

**Digital diasporas and storytelling:
Reimagining Black women's narratives in Adichie's *Americanah*
and Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom***

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Abstract: The twenty-first century has brought about a transformation in the ways diasporic identities are expressed, with digital platforms becoming essential spaces for identity-making, cultural negotiation and memory transmission. The earlier researches on diasporic storytelling were limited to oral traditions, novels and community narratives but the rise of digital media gave space for storytelling and diasporic narrative in digitally mediated settings. Hence, this paper explores how African women in the diaspora use digital storytelling in the form of vlogs, blogs, online forums and social media in order to reconstruct and claim silenced voices and create new cultural archives that challenge hegemonic narratives as well as redefine belonging thus showcasing how digital narratives create interactive transnational communities. The paper draws on to Black feminist thought of Bell Hooks, memory studies by Marianne Hirsch, decolonial framework of Walter D. Mignolo and utilizes Stuart Hall's theorization of cultural identity as 'becoming' rather than fixed and Paul Gilroy's conception of diaspora as transnational hybridity. The paper also investigates into contemporary digital diaspora theory of Jennifer Brinkerhoff showcasing textual interconnections between digital self-representations on platforms like blogs and social media dealing with migration, race, and gender with that to contemporary African diasporic fiction such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*. These digital platforms such as blogs movements and hashtags archive identity, trauma and resistance resonate very well with the narratives of Black women.

Keywords: digital diaspora, Black women's narratives, storytelling, digital media, memory and belonging

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Introduction

Migration and diaspora have been important aspects in the history of African people and their descendants, and have continued to impact both global cultural production and personal identity. Oral traditions, slave narratives and postcolonial literature have become the mediums through which stories about the diasporic experience have been passed on. These communicated stories transfer trauma, reserve, memories and help in regenerating sense of belonging. Digital platforms such as blogs, vlogs, social media, and online archives have transformed the whole outlook of diasporic cultural creation, they have helped largely in the swift trade of testimonies, the development of global networks, and the real-time archiving of events. These platforms show how memory is affected by the media that present it, reflecting what Astrid Erll (2011) terms as the ‘mediality of memory’ a notion that says memory can always be altered and modified by the medium through which it is communicated, be it oral tradition, films, writings and the Internet. Thus, digital storytelling permits African diasporic women to reclaim their voices, discard erasure and oppose the diminishing image that continues to exist in Western media about them. The paper explores how African women are vigorously redefining and transforming global conceptions of diaspora and identity in manners that bridge generational, cultural and geographic boundaries by placing digital storytelling as both a literary theme and a lived diasporic experience. These stories are not momentary, rather they are permanent repositories of memory, solidarity and resistance. By highlighting the value of digital media as a new frontier of diasporic narrative, it is providing a platform for African women to reclaim agency and imagine futures beyond racial and patriarchal limits.

Both the novels, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi are examples of how storytelling serves as individual testimony and a collective archive in the digital age when read in conjunction with real-world examples of diaspora blogs such as African Feminism, #BeingBlackAndMuslim, #AfricanAmerican and digital archives like African Digital Heritage. Ifemelu, the protagonist in Adichie’s novel *Americanah*, gives a literary model for comprehending how real African women negotiate and navigate identity in digital spaces by using blogging as a means to express the intricacies of race and diaspora. Thus, her blog becomes a narrative device as her online thoughts on race, beauty, and belonging

serve as a fictitious model of digital diaspora practice. In Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* inherited trauma, faith, and science are managed through digital networks, reflecting the ways in which diasporic individuals express hybrid identities through digital platforms. Gyasi presents narratives that resonate with digital testimonials of diasporic people navigating and negotiating intergenerational trauma and religious memory in digitally mediated scenarios.

