The 'New Man' Character and an Integrative Image of the Male and the Female World in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

This paper examines the making of 'new man' character in Adichie's *Americannah* and discusses how such a molded man integrates himself in society and deals with other gendered worlds. The discussion shows how much Adichie in the representation of 'new man' character in her novel rejects the naturalization of the unchangeability of the male subject by dramatizing how much the male's enactment of masculine-self is contingent on the orientation one gets. In this paper, I argue that Adichie's representation of progressive 'new man' character in her novel not only serves as a role model for ideal progressive masculinity, but also re-invents a space necessary for a progressive female character to belong in hetero-patriarchal setting of the novel—the disavow of the normalized good womanhood made by a woman's performance of silence and submissiveness. Indeed, the representation of progressive 'new man' in *Americannah* is treated in this paper as a womanist endeavor of creating an integrative Africa which accommodates both the enlightened men and enlightened women in the formation of ungendered relationships.

Key Words: New-Man, New-Woman, Progressive, Masculinity, Femininity, Integrative Image

Introduction

Literary works by African women writers are known for the tendency of interrogating what is perceived by early male writers as the norm—problematizing socio-political conducts that empower some males at the expense of females, children and other males. For Ogunyemi (1996), this trend of questioning the hetero-patriarchal norms in African women's writing is an attempt of creating a better Africa where both males and females can be accommodated (p.115). However, since the focus of most studies on literary works by African women writers has been on exploring how heteronormative masculinities can be toxic to female subject while paying less attention to the representations of other possible images of the male subject in the works, the impression is that literary works by African women writers are characterized by a monolithic representation of the male subject as a villain—the source of misery to women, children, and other nonconformist males.

It is with such an impression that scholars like Frank (1987) come up with a conclusion that African women's writing "embrace the solution of a world without men: *as* men in *African women writing* is the enemy, the exploiter and oppressor…" (My emphasis, p.15). On the contrary, in this paper I agrees with Nnaemeka (2004) that in African women's writing "all men are not bastards" (p. 380) as the works represent, as well, other masculinities which depart from the oppressive gender system, unfortunately such representations have not been the focus of most studies. As Nnaemeka further enlightens, African women writing challenges the toxic gender system "through negotiation, accommodation, and compromise" (p. 380) which result to the creation of "a third space which allows for the coexistence" between the male and the female subjects (p. 360). The representation of progressive masculinities in African women's writing can be perceived, therefore, as the common ground—a place of negotiations on the (re)creation of the world where both the male and the female can equally coexist in full extent.

Thus, through Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americannah*, this paper transcends the tendency of always studying only negative images of the male subject by highlighting the representation of the positive images of the male subject, which is to underscore the propositions of the images of a healthier future for both the male and the female or as Ogunyemi (1985) would put it, an "integrative image of the male and female world" (p. 69). In this paper, I explore the making of 'new man'

character in Adichie's novel and examines how this molded man integrates himself in hetero patriarchal society as an agent for change in hetero-patriarchal African settings. Basically, the representation of progressive masculinities as enacted by a 'new man' character in Adichie's novel is considered in this paper as the author's technique of giving essence to a progressive 'new woman'—independent, strong and ambitious, the situation which makes it possible for the re-invention of an integrative Africa which accommodates both the enlightened men and women.

Progressive masculinity as Mutua (2006) theorizes it, is the kind of masculinity which works against social structures of domination—the key element of hetero-patriarchal masculinity. It "values, validates and empowers humanity" in all its variety in multicultural diversities (p.7). This is the kind of masculinity which depends on the male subject's recognition of his being equal human - neither superior, nor inferior to his female counterpart, children or other males. Precisely, progressive masculinity intervenes the hegemonic gender order. This is when the male subject internalizes the ideology that transcends the normalized ideas of being a real man, and thus, as Mutua (ibid) puts it, "stands against social structures of domination". In this paper I basically use "progressive masculinity" as the author's attempt to disrupt the Manichean allegory of gender whereby the male is superior being and the female the subordinate. By destabilizing the normalized hetero-patriarchal psychological and institutionalized sets ups, Adichie in *Americannah* shows the possibility of the realization of ungendered Africa where the male and the female integrate symmetrically.

