong in particular cases. So the killing of a human being, in the case where such death may be for the wellbeing of a great majority, may not be considered a wrong act.

One way to summarise all that has been said so far is to concede that there is no agreed standard of morality. This, perhaps, is the reason there is a dearth of moral criticism of, especially, literary works in the post-modern period. Writers who paint very graphic sexual scenes are said to be realistic to the happenings in the society. They are said to be bold to thematise issues that writers before now may have lacked the courage to grapple with. While this paper does not necessarily seek to condemn the actions of the characters in the selected work or the novelist's perceived position on sexual matters, it maintains that some sexual scenes in the novel are too explicit and could pass for pornography. Fred Berger (1984), in his paper "Pornography, Feminism and Censorship", describes pornography as "a visual or written matter that depicts sexual activity or arousal of sex organs in a graphic explicit way (i.e. intended or expected to produce sexual arousal)".

Although Adichie may not have intended that the sexually explicit scenes in her novel *Americanah* produce sexual arousal, she is still held responsible should such become the outcome, just the same way someone who drinks and drives is held responsible if he runs someone over, whether he intended it when he got drunk and went behind the wheel or not. What the moral critic does is to "examine the moral effect or value of a work in a more general way, considering how the images, events, characters...in a work affect its readers as moral beings" (www.brugger.weebly.com/.../moralphilosophyandcriticism)

It is observed that moral approach to literature has become less popular during the last few decades. This may be attributed to critical excesses (number and intensity of other critical theories and the moral laxness of critics)(www.brugger.weebly.com/.../moralphilosophyandcriticism). One may also add that given the controversy surrounding the standard of what is good or bad, a controversy which is at its peak in the post-modern period; critics find it less attractive approaching literature from the moral angle.

However, Niyi Osundare (2007) avers that the writer “has a duty to relate not only how things are, but how they could be or should be. He must not only lead the people to the top of the mountain and point out the Promised Land; he must also show them how to get there” (12). He further quotes Ngugi wa Thiong’o as affirming that “the writer should not only explain the world; he should change it” (12). This perception, that writers should be “righters” and “teachers”, has prompted philosophers and critics from as far back as the days of Plato to T.S Eliot, to insist that writers have their works censored. Plato’s interest, according to Nwahunanya (2007) is that:

... the moral effect of the knowledge acquired from literature on its consumers...if literature must be accommodated in his ideal republic, it was not to be a vendor of offensive moral picture (20)

Although Samuel Johnson praised Shakespeare, he points out that he (Shakespeare) “seems to write without moral purpose, because he is more careful to please than to instruct” (26) Johnson’s position is that the writer has a duty, not only to entertain, but to also teach. Matthew Arnold on his part “believes that art and morality are intertwined...The writer thus has a moral responsibility and should use culture and criticism to enrich the

spiritual life of his country” (29). T.S. Eliot (1933), in his book *After Strange Gods*, argues that literature should be a tool to preserve and uphold moral principles. This paper sets out to investigate the sexual moral aspect of the selected novel and to evaluate to what extent the author has upheld moral principles.

This study thus undertakes a moral critical evaluation of the novel, focusing on the sexual moral issues raised in it. The moral concept as a critical tool:

- Investigates the effects literature has on readers
- Looks at a text as combinations of various moral qualities
- Looks at how the work influenced or was influenced by the ideas of the time. (www.brugger.weebly.com/.../moral and philosophical criticism)

This paper however, compresses the tenets of the moral concept into discipline, restraint and order. In the light of these tenets the actions of the characters will be evaluated to determine how much restraint and discipline they have exercised. The paper will also investigate the extent to which the writer has exercised restraint in describing sex scenes in the selected novel.

Sexual (Im)moralities and the Authorial Stance in Adichie’s *Americanah*

Just like novelists of other epochs, the post-modern novelists are saddled with the responsibility of reflecting the society in their works. The society today is one where the mistrust for religion has contributed to a moral breakdown. It is a society where traditional values are trampled upon, with individuals deciding for themselves what is good or bad. Such is the society contemporary writers are to reflect in their works. In an attempt therefore to present the moral decay engulfing the society, some fiction writers have served their readers what could pass for literary pornography.

