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Narrative within a Narrative: Blogging as an Embedded Narrative Strategy in Adichie's *Americanah*

Melsew Alemayehu Haregu^{1*}, Berhanu Mathews²

¹ *Ph.D. Candidate, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

² *Associate Professor, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

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Abstract:

In the world of storytelling, authors employ multilayered narrative techniques for various reasons. This study aims to explore the narrative levels, the relationships between them, and the functions of the embedded texts in Adichie's novel "Americanah." Unlike the previous works that mostly focused on the thematic concerns raised in the novel, this study is originally approached from a narratological perspective. Applying narrative theory, it mainly focuses on analyzing the novel's use of blogs as an embedded narrative strategy. A narrative strategy here refers to a device or technique that a real author uses to communicate the themes of a novel. The study employs a qualitative research method since it is a textual analysis. Since blogs can reach a wide audience as a mouth of many diasporas, the author strategically used them to explain the external narration. Critical diaspora concerns are juxtaposed in the blogs by the major character, Ifemelu, for having the effect of intimacy with the readers. Overall, blogs are effectively used by the author as an embedded narrative strategy. The primary (embedding) narrative justifies the embedded narrative in it. They do not just present the text rather they provide a context for the embedded narrative. The functions identified are actional, explicative, aesthetic, and advancement of oral storytelling. The second degree narratives (blogs) are also used for aesthetic purposes as a means of creating suspense and introducing new plot lines.

Keywords: blogging, narrative embedding, narrative levels, narrative strategies, narrator.

敘事中的敘事：博客作为阿迪奇的美利坚合众国中的嵌入式敘事策略

Corresponding Author: Melsew Alemayehu Haregu, Ph.D. Candidate, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; email: melsew1981@gmail.com

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摘要:

在讲故事的世界中,作者出于各种原因采用多层叙事技巧。本研究旨在探讨阿迪奇的小说《美利坚合众国》的叙事层次、它们之间的关系以及嵌入文本的功能。与以往主要关注小说中提出的主题关注的作品不同,本研究最初是从叙事学的角度进行研究的。运用叙事理论,重点分析小说将博客作为一种嵌入的叙事策略。这里的叙事策略是指真正的作者用来传达小说主题的手段或技巧。该研究采用定性研究方法,因为它是文本分析。由于博客可以作为许多散居者的嘴巴接触到广泛的受众,因此作者有策略地使用它们来解释外部叙述。主要人物伊菲美露在博客中将批判性的散居问题并列在一起,以产生与读者亲密的效果。总的来说,博客被作者有效地用作一种嵌入式叙事策略。主要(嵌入)叙述证明了其中嵌入的叙述。它们不只是呈现文本,而是为嵌入的叙述提供上下文。确定的功能是口头讲故事的行动、解释、审美和进步。二级叙事(博客)也用于审美目的,作为制造悬念和引入新情节的手段。

关键词: 博客, 叙事嵌入, 叙事层次, 叙事策略, 叙述者。

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

As Barth (1984) states that there are tales within tales, storytelling occurs at different levels of narration. There are possibilities when a story can be told within a story. Bal (1985, p. 43) explains the happening of such circumstances as “when a character in a story begins telling a story of her or his own, creating a narrative within a narrative, or a tale within a tale”. After Genette's (1980, p. 255) introduction of the concept of narrative level, later narratologists such as Bal (1985, p. 43) and Rimmon-Kennan (2002, p. 94) forwarded their own discussions using their own terminologies. According to Genette (1980, p. 229), a narrator can be either extradiegetic or intradiegetic based on the story level, which is equivalent to the narrator being ‘outside’ or ‘inside’ of the story. An extradiegetic narrator is above or superior to the story s/he narrates, where as the intradiegetic narrator is inside the fictional world created by the story. When the narrative continues, according to him, we call it as extradiegetic → interdiegetic → inter-intradiegetic narrators based on the story level that a narrator narrates.

The original narrative becomes a ‘frame’ or ‘matrix’ narrative in Bal's (1985, p. 43) discussion, and the story told by the narrating character becomes an ‘embedded’ or ‘hypo’ narrative. Additionally, Rimmon-Kennan (2002, p. 97) prefers to count the number of narratives as first degree, second degree, third degree, and narratives according to their having the embedded stories. For her, a first-degree narrative is a narrative that is not embedded in any other narrative, whereas a second-degree narrative is a narrative that is embedded in a first-degree narrative, and a third-degree narrative is one that is embedded in a second-degree narrative, etc. Correspondingly, a first-degree narrator is the narrator of a first-degree narrative; a

second-degree narrator is the narrator of a second-degree narrative, etc.