Like many Nigerian third generation women's novels, Adichie's *Americannah* can be classified as coming-of-age novel (Ogaga Okuyade, 154). This is because throughout the narrative, the main female protagonist, Ifemelu develops her progressive-womanhood-personality from adolescence to maturity. Ifemelu passes through different challenging experiences both in patriarchal Nigeria and racist America to become strong enough to rebelliously reclaim her space in hetero-patriarchal Lagos of her adulthood. However, different from other third generation novels, in *Americannah* growth occurs to the male protagonist as well. Like Ifemelu, Obinze, the male co-protagonist in Adichie's novel, manifests progressive new-man-personality from adolescence as the outcome of his womanist mother's determination to raise a progressive man whose masculine identity is beyond the hetero patriarchal perception of a man as a dominant being. Obinze experiences an ungendered kind of relationship from adolescence with his mother and Ifemelu his school girlfriend. As Ifemelu disappears in America, Obinze doubts his progressiveness and attempts to act in Nigerian male conventions by marrying Kosi, a conventional 'good' wife—beautiful and docile. However, what he has to endure in such a conventionalized marital relation returns him to Ifemelu, his progressive school girlfriend which suggests his realization that he cannot be happy and himself in heteronormative world, the act which proposes his highest point of growth to new-man-personality. Indeed, it is through the bond between progressive 'new man' character and progressive 'new woman' that the novel represents an ungendered relation—an integrative image of the male and female world.

Teaching a boy how to be a Progressive Man

Basically, in Adichie's *Americannah*, progressive masculinity is not represented through the creation of a utopian gender-free-society but rather as a personal project of a single mother to mold his son to be a progressive man in the midst of hetero-patriarchal set up. His survival is thus the author's dramatization of how progressive masculinity can penetrate and find a space within hetero-patriarchal society. This is to say, progressive masculinity in Adichie's *Americannah* is represented as an organized womanist project to mold the male subject's psychology by empowering him with the ability to live beyond the normalized male stereotypes. The aim of such empowerment is basically to enable him to associate healthily with the empowered female character and live harmoniously as equal partners in an ungendered world. Concisely, Adichie in the representation of progressive masculinity in her novel rejects the commonly used phrase of 'boys will be boys' as she advocates the idea that boys will be what the society teaches them to be. This first section explores how Obinze's mother in Adichie's novel molds her son to be a progressive man and act as an agent of progressive kind of masculinity in hetero-patriarchal community of the novel.

Studies suggest that the most recurring image of the female protagonist's mother in third generation Nigerian women's writing is completely the opposite to the image of her daughter whom she considers her mother the reason to strive for different womanhood. In Okuyade's (2011) analysis, the mother of an elevated female protagonist of the third generation women's writing is the woman who "frustratingly trapped within the confines of domestic space"—carrying the burdens for conforming to the "iconic representations of women as subservient, self-sacrificing, chaste, and devoted mother" (p.152/153). Conversely, focusing on Obinze's mother in Adichie's novel, one may argue that the mother of the new-man-protagonist, like the elevated female protagonist should possess the opposite characteristics from the normalized hetero-patriarchal womanhood.

It is through such an empowerment of the mother that the new-man-protagonist would internalize a more progressive view on himself and his female counterpart, which would enable him to see her not as his subordinate but as an equal human being. In the novel, Obinze's mother believes in gender equality; she believes both males and females are equal human beings—worthy of equal respect and treatment. She thus recounts her gender stance to her son who embraces it in the formation of his gender identity as a progressive new Nigerian man. For instance, when Obinze's mother gets slapped by a male colleague, a chauvinist professor who claims in the meeting that a woman cannot speak to him in a 'disrespectful' way, she unapologetically stands firm to defend her dignity as a human being; "so my mother got up and locked the door of the conference room and put the key in her bra. She told him she could not slap him back because he was stronger than her but he would have to apologize to her publicly…. So he did" (p. 59). And when later she notes that people's pity on her for such a sordid incident is based on her widowhood, she gets annoyed insisting that "she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being, not because she doesn't have a husband to speak for her" (p. 59). With this statement, Obinze's mother denies patriarchal positioning of the female subject as the weak person whose survival depends on a man's mercy. This is, indeed, a denial of the traditional, early male writers' portrayal of the female character as a relational character who cannot stand for her own right but in relation to her father, her husband or her sons. Although she knows she cannot change the society's chauvinist psychology, Obinze's mother makes it her project to mold her son's mindset on the perception of self as a man, as well as, his view on others, especially female subjects. This is certainly Adichie's attempt of reversing the normalized position of the female subject as the icon or the conveyor of hetero-patriarchal customs which marginalize her, to an agent of change in gender relations.