Americanah tells the story of Ifemelu and Obinze who develop romantic feelings for each other while in the secondary school. The endless strike in Nigeria forces Ifemelu to travel out of the country to complete her education in the US. She spends thirteen years, during which Obinze, back from London, gets married to Kosisochukwu. Ifemelu gets back from America and seeks Obinze out who abandons his legitimate wife and moves in with her. It is bad enough that Obinze and Ifemelu, two main characters in narrative, who are not married, are having sex. But to paint an explicit picture of what these two young ones do behind closed doors does not conform to the tenet of restraint that a writer has to exercise. Here is how Adichie describes the first sex involving Obinze and Ifemelu:

The first time she let him take off her bra, she lay on her back moaning softly, her fingers splayed on his head and afterwards she said "my eyes were open but I did not see the ceiling. This never happened to me before" (32)

The writer further describes a scene where Obinze is straddled by Ifemelu, who is massaging him. This is how the writer paints what happens next:

"I have a suggestion for a better massage" he said, when he undressed her, he did not stop, as usual, at her underwear, he pulled it down and she raised her legs to aid him. "Ceiling" she said, half-certain. She did not want him to stop..." I'll come out", he said "You know it doesn't always work" (114)

In describing the sex scene between Ifemelu and Rob, her neighbour, the novelist writes:

The sex was good the first time, she was on top of him, gliding and moaning and grasping the hair on his chest, and feeling faintly and glamorously theatrical as she did (332)

Within the bounds of most religions, especially Christianity and Islam (1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 1 Corinthians 7:2. Islamic quote. 24: 2), sex before marriage is considered an immoral act. Also in most parts of Africa, young girls are encouraged to be chaste and abstain from sex until they are married. The Igbo society is one of such. In Buchi Emechata's *The Joys of Motherhood*, for instance, the people from Amatokwu's compound bring six kegs of palm wine, filled to their brims, to thank Nwokocha Agbadi for giving them a virgin for a wife, in the person of Nnu Ego. This is how Agbadi expresses his happiness, "my daughter has been found an unspoiled virgin. Her husband's people are here to thank us"(31). Obinze's mother in *Americanah* is presented to us as a Christian. She is also a member of the Igbo society where chastity is a virtue. One can therefore not reconcile these with her reaction when Ifemelu tells her that she had sex with her son Obinze, she says, "Let us see the doctor first" (117). One would have expected Obinze's mother to express shock at the action of these two young ones, but when she summons them she says:

"You must always use a condom, if you want to be irresponsible, then wait until you are no longer in my care. If you make the choice to be sexually active then you must make the choice to protect yourself. (118)

In the above, Obinze's mother does not advise them to make abstinence a choice by admonishing them that sex before marriage is not morally and socially accepted. Rather, she gives them the choice of absolute freedom to swim in the ocean of immorality. In this vein she has broken the trio of the tenets of morality – discipline, restraint and order. She lacks discipline as an elder in a society whose social responsibility is to guide the younger ones to be disciplined by asking them to imbibe self-control with restraint. With this, she would be able to maintain the social order that

makes up the moral grounds of every society. Without order, morality in every society is in question.

A careful study of Obinze's mother's reaction to the conduct of Ifemelu and Obinze reveals that she does not clearly warn them to abstain from sex. But even if she implies this, she seems to be saying that they should abstain so that they don't get into the trouble of unplanned pregnancy or contract deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS. If we weigh Obinze's mother's attitude towards premarital sex, we could say that she is of the view that it is only bad when premarital sex brings grave consequences like unplanned pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. But this should not be the right attitude towards premarital sex, if one applies the Divine Command Theory of Morality, which, in part offers that some actions are declared immoral by a divine authority, irrespective of whether they bring grave consequences or not. After thirteen years, within which Ifemelu was involved in various relationships, avoiding Obinze completely, she comes back to Nigeria. She is aware that Obinze is married to a lovely wife Kosisochukwu who has a child, Buchi for him. But she goes ahead to rekindle her relationship with Obinze.

It could be argued that she was really in love with him, as much as he was with her, so her action of re-establishing contact with him was an effort made to get what she wants. The concern of this study is the consequence of one person's action on the majority of the people. According to the theory of utilitarianism, an action is moral when it benefits the majority of the people. Although Ifemelu may be trying to win her man back, just as Obinze tries to gain happiness by taking steps to move in with her, their action of getting back together may be considered immoral, if we take into account the pains Kosisochukwu and Buchi have to go through losing their husband and father respectively, to an old-time girlfriend. Obinze is now a very wealthy young man, with a

very beautiful wife whose beauty others envy. He also has a beautiful daughter. Yet a careful study of his character shows that he is not a happy man. His happiness appears to reside with his former girlfriend, whose return to Nigeria has shattered his family. Now he compares his wife's sexual strength with that of Ifemelu:

He had been turning away since the day he first kissed Ifemelu. Ifemelu demanded of him. "No don't cum yet, I'll kill you if you come", she would say, or "No, baby, don't move", then she would dig his chest and move at her own rhythm, and when finally she arched her back and let out a sharp cry, he felt accomplished to have satisfied her. She expected to be satisfied, but Kosi did not (521).