The themes of migration, race, trauma and hybridity mingled with digital cultural platforms like blogs, vlogs, hashtags and online archives represents how identity and belonging are formed in digital diasporic spaces. Therefore, the two fields contrast with each other and are studied separately by the literary scholars hence very less research has happened that has analysed literature and digital practices together. Also, this lack is more striking with regards to African women, since their digital storytelling and personal narratives have yet not received much attention in the academic field. Thus, by doing a comparison between the selected novels and real digital narratives the present paper demonstrates how literature and digital media are part of the same storytelling continuum; and thus this highlighting African women's voices. Hence, digital platforms and literature collaborate and interact to create alternative cultural archives that reimagine diasporic futures. However, as per the data gathered from studies on the digital diaspora, the contribution of women specifically has received very less attention. Therefore, these platforms develop their base on literary and oral traditions and comprise these ideas about African women into the digital archives that are accessible universally. Although critics have analysed novels such as Adichie's *Americanah* and Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* for their themes of migration, hybridity, and trauma, some others have investigated the role of digital platforms in producing diasporic memory, but very few studies have combined both the strands. This gap is significant because both literature and digital media serve as counter-archives, allowing African women to recover their voices, negotiate belonging, and resist erasure. This paper fills that gap by adopting a comparative approach, reading *Americanah* and *Transcendent Kingdom* alongside digital cultural forms like blogs, vlogs, and online archives. The paper bridges the gap by exploring the association between African women's literature and digital cultural production and presents a theoretical framework, where Black women narratives can be understood as influential interruptions

that resists and counterattacks dominant discourses and reconstructs alternative archives of diasporic memory.

Theoretical framework

The paper employs the intersection of memory and diaspora studies of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Astrid Erll and Marianne Hirsch with digital diaspora theories of Jennifer Brinkerhoff. The paper also applies the decolonial and postcolonial frameworks of Walter D. Mignolo and black feminist thought of bell hooks to the study African women's narratives. Together these theories demonstrate how diasporic communities use online platforms. It examines the narratives of African women whether in literature or on digital media, highlights how resist and reclaim subjectivity, reconstruct memory and imagine futures. Paul Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic* theorizes diaspora as a transnational space of hybridity and circulation generating new cultural forms that surpass national boundaries. Gilroy rejects the notion that identity is connected only to one nation. In *The Black Atlantic*, he defines diaspora not as set 'roots' attached to a particular nation, but as continuous 'routes' created by transnational flows of people, memory, and culture. Although Gilroy demonstrates this through music, travel, and cultural interchange across the Atlantic, similar flows have now expanded into digital realms, where diasporic individuals maintain relationships, share testimony, and redefine belonging online. Adichie's *Americanah* mirrors this dynamic by using Ifemelu's blog, which serves as a digital 'route' connecting African, African American, and global readers in discussions on race and identity. Likewise, Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* depicts Gifty's struggle and dilemma with trauma, faith and science as part of a diasporic shift formed by both personal memory and the scientific records in lab notes and digital research. In both works, storytelling serves as an expansion of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which he defines as a transnational space which is formed by the actions of individuals, cultures, and ideas across nations. This space creates hybrid cultural platforms like digital media, music, literature and storytelling where identities are reformed through intersection of various cultural encounters. Hence, cultural identity is no longer defined by fixed origins rather filtered through the interconnected web of digital platforms.

According to Stuart Hall (1990), cultural identity is 'a matter of becoming as well as being' and he therefore argues that cultural identity should not be recognised as a fixed essence but as a process of

‘becoming’, which is always constructed within the representation. This insight is especially relevant in digital contexts, as diasporic communities utilize blogs, vlogs, hashtags, and online archives to express belonging and distinction. Ifemelu’s blog, in *Americanah*, demonstrates this process as she constantly redefines herself and addresses race, hair politics, and interracial relationships, creating a hybrid identity formed by her Nigerian roots and American experiences. Similarly, in *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty navigates through her Ghanaian immigrant culture, evangelical upbringing and scientific profession, demonstrating how identity is constantly reshaped across divergent cultural frames. When read along with contemporary digital platforms like African Feminism or #BeingBlackAndMuslim, these narratives demonstrate Hall’s assertion that diasporic identity is always ‘in process’ created through storytelling techniques that connect numerous cultural locales and forms of memory. The paper also applies Jennifer Brinkerhoff’s (2009), idea that digital diasporas are far more than just social spaces and they allow scattered communities to mobilize, retain their culture, and form global solidarity. This concept is critical for understanding African women’s digital storytelling. Platforms like African Feminism, the Natural Hair Movement and hashtags like #BeingBlackAndMuslim function as transnational spaces and platforms for women to tell their migration and identity stories while also building networks of solidarity that challenge mainstream narratives that dominate at global level. Ifemelu’s blog in Adichie’s *Americanah* implies this concept. By blogging about race, hair politics and diasporic belonging, she envisions a digital community that exposes systemic discrimination while reinforcing cultural identities. Similar to that, in Gyasi’s *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty’s balancing of science, faith, and inherited trauma is parallel to digital testimony in which African women define hybrid modes of belonging and survival. When placed together, these narratives highlight Brinkerhoff’s claim that online platforms expand diasporic identities into collective political and cultural efforts, converting individual voices into counter-archives of resistance and solidarity. Hence, these platforms show how memory is affected by the media that present it, reflecting what Astrid Erll (2011) terms as the ‘mediality of memory’ a notion that says memory can always be altered and modified by the medium through which it is communicated, be it oral tradition, films, writings and the Internet.