The project of molding Obinze to a progressive man is basically centered in his mother's home setting. In hetero-patriarchal tradition, home is one of key spaces where masculine identities and power relations are formed. It is the site where the male subject initially learns his naturalized position of power—the antithesis of his female counterpart's subordinate positionality defined by the normalization of domesticity as feminine (Gorman-Murray, 2008). In the effort of reconstructing progressive masculine identity to his son, Obinze's mother interrupts such a normalized gender order by destabilizing the normalized hierarchies in her home, which is to disturb the normalized power relations. As Ifemelu observed in her visit to Obinze's mother, their home is made of the freedom which transcends categorized relationships as mother and son treat each other as equals regardless of their traditional familial position or gender; "their fluid, bantering rapport made Ifemelu uncomfortable. It was free of restraints, free of the fear of consequences; it did not take the familiar shape of a relationship with a parent (p. 69). Breaking the normalized hierarchy is, indeed, the scheme of making Obinze think and act beyond conventional gender roles—a scheme of making him not a man but a good human, reliable and respectful. Obinze's mother here interrupts Obinze's normalized perception of self as a man and thus superior being, to internalize a more progressive self-image which makes him perceive himself just as human being—the equal of any other human regardless of his or her gender. Largely, the relationship Obinze's mother creates in her home can stand as a microcosm of the idealized male-female relationship within and without the household, the bond which transcends the normalized hetero-patriarchal power relation.

Indeed, home in heteronormative conventions is positioned as feminine domain whereby domestic chores are naturalized as "the care work of wives and mothers characterized as domestic angels" (Gorman-Murray; 2008, p. 369). However, since Obinze's mother seems to consider home a site for contestation of heteronormative hegemony, she de-genders domesticity as an effort to make her son negotiate alternative domestic masculinity. Obinze and her mother cooked together; "They cooked together, his mother stirring the soup, Obinze making the garri…" (p. 69). The fact that in doing so, Obinze ends up enjoying cooking, subverts the normalized gendered and sexualized meaning of home where domesticity is considered feminine space that demonstrates a man's domination over the female subject who should serve him as her lord and master. Indeed, Obinze's mother de-genders domestic space in her home to interrupt the conventionalized hetero-patriarchal gender order as the necessary process to make Obinze internalize the non-hierarchical gender ideology. As a result, throughout the novel, Obinze is identified by those who associate with him not as a man but a good human—kind, hardworking, respectful, reliable and compassionate. He is confident, very sure of himself but never considers other people inferior because of their family background or gender. And this adaptation of her mother's humanist gender philosophy makes him a different man—a composed 'gentle' man, admired by both the males and the females who come closer to him.

In Biller's (1968) proposition, both the absence of father figure and family background, such as the nature of the mother who heads the household in the absence or invisibility of the father, influence a person's development of masculine self because "when a boy is father absent in his preschool years, his opportunities to interact with and imitate males in positions of competence and power are usually severely limited" (p.1006). Simply put, in hetero-patriarchal tradition, a father is a key mediator of a normalized kind of masculinity to his sons; the mentorship which maintains society's normative gender order. His absence, physically or metaphorically, can therefore incapacitate the 'automatic' adaptation of normalized masculinity to his son. In Adichie's novel, Obinze's father died when he was seven years old. His mother, thus, becomes his major influence in the construction of his masculine self. Here, as Ng'umbi (2017) puts it elsewhere, Adichie "creates a new form of family structure where the father figure, as portrayed by older generations of African women writers, is no longer the head of the family" (p. 93). This is, indeed, an act of interrupting the normalized wife/husband binary to give a progressive woman uninterrupted space to mold the male to someone who can somewhat equally share the available resources and power within and without the family space. Perhaps one would challenge Adichie that her novel somewhat suggests the world without men since a father had to die to give a mother the room to raise the son progressively. However, the fact that the novel ends up by bonding Obinze - a progressive male, and Ifemelu - a progressive female character may portray the author's optimism for an integrative world where the enlightened male and the enlightened female live together in a balanced relationship. This is, indeed, the hope for ungendered heterosexual household in African settings.