Ifemelu has only put Obinze into a dilemma. He would have to choose between societal demand of keeping his family intact by staying with the woman he is legitimately married to, or personal desire to enjoy the "acrobatic sex"(523) which Ifemelu offers. The reader might be tempted to heap all the blames of Obinze's shattered family on Ifemelu, however, Obinze shares part it. If he had remained chaste, and only maintained a healthy sex-free (platonic) relationship with Ifemelu, he would have nothing to compare his wife's sexual strength with, and would be satisfied with whatever he gets from her. Again, knowing that he is married, he would have exercised restraint by not paying unaccompanied visit to Ifemelu an old-time girlfriend. For not exercising restraint, Ifemelu and Obinze shatter the order in Obinze's family and societal order by extension.

For a character like Ifemelu, whose attitude towards premarital sex is questionable, one expects that the author mete out punishment on her as a way of condemning evil. But Ifemelu appears to get away with all her immoral actions. The writer seems to say that people who engage in all sorts of immorality can still

succeed in life. Granted, in real life situation, certain persons who engage in all manner of atrocities, sometimes become successful, but this is not a regular occurrence. The natural order of things is that one has to suffer the consequences of one's wrong behaviours, sometimes even when one has repented of them. Ifemelu seems not to have suffered the consequences of her immoral life. The same may be said of Nicholas, Obinze's cousin and his wife Ojiugo. Nicholas, it is said of in the novel, draws "diagrams in a piece of paper to show Obinze what to do when his fingers were between a girl's legs" (276)

Nicholas and his girlfriend Ojiugo: drink, smoke and even have sex in public. Ojiugo tells Obinze, "Ahn-ahn! Do you know we used to fuck in public? We did it at the Arts of Theatre. Even in the engineering building one afternoon, in a quiet corner of the corridor!" (277). Now Ojiugo and Nicholas live in London with two lovely kids Nna and Nne. We are not told, nor was it suggested that they later changed their life styles so things worked out well for them. On another level of thought, the writer needs not put down everything. We could conclude that for Ojiugo and Nicholas to have been successful, they must have left their wayward life styles. But most young readers may not reason this way.

Another character who does not apply restraint in her action is Aunt Uju. There is really nothing wrong with aunt Uju making the General her benefactor. There is also nothing bad about the General's resolve to help Aunt Uju, his intentions may not be totally ulterior. Ifemelu's mother once explains the reason for the General's generosity, "you see, The General wanted to be a doctor when he was young and so now he helps young doctors, God is really using him in people's life" (60). But the General is a married man. The application of restraint would have made him set bounds

to his relationship with Auntu Uju, at least for the sake of his family. One can be good to others without exploiting them. The General is exploiting Auntu Uju, as much as Auntu Uju is exploiting him.

It is bad enough that Auntu Uju is aware that the General has a wife, yet she goes ahead to have sexual relations with him. Narrating to the young Ifemelu what is going on between her and the General does not show restraint on the part of Auntu Uju. Sleeping with a married man for money and other benefits is by no means an act to be applauded. Even though she may have warned Ifemelu not to do the things she does, there is no denying the negative influence a narration like this could have on the young Ifemelu:

“I’m lucky to be licking the right ass... it’s luck. Oga said I was well brought up, that I was not like all the girls who sleep with him on the first night and the next morning give him list of what they want him to buy. I slept with him on the first night but I did not ask for anything” (96)

One wonders what message Auntu Uju wishes to convey when, on a Muslim holiday, the General calls to say he is coming over to Auntu Uju’s, and she says to Ifemelu, “Ifemelu please come and help me trim my hair down there. Oga said it disturbs him!”(100), afterwards she “lay on her back, legs spread and held high, an old gossip magazine beneath her, while Ifemelu worked with a shaving stick” (100). One may therefore not be surprised that when Ifemelu tells Auntu Uju about Obinze her boyfriend, Auntu Uju tells her to “let him kiss and touch but not to let him put it inside” (70) Auntu Uju may have negatively influenced Ifemelu, because she does not apply restraint in her actions. Ifemelu is made not to see anything wrong in a single lady sleeping with a married man, so long as she doesn’t ask for money the first time, but does so subsequently. She

is made to think that allowing someone of the opposite sex kiss and touch her is not bad, so long as the person does not "put it inside". That Aunt Uju is a bad influence on Ifemelu is seen in the way her (Ifemelu) life turns out in the end. Although some of the actions we have so far evaluated were carried out by the characters in the novel, we do not gloss over the fact that these characters were created by the writer. She it is also who gave them the roles they play. No doubt, these are credible characters, true to life, characters that one can relate with. Their actions are not far from what we see around us. But as pointed out earlier, the writer is not just to reflect the society in his/her works, showing how deplorable the human condition is in the present, he/she has a duty to right the society. One thinks that it amounts to lack of restraint on the part of the author to be vivid in depicting sex scenes in the novel.