Lastly, the paper employs bell hooks' theory of 'talking back', which says speech is an act of talking back, a radical interference against silences that occurred in past. This theory of hooks is applied to the Black women in both the novels wherein the resistance to stereotypes and false narratives is expressed through the medium of digital spaces. Both the novels *Americanah* (2013) by Adichie and *Transcendent Kingdom* (2020) by Gyasi offer a deep investigation into migration, identity and the interactions between diasporic and digital life. Hence, these novels not only showcase identity negotiation in diasporic contexts, but also involve and connect with contemporary African women's digital storytelling practices. Online testimonials of migration and racism, in *Americanah* where Ifemelu's fictional blog and vlogs on diaspora highlight her politics are examples that reflect the act of 'talking back' where the black women's voices are imprinted into the archives that challenge and resists erasure. Additionally, Hirsch's (2008) concept of postmemory emphasizes how trauma endures through retelling across generations even in the absence of real experience.

Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative research methodology and does a comparative and contextual literary analysis of Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* within the theoretical frameworks of memory studies, diaspora studies, Black feminist thought and decolonial theory. Thus, the paper also applies interdisciplinary method by integrating literary studies with digital humanities that describes how online platforms influence memory and storytelling. Further, the close textual reading of the primary texts will be conducted to examine how the complexities of diasporic subjectivity are reflected in the narrative design, character growth and concepts. By placing the primary texts and digital practices within a unified framework, the methodology draws attention towards the continuum 'from page to platform' and answers three major research questions. First, in what ways do digital platforms serve as spaces for African women living abroad to convey their stories? The second question is, what connections exist between these digital real-time stories and these fictional texts literary representations? And third, in what ways do these practices support decolonial futures and subvert prevailing cultural narratives? Therefore, this interdisciplinary method provides a broader understanding of how storytelling, whether

it be digital or literary, functions as a practice of decolonial worldmaking, reclamation and resistance for African diasporic women thus projecting into a transmedia space in which narrative techniques advance and engage with digital diaspora practices.

Analysis

The paper analyses the interaction of diasporic identity, trauma, memory and belonging with the digital storytelling practices. The novels are placed alongside digital cultural mediums, for example in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's race blog is fictionalized as a digital diasporic narrative, emphasizing its purpose in addressing issues of race, gender and belonging. The protagonist Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant living in the United States, starts a blog titled 'Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black'. Through this platform, she narrates her experiences of race, belonging, and identity in a society that continuously excludes her and makes her feel like the Other. Similarly, *Transcendent Kingdom* showcases inherited trauma and the complexities of hybrid identity through digital and technological medium. Gifty, the protagonist in the novel records her experiments and observations in lab notebooks and digital databases. She contemplates about her career and says:

I didn't want to be thought of as a woman in science, a black woman in science. I wanted to be thought of as a scientist, full stop, and it mystified me that Katherine, whose work was published in the best journals, was content to draw attention to the fact of her womanhood. (Gyasi 2020, 83)