As such, Obinze is molded to be progressive man not only to live free from hetero-patriarchal conventions but also to act as a positive role model in the matter of inspiring progressive forms of masculinity in the hetero-patriarchal society of the novel which lacks such exemplary male figures. His enactment of his progressive masculine-self in his new school in Lagos reveals the author's attempt of interrogating heteronormative masculinity through the representation of more sophisticated mode of masculinity which works beyond the demonstration of power and dominance. When Obinze joined his new school in Lagos, he was automatically registered in the group of "the Big Guys" at the top of students' masculine hegemony. By default, Obinze fits into the group because it is made up by the students from affluent families with some air of sophistication from their exposure to western world; the qualities which Obinze by default has, because his mother is somewhat well off and, from the elite class which gives him the elegancy that defines the group. Obinze is also bright in class and active in sports—the add-on to his masculine prowess in school hegemony. To use Swain's (2006) explanation, "a boy's position in the peer group is ultimately determined by the array of social, cultural, physical, intellectual, and economic resources" available to him to build his popularity and status (p.334). Obinze is thus resourceful enough to fit in at the top of school masculine hegemony.

However, my discussion on Obinze is rather on his masculine departure within the group than his being part of the school's hegemony.

At this juncture, I use Connell's (1996) lead that "some aspects of the school's functioning shape masculinities indirectly, and may have the effect not of producing one's masculinity but of emphasizing the differences between masculinities" (p. 218). My argument here is that Obinze is Adichie's attempt of (re)creating an ideal heterosexual male co-protagonist who is part of the hegemony because of the heteronormative masculine resources available to him; but who also departs from heteronormative norms, the situation which would make the difference so vivid to overshadow the norms. In other words, Obinze is Adichie's attempt of (re)creating an ideal heterosexual male character who is part of the hegemony because of the masculine resources available to him but who also departs from heteronormative hegemony, the situation which would make the difference so vivid to overshadow the norms. Indeed, Adichie tries to (re)creates a male figure who is part of the hegemony but attractively act differently to stand as the influencer of progressive masculinity to the males who cannot imagine other ways of being men than playing the normalized hetero-patriarchal dominant figures.

Basically, Obinze's progressive masculinity outside his mother's household is made by his ability to withstand peer pressure; the aptitude which enables him to enact his progressive masculine self without seeking for his peers' approval. The internalization of such self-esteem suggests his mother's accomplishment of raising a confident man who not only enact alternative masculinity but also resists hetero-patriarchal pressure for conformity. The novel describes Obinze in his teenage years as a calm and composed young man—the composure which can be associated with the world he is exposed to by his mother through open discussions and the reading culture that characterizes their home. We read in the novel that the Big Guys are known for their families' wealth and they demonstrate their power through their resistance to "tuck in their shirts and for this they always got into trouble with the teachers" (p. 55). In Connell's (1996) analysis, to the peer group that invests heavily in ideas of toughness and confrontation, the school discipline system becomes a test for their hyper masculine status. Which means, the probability of such boys to rebel against the school rules just to prove in public their masculine prowess is very high (p. 220). Indeed, by defying school rules and regulation, the Big Guys dramatize their heteronormative virility and audacity of challenging the authority. Although by disregarding the rulebooks they always find themselves in trouble, their persistence makes them appear tough and thus manly.

When Obinze joins the group, he rejects this macho masculine identity as he "came to school every day with his shirt neatly tucked in" (p. 55). Since being a man within the group means not to tuck in the shirt, Obinze's act of going against his peers' norm may compromise his identity as he may appear cowardly - not a real man indeed. However, since Obinze is raised to never compete for proving his being a man, he withstand the pressure by remaining in the group but keep on tucking in his shirt. It seems his composure to withstand the pressure attracts his group members as "soon all the Big Guys tucked in too, even Kayode Da Silver", the group leader (p. 55). Indeed, joining the group and acting differently, Obinze introduces to the group a kind of masculinity which is less obsessive to the normalized ideas of physical toughness and domination. Here Obinze stands as a positive role model to inspire progressive forms of masculinity in the hetero-patriarchal society of the novel which lacks such exemplary male figures. Largely, how Obinze resists peer pressure for conformity in school setting positions home in Adichie's *Americanah* as the key site where masculine identities and power relations can be (re)constructed to healthier definition of self which would result in formation of less gendered power relations.