Again one thinks it would have been wise to mete out strong punishment on some characters whose life styles were adjudged immoral, so that readers are warned of the dangers in taking similar course. Even in what is supposed to be a voice of wisdom from Okwudiba, a character in the narrative, to the reader, one still finds a fault:

"Look, the Zed, many of us didn't marry the woman we truly loved. We married the woman that was around when we were ready to marry. So forget this thing. *You keep seeing her*, but no need for this kind of white-people behaviour. If your wife has a child for somebody else or if you beat her, that is a reason for divorce. But to get up and say you have no problem with your wife but you are leaving for another woman? *Haba*. We don't behave like that, please." (Emphasis added.532)

Okwudiba has a very strong point. It is 'un-African' for a married man to wake up one morning and move in with another woman,

when the wife has not done him any serious wrong. The woman who is about bringing disaster on Obinze's family is Ifemelu, and Okwudiba advises that he continues to see her. A good advice would be to explain to Ifemelu that he is now married and cannot afford to jeopardize the happiness of his family, and quit seeing her. By suggesting Obinze keeps seeing Ifemelu, Okwudiba seems to be saying that if a man marries a woman he does not truly love, he should keep seeing the one he truly loves, while living with the one he is married to but does not truly love. But the right thing should be this; if a man marries the one he does not truly love, perhaps because the one he truly loves was not around when he was ready to get married, as Okwudiba says, he should develop true love for the one he has married. By not punishing characters who take wrong courses, and not making a strong comment against the immoral conduct of some characters, one is left to wonder where the author stands on the issue of sexual immorality.

Conclusion

This paper has so far drawn attention to the utilitarian function of African prose fiction. In the pre-colonial era, oral literature was used to educate the indigenous people and promote peaceful co-existence among them. In the colonial era, after most Africans had acquired the skill to write, literature became a tool for exposing the ills of the colonial masters. After independence, writers of prose fiction did not spare African leaders who became tyrannical. They used their art to expose the sufferings of the poor masses. Presently, Nigerian writers of prose fiction seem to be responding to a new Nigerian reality. There is a noticeable shift from the themes of culture conflict, bad governance among other known themes in Nigerian literature, to the new reality of the Nigerian

society. We are thus witnessing an era where premarital sex is no longer considered immoral, a period when long-held traditional values are dismantled by philosophies of individuals. These are the strains which the Nigerian prose fiction writer is responding to presently.

The main thrust of the study, however, is that the writer should not stop at presenting the deplorable state of the human condition, but should try to proffer solutions, by educating the reader. This study insisted that the writer be a “righter”. It is in view of reiterating the educative function of literature that this study critiqued Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah*, using the concept of morality. If writers must teach their readers and put things aright in the society, they would have to exercise restraint and discipline in the use of their skill so as to maintain a virile and healthy society. The paper questioned Adichie’s position on the sexual moral issues raised in the novel *Americanah*. It drew attention to the various sexual immoralities the main character, Ifemelu, gets involved in the narrative and wonders why she is not adequately punished at the end of the narrative.

The argument of this paper is that such a novel could be a bad influence on young readers. It is very difficult to dismiss the negative impact of a story about two young people Ifemelu and Obinze, who engage in sex from secondary school but grow up to be prosperous in life. Other characters who could be of negative influence in the narrative are Nicholas and Ojiugo, two very immoral fellows, who even made out in public, but their story ends in London where they get married and are living happily. Of greater worry in the novel is the explicit depiction of sex scenes, which violates one the tenets of the moral principle-restraint-which a writer is expected to exercise. While admitting that the Nigeria society is one where young ones now exhibit behaviours that could

shock adults, like having sex before marriage, the study insisted that there was no need to be explicit in depicting this in a narrative. Granted, the writer has to be realistic in reflecting the society; such realistic portrayal of the society should be moderated by restraint and discipline, which help to maintain order. Lack of restraint on the part of Ifemelu, in the narrative, leads to the crisis in Obinze's family, which in turn leaves Kosi without a husband and Buchi without a father. Ifemelu engages in premarital sex and seems to get away with it without any concrete punishment by the writer by way of poetic justice.

This paper is of the opinion that despite the moral decadence into which the society has been thrown in the modern period, the Nigerian prose fiction writer still has to maintain a clear mind to help heal our ailing society. This has necessitated the moral critique of Adichie's *Americanah*. Since this paper focused on the sexual moral issues in the selected text, it is therefore recommended that further research in this area takes on other moral issues in the novel.

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