In this novel, the memory of family trauma is mediated through the language of science and digital research. Rather than retelling her brother Nana's death as a purely personal memory, Gifty reframes it through the medium of neuroscience, using brain imaging, lab notes and data points. This shows how memory can be reconstructed and presented through different mediums like digitally. In Adichie's *Americanah*, the blog functions as a digital archive of diasporic subjectivity as well as a narrative tool. With the help of the blog, Ifemelu is able to deal with the intricacies of identity in the United States, and she discovers that racial classification is impossible to avoid. Ifemelu is compelled to adopt the U.S. racial system, changing her identity from Nigerian to 'Black' in the American setting. This is in line with Stuart Hall's (1990) notion that identity is a process of

‘becoming’. Hence, identity is not a fixed but a process of negotiation, constantly constructed through representation. Ifemelu’s posts are interventions that manage and negotiate her constantly changing status as a ‘Non-American Black’, rather than static representations of identity. This is best expressed by her views on Black Hair politics. Ifemelu challenges the imposed standards and affirms Black womanhood through digital storytelling by questioning Eurocentric beauty conventions and sharing her journey back to natural hair.

She touched Ifemelu’s hair. “Why you don’t have relaxer?”

“I like my hair the way God made it.”

“But how you comb it? Hard to comb, Aisha said.”

Ifemelu gently combed her hair, dense, soft and tightly coiled, until it framed her like a halo.

“It’s not hard to comb if you moisturize it properly, she said, slipping into the coaxing tone of the proselytizer that she used whenever she was trying to convince other black women about the merits of wearing their hair natural.”

(Adichie 2013, 14-15)

This conversation directly dramatizes the politics of natural hair versus chemical relaxers, pointing towards the dominance of Eurocentric ideals of considering straight hair as beautiful and showcasing resistance for natural hair. Hence, it showcases how the act of ‘talking back’ (Hooks 1989) reclaims physical independence and choice against the Eurocentric standards of beauty. The fictional blog envisions real-world digital movements such as the Natural Hair Movement, where Black women with the help of YouTube and Instagram document similar changes. According to researchers like Oduor (2019) digital testimonies serve as collective archives that support belonging as well as challenge preconceptions. Ifemelu’s blog is a reflection of online communities such as African Feminism (2024), a collaborative blog where African women discuss resistance, gender and migration. Hence, these platforms show how memory is affected by the media that present it, reflecting what Astrid Erll (2011) terms as the ‘mediality of memory’ a notion that says memory can always be altered and modified by the medium through which it is communicated, be it oral tradition, films, writings and the Internet. In other words, memory is never pure. It always gets moulded by the mediums through which it is expressed. Erll defines that memory is told through oral stories will look different in comparison to memory told in a book, a film or on social media. Every medium adds its own layer of interpretation, understanding and representation to that vary

narrative. Therefore, when these Black diasporic women use digital storytelling via blogs, hashtags, vlogs or any form of social media, they are not just preserving memory but also reconstructing it in real time through these digital platforms. This way it gives some negotiated agency to these women to reclaim their silenced voices, fight against being erased and discard the stereotypical image of them as docile and marginalised by western media. Hence, digital platforms not just carry memory rather they change it and for the African women of diaspora, this change becomes a tool for empowerment and resistance. If narrated informally to friend, the same memory of hers would have felt less public and less formal in comparison to how its expressed to a larger audience through a digital platform. Therefore, the memory is not fixed and cannot be expressed through one medium or platform rather it is always converted from some form of personal memory into a digitally cultural memory. Hence providing a place or platform to African diasporic women to reclaim their voices, discard erasure and oppose the diminishing image that continues to exist in Western media about them with help of broader representation of stories into cultural memory via digital platforms. In these lines, Ifemelu is expressing and analysing her experience of being racialised in the U.S. and her blog posts functions as textual spaces of negotiation.

Similarly, Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*, demonstrates a different approach to narrate the trauma, personal memory and pain of a 28-year-old protagonist, Gifty. In this novel there is intersection of trauma with faith and science because Gifty interprets and expresses the personal memory of her brother Nana's addiction and her mother's depression through scientific data. She records her experiments and observations in lab notebooks and digital databases therefore the memory of family trauma is mediated through the language of science and digital research. Rather than retelling her brother Nana's death as a purely personal memory, Gifty reframes it through the medium of neuroscience, using brain imaging, labnotes and data points. This shows how memory can be reconstructed and presented to different communities like in this case, to the scientific community and how it can be archived in various forms. Gifty clearly defines her relationship with trauma despite not having been present during her mother's migration from Ghana. This further directs towards Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before. In other words, trauma is passed on and