'New Man' Character and Progressive Femininity in Hetero-patriarchal Settings

More than serving as a positive role model to inspire healthy forms of masculinity, the emergence of Obinze as progressive male protagonist in Adichie's *Americannah* re-establishes a niche for a complex female figure to belong in hetero-patriarchal African setting and makes the integrative image of the male and the female world more vivid in the novel. To be exact, Adichie's *Americannah*

suggests the male subject in heteronormative settings should go through a psychological transformation in the perception of self as a man to become equally progressive individual like his elevated female counterpart and thus bond together in the formation of ungendered world. As it is portrayed in the novel, before she meets Obinze, Ifemelu finds herself unfit to live in hetero-patriarchal Nigeria as she every time finds herself in conflicting situations as the result of being nonconformist to hetero patriarchal power relation. From her adolescence, Ifemelu refuses to compromise her individual-self by playing 'good woman' like the female protagonist in the second-generation African women's writing who "though she recognizes the inequalities of patriarchy, she never really fight for her 'right" (Ogunyemi; 1985, p. 76).

Consequently, for being herself, Ifemelu is considered troublesome in every social setting - an unfit girl. At school, she is "known for insubordination", the same reputation she creates in church (p. 52). Among the peers, she is considered an uncontrollable girl, unfit to be one's girlfriend as Kayode tells Obinze, "Ifemelu is a fine babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agree" (p. 60). Focusing on this description, Efemelu who is marked as a not-worthy-woman is an 'outsider within' - doomed to either conform to heteronormative norm or subtly be punished by being ignored and labeled. However, the emergence of Obinze - a progressive male, not only (re)create a perfect match for such a complex female character in Adichie's novel, but also (re)establishes a place for such a complex female character to fit in to hetero-patriarchal setting. The emergence of Obinze in Ifemelu's world is thus the author's way of giving essence to Efemelu's kind of liberated femininity, or as Nnaemeka (1994) would put it, giving existence to "that other African woman - independent, strong, and admirable woman who is celebrated in our oral traditions" (p. 141).

Principally, the ungendered world is realized in the novel because both the male and the female are empowered enough to realize the self-actualization which transcends heteronormative binary of gender. As Ifemelu is fully realized woman - "responsible, courageous, audacious, willful and whole" (Nadaswaran; 2011, p. 22), the male who forms relationship with her should thus be broad-minded to recognize her personhood - perceiving her as "a person first, and a person herself" not simply a woman —an appendage of a man (Ogundipe-Leslie; 1994, p.140). The bond between Obinze and Ifemelu is thus centered not on the normalized male's domination of the female other, but on ungendered mutuality which supports each individual's pursuit of his/her personhood. With Obinze's kind of progressive masculinity, Ifemelu can argue, can talk, and she can disagree without being judged; "He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease, her skin felt as though it was her right size. It seemed natural to talk to him about odd things. She had never done that before" (61). With Obinze, Ifemelu can comfortably be herself as nothing forces her to suppress her personhood just to fit in to the heteronormative binary of gender. Progressive men in Mutua's (2006) explanation, are "not dependent and not predicated on the subordination of others, they instead promote human freedom for all, both in the context of their personal lives and in the outward manifestations of those personal lives in social, cultural, economic and political contexts" (p.7). Obinze is thus a progressive man. And his presence in Ifemelu's life gives essence to her liberated kind of femininity. Indeed, with a progressive male character, the female subject guiltlessly stands on her own selfhood and agency.

In essence, the integrative image of the male and the female world in Adichie's novel is dramatized by the fact that Obinze and Ifemelu do not respond to the normalized expectations on what is to be a man or a woman. As they develop such a sense of sovereignty anchored in their determination for the emancipation of selves as well as the desire for the growth of their consciousness, they progressively come to consider manipulative game-playing disgusting, and thus investing in an unpretentious, straight relationship. As they learn to treat each other as more human than a man or a woman, they end up achieving a kind of heterosexual bond which transcends hetero patriarchal judgmentalism. For instance, when Ifemelu proposes they should kiss (in the first day of their relationship), Obinze does not consider Ifemelu amoral since conventionally, a man is supposed to be sexually proactive and a woman reactive (Sanchez et al. 2006). Obinze's response to Ifemelu's sexual advance may suggest his perception towards women—she is an equal human, which means,

she can feel and express her feelings freely. And when Ifemelu asks him where he learned how to kiss for his kissing "was nothing like *her* ex-boyfriend's salivary fumbling", Obinze does not judge her for having a boyfriend before him. He does not, as well, try to take advantage of her appreciation to suggest he is more a man than her ex-boyfriend as he responds to her that "it was not technique, but emotion. He had done what her ex-boyfriend had done but the difference, in this case, was love" (p. 62). Obinze here does not present himself as more a man than other men in Ifemelu's life but simply a man in love. Their agreement to abstain from sexual intercourse until they at least get to university reveals their maturity and agency. Here Obinze reveals his ability to live with an empowered woman - bold enough to express her feelings and show control to her sexuality; and through such ability, Ifemelu feels at home in hetero patriarchal Lagos where she was once an 'outcast'.

Unlike the conventional hetero-patriarchal male-dominating-female kind of relationship, the bond between Obinze and Ifemelu is generally made of the intimacy they share - their mutual understanding, equal treatment, and open dialogues and discussion. It is made of mutual attraction, which results from un-gendered equal treatment. As Obinze later explains, although they always enjoy their sexual chemistry, their love is beyond it; "you know this isn't about sex. This has never been about sex" (p. 447). As they bond together, treating each other as equal partners in the relationship, they enjoy their togetherness while everyone pursues his or her ambitions. Through the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu this section argues that Adichie's *Americannah* proposes that in the (re)creation of ungendered world, the male subject in heteronormative setting should go through a psychological metamorphosis to become equally liberated individual who can understand and symmetrically integrate with an empowered female - the kind of woman who is uninterested in performing gender.

New Man Character and the Disavow of the Conventional Image of a 'Good Woman'

Men's resistance to gender equality is initially because of the fact that the male gender benefits with hetero-patriarchal power relation (Connell, 2005 p.1811). The reconfiguration of gendered relation can thus begin in the interruption of the male subject's normalized hetero-patriarchal psychology by making him not delight in what are traditionally considered patriarchal dividends. By doing so, the conventionally admired womanhood characterized by docility becomes unappealing to progressive men, the situation which would normalize the fully-realized-kind of womanhood and the ungendered relation. It is through such transformation of her progressive male character's mindset that Adichie indorses progressive womanhood and disqualifies the normalized hetero-patriarchal femininity. As it is in the novel, although the circumstances make Obinze gets married to Kosi, a conventionally good woman and tastes how it is to live in hetero-patriarchal power relation, his progressive makeup betrays him by making him feels misplaced, the situation which returns him to Ifemelu to resume and enjoy the fruit of the ungendered relationship. Indeed, unlike how the normalized hetero-patriarchal male is oriented to enjoy playing dominant figure in male-female relationship, Obinze is naturalized to delight in ungendered kind of partnership, the situation which makes him to consider male's sole dominance in male-female relationship something to tolerate - a boring experience indeed.

In all dimensions, Kosi is a foil character to Ifemelu. She is conventionally beautiful (erotic beauty), and dogmatically observing the conventional definitions of being a 'good' Nigerian woman. In other words, Kosi is Stratton (1990)'s embodiment of the mother Africa trope, which according to her, is one of defining features of early African male writing. Namely, while Ifemelu incarnates as an empowered female character celebrated in African women's writing, Kosi is an archetype of the worthy woman in early male writing. The fact that Adichie through Obinze's progressiveness portrays Kosi as a pathetic old-fashioned-woman reveals her attempts of disqualifying such heteronormative ideas of a 'virtuous' woman, which is to highlight the relevance of Ifemelu's image of a fully realized female character. Obinze as the author's idealized male figure in the novel is thus to interact with both kinds of womanhood to dramatize the unfitness of conventionally celebrated womanhood; which is, indeed, to underscore the essence of the empowerment of the female character in the (re)creation of ungendered relation.