communicated across generations and creates a memory so strong as if it is actually lived. Hence, in *Transcendent Kingdom*, trauma is mediated by science, demonstrating Astrid Erll's notion of 'mediality of memory' which says that memory circulates through cultural forms and in this novel, it circulates through the digital language of scientific research. In *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty's story shows how identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated across diverse frameworks of meaning. She picks science as her anchor that's why the novel is also a bildungsroman specifying Gifty's search for facts of the world, existence and life in a philosophical way and in future, with the help of a digitally and scientifically communicated manner.

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* theorizes diaspora as a transnational space of hybridity and circulation generating new cultural forms that surpass national boundaries. Gilroy rejects the notion that identity is connected only to one nation. Rather, he defines the Black Atlantic as a transnational space which is formed by the actions of individuals, cultures, and ideas across nations through slavery, migration and belonging. This space creates hybrid cultural platforms like digital media, music, literature and storytelling which does not belong to just one country but is a blend of various cultural practices from copious nations like Africa, America, the Caribbean, and Europe. Thus, Gilroy describes diaspora as a hybrid space where identities are reformed through intersection of various cultural encounters. Ifemelu's blog is a perfect example of this, as her identity shifts when she crosses borders, and she makes writing and blogging a medium to explain that transformation. Hence, the 'Dear Non-American Black' blog post of Ifemelu represents how race is seen differently in diaspora, and how digital storytelling through a medium like blog becomes a way of negotiating and reconstructing new diasporic identity. She resists the dominant U.S. racial discourses through her blog and creates a transnational space that affirms African diasporic identity. This act of resisting and reclaiming the history and identity erased by Eurocentric power is Walter Mignolo (2011) defines as 'acts of re-existence'. Ifemelu's opinion on interracial dating further complicates diasporic belonging. She observes that dating white American men often required explaining her Nigerian identity, whereas dating African Americans revealed those cultural differences which she had not anticipated. These blog posts dramatize Hall's (1990) argument that diasporic identity is always a negotiation of difference, shaped by multiple layers of race, culture, and belonging. Hall (1996) claims that

diasporic identity is constantly a negotiation of differences formed by numerous layers of race, culture and belonging. Likewise, in Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty simultaneous dependence on neuroscience and faith subverts the binary between Western scientific rationality and African spirituality, demonstrating Mignolo's vision of epistemic disobedience.

Conclusion

African women's storytelling reclaims silenced voices, preserves memory, and constructs belonging within transnational contexts. In doing so, it affirms that storytelling is both archive of digital narratives of these women, anchoring their diasporic experiences while opening fictional space for decolonial futures. The experiences of Ifemelu and Auntie Uju in *Americanah* represent how African women cope with multiple systems of domination and subjugation in the transnational settings. In *Transcendent Kingdom*, protagonist Gifty's hybrid mingling of science and faith mirrors the multilayered challenges diasporic women experience in creating a sense of voice and belonging.

Hence, in both the novels as well as the real digital platforms, narratives by women represent how agency is negotiated under uneven frameworks. Storytelling develops as a multidisciplinary process for retaining and archiving identity, trauma, and belonging in both literary and digital contexts. Together, these stories show how African women's storytelling transcends novels and digital spaces, shaping diaspora counter-archives that reject erasure and foresee decolonial futures. The blog reflects how online platforms allow diasporic individuals to resist racial hierarchies and negotiate new forms of selfhood. As subsequently, Ifemelu's blog might be described as a type of digital home, a narrative space where personal experience transforms into collective memory. Thus, the paper examines diaspora through the lens of digital media. But in most situations, literature and digital testimony have been investigated separately, with the former as a fictional account and the latter as a lived cultural expression. However, African women's storytelling today surpasses these boundaries through novels like *Americanah* and *Transcendent Kingdom*. Hence, by reading novels and digital testimonies together, the paper highlights the continuum 'from page to platform' and emphasizes that postcolonial studies must account for digital media as vital sites of diasporic cultural production, alongside digital humanities

promoting the nuanced aspects of voice, form, and identity developed in literary studies.

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