Masculinity like any other gendered identity is fluid as "there is a constant renegotiation and redefinition of masculinity - and a struggle between different masculinities" (Gottzen; 2011, p.231). One's definition of self as a man and sexual being can thus consciously or unconsciously be redefined or reconfigured depending on the circumstances one finds himself in. Meaning to say, although Obinze is raised to live beyond heteronormative gender order, his enactment of such soft masculinity is somewhat negotiable based on the settings and the occurrences. This is the author's attempt of making Obinze the same as Ifemelu—more realistic - "the agent of his own self-destruction, self-reconstruction, and self-determination" (Nfah-Abenyi; 1997, p. 60). He can slip up but ultimately, he collects himself to live in his internalized progressive personhood. His act of marrying Kosi, not by anything but her beauty, is one of such circumstances where he tries to reconfigure his progressive masculine-self to act in normalized hetero-patriarchal ways. From the very beginning, Obinze observed the incompatibility that exists between him and Kosi, yet he pushes on the marriage in the basis of her erotic features; "he had never seen a woman with such a perfect incline to her cheekbones that made her entire face seem so alive, so architectural, lifting when she smiled" (p. 459). Perhaps, the rough experiences - failure to get in America, the destination of his dream; the failure to reconnect with Ifemelu, the woman of his life; and his unexplainably becoming rich shortly after been deported from London as an illegal immigrant may make the life principles that he internalized to appear unrealistic. Finding himself in a seemingly state of disillusionment in the midst of hetero patriarchal acquaintances, Obinze resolves to marry Kosi to fulfill his sexual needs and societal obligations to fit in - after having wealth and titles, a woman is a necessary add-on, to polish one's hetero-patriarchal masculine status as the novel suggests; "Kosi became a touchstone of realness. If he could be with her, so extraordinarily beautiful and yet so ordinary, predictable and domestic and dedicated, then perhaps his life would start to seem believably his" (p. 459). Kosi being "a touchstone of realness" may suggest how Obinze's hetero-patriarchal pressures, in adulthood drive him to somewhat doubt his progressive masculine-self considering such soft masculinity an illusion; in fact, non-existent in a typical African society. He thus resolves to act in the normalized ways he was raised to disavow.

As such, focusing on Kosi's performances of gender, one would find Nfah Abenyi (1997) right when she argued that, marriage is an institution which "does not change its traditional principles, even if the woman is distinguished by her class *or education"* (p.38, my emphasis). Kosi is educated, lives independently in Lagos but she inflexibly observes the orthodox prescribed roles of how to be a good wife - "a woman of virtue" (p. 459). The fact that Obinze compares how Kosi uses the word virtue with how it is used in "the badly written articles in the women's section of the weekend newspapers; *The minister's wife is a homely woman of virtue*" (p. 459) suggests to her, being a virtuous woman is ordinarily conforming to the idealized hetero-patriarchal womanhood, passive and submissive—"always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and family" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 4).

Since to Kosi, being an idealized traditional wife is to dogmatically perform gender roles, Obinze's progressive masculine-self, which he enjoys, becomes redundant in their homestead and thus his life becomes dull. With Kosi, Obinze cannot cook anymore; "Kosi never liked the idea of my cooking. She has really basic mainstream ideas of what a wife should be and she thought my wanting to cook was an indictment of her. So I stopped, just to have peace" (p. 450). As per the quote, as Kosi considers kitchen a synonymous to her feminine identity, if Obinze occupies it, her conventional womanhood— which is the only identity she pursues, would be put into question. Obinze is thus trying to fit into Kosi's rigid structure of hierarchical husband-wife relationship by suppressing his domestic masculinity which is to suppress his reality—his likes, his beliefs and his happiness pretending to be a man whom he is not. As he tells Ifemelu, Obinze sees living in such a kind of life unfortunate; "there's a lot of pretending in my marriage'. [T]here were tears in his eyes" (p. 451). As I discussed earlier in this paper, with his mother, and Ifemelu, Obinze's progressive masculine self is embraced, and he enjoys it as he becomes himself. But with Kosi, he finds an Obstacle to be a free man - free from hetero patriarchal prescriptions on how a man should be.

In essence, the major difference between Kosi's conventional femininity and Ifemelu's progressive one is depicted on their perception and enactment of sex and sexuality. While Ifemelu owns her sexuality, Kosi surrenders it to Obinze allowing him to 'consume' her as per his heteronormative masculine ego. With Kosi's conventional sexual submissiveness, Obinze practices heteronormative sexual dominance where intercourse is, in Frye's (1992) definition "male-dominant-female subordinate-copulation-whose's-complation-and-purpose-is-the-male's-ejaculation" (p.113);

> Ifemelu demanded of him. 'No, don't come yet, I'll kill you if you come,' she would say, or 'no, baby, don't move,' then she would dig into 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'. Kosi always met his touch with complaisance, and sometimes he would imagine her pastor telling her that a wife should have sex with her husband, even if she didn't feel like it, otherwise the husband would find solace in a Jezebel (p. 463).

According to Sanchez, et al. (2006); sexual autonomy "is critical for women's sexual enjoyment and ability to orgasm" while sexual submissiveness is prone to sexual numbness (p. 514). Which is to say, while Ifemelu enjoys the intercourse, Kosi seems to endure it. Here Kosi portrays her conformity to normalized hetero-patriarchal gender order where a wife is to submit herself sexually allowing her husband to dramatize masculine power and control over her body which is the metonym of his power and dominance over the household. Kosi sacrifices her sexual fulfillment to make Obinze feel a man in hetero-patriarchal terms, which is to maintain her good-wife-status. However, the fact that Obinze's does not feel a real man with Kosi's conventional sexual submissiveness is thus regarded in this paper as the author's way disavowing both conventional femininity and heteronormative masculinity, an appeal for both progressive femininity and progressive masculinity.

As he was intoxicated with her beauty, when Obinze got married to Kosi he comforted himself that her parochial worldview would somewhat improve as they lived together. Four years of marriage, however, are enough for Obinze to realize Kosi cannot change no matter what; "he imagined she would gain a certain heft. She had not, after four years, except physically, in a way that made her look even more beautiful, fresher, with fuller hips and breast, like a well-watered houseplant" (p. 459). The fact that Kosi improves only her erotic feature—hips and breast insists subtly on Kosi's total acceptance of the conventional subservient position reserved for a female subject in hetero patriarchal space—a 'houseplant' waiting to be watered. Here a woman is for decorative purposes rather than adding anything significant into the household. Which is to say, if Obinze wants to keep the marriage, he would have to learn to pretend to be a man in Kosi's terms—playing heteronormative masculinity where a man is dominant figure in the household. However, Obinze seems tired of living the life of pretention, he thus chooses to break the marriage which is to break the ties with heteronormative masculinity, the act which his friends consider unusual - a "white people behavior";

> 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 can keep seeing her, but no need for this kind of white people behavior. 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 (p. 471).

Okudiba's, (Obinze friend's) stance in this excerpt summarizes important hetero-patriarchal tenets on marriage and masculinity. Marriage is functional rather than emotional, thus a real man is to keep his emotions out of it and focus on the major function of marriage—to make the clan's name alive by begetting more male children. If a man wants emotional attachments he can get it outside his household by having a mistress because a real man's virility is beyond his household. A marriage can end when either a man's masculinity is attacked by a woman's act of infidelity; or when the government's law is broken by a criminal act to a woman. This is to say, hetero-normative patriarchy allows Obinze to be with both Ifemelu and Kosi—it allows him to live in both worlds; progressive and normalized masculinity as per his masculine ego's demand. Thus, Obinze's act of choosing to

break the marriage reveals his determination to totally dissociate from hetero-normative power relation. Indeed, while Kosi is a symbol of conventional masculinity, Ifemelu is the opposite - a metaphor of unconventional masculinity. To be a complete heterosexual progressive man, Obinze should, therefore, leave Kosi to resume his intimacy with Ifemelu, which is to resume his intimacy with his progressive masculine-self.

Conclusion

Indeed, Adichie in the representation of progressive masculinity in *Americannah* rejects the normalization of the unchangeability of the male subject as the representation of her male protagonist suggests a man is the product of social orientations he gets. Thus, for the ungendered world to be realized, Adichie's novel suggests that both the male and the female subject should go through a psychological metamorphosis to become equally liberated individuals who can share life and support each other's pursuit of individual-selves and ambitions. With that regard, the re-invention of progressive 'new man' and 'new woman' in *Americannah* can be regarded as a womanist endeavor of creating an integrative Africa which accommodates both the enlightened men and enlightened women to form an ungendered world.

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