This article focuses on exploring the narrative levels, especially how blogging is used as an embedded narrative strategy in the novel under study. A narrative strategy refers to a device or technique that a real author uses to transmit a theme, subject, or message. Novelists usually use various narrative strategies in constructing their texts. These strategies are artistically used to convey the story and to achieve a certain effect on the readers (Mackay, 2011, p. 39). The main argument, as Chatman (1978, p. 30) explains, is that novelists deliberately set up specific narrative strategies “to achieve certain effects in the reader”. Roston (2006, p. 5) shares the above idea when defining the term as “the strategies where by [the novels] achieve their effects”. The term narrative strategy in Roston's work basically refers to the relationship between the authorial craft and its intended effect on the readers. Thus, narrative strategies are techniques that are strongly linked with the goal of the narrative (why the story is told in such a way). It mainly focuses on the effect it transfers from using that specific strategy.

It is true that getting narrative studies using the term narrative strategy is uncommon. Nonetheless, although they treat the term from different perspectives, few scholars have conducted narrative studies using this terminology. Dires (2014, p. 22) treats form as a narrative strategy that is employed in a literary text with “the writer's skillful maneuver to motivate the meaning of the texts at the textual and contextual levels”. Shen's (2006, p. ii) dissertation also used the term ‘to explore the reciprocal relationship between narrative techniques and themes’ in Comier's novels. Additionally, form including the choice of protagonists and secondary characters, linearity or non-linearity in structure, setting, and voice or mode of storytelling is also treated as a narrative strategy in Rahman's (2002, p. 7) article. On the other hand,

Kozielec's (2015, p. 1) article accepted the writer's use of Igbo as a narrative strategy to manifest migrant identity.

From these works, we can conclude that different narrative researchers use the term, narrative strategy, in the way they should address. Therefore, in this study, narrative level, specifically embedding, is accepted as a narrative strategy for telling a story and how this strategy functions and succeeds in emphasizing the themes of Adichie's diaspora novel "Americanah."

2. Methodology and Organization

The study is based on narrative theory. Since it focuses on textual analysis, it employs a qualitative research method. The analysis begins with a critical reading of the novel. Depending on the theories by the stated narratologists above, important extracts from the novel would be organized and interpreted. The paper has three sections. The first section is an introduction of the study, which comprises: background, methodology, and organization of the study. Section two deals with the results and discussions based on the selected narrative strategy employed in the novel. The fourth and the final section is the conclusion of the paper. Because the author uses multi-layered narratives such as blogs as a strategy, Adichie's (2013) *Americanah* is purposively selected since it is fitting to treat the novel from this narratological perspective, i.e., narrative levels.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Narrative Levels in the Novel

Adichie's *Americanah* can be considered a romantic novel, basically a romance between two major characters - Ifemelu and Obinze. However, it is surprising that their physical contact spends very limited time in the novel. We have seen them communicating through mobile texts, emails, and rarely letters. They usually communicate through Ifemelu's blogs. In addition to their personal mediums, Obinze equally with other audiences gets information on different issues from Ifemelu's blogs, which is the most significant way of embedded narratives found in the text. Therefore, he is seen in reacting on some issues of the blog posts.

Since the narrator of the story is not sexually determinate, this paper borrows Lanser's (1981, p. 166) rule to use the pronoun "appropriate to the author's sex" in writing the paper. It is to mean that the narrator is female if the author is female, and that the narrator is male if the author is male. Thus, this paper continues using the pronoun 'she' to describe the narrator, which is appropriate to the writer's sex.

In the novel, Ifemelu's blog is described as a successful blog with a growing readership. We can see what the narrator says about the blog: "...trailed by two hundred and seventy-four comments so far. All those

readers growing month by month, linking, cross posting, knowing so much more than she did....." (p. 5). The readership by "one thousand unique visitors" by the sixth day of the post also shows that the blog attracts many new readers to participate (p. 422). The blog has also influenced teachers to use it in the class as Paula, one of Ifemelu and Blaine's friends, states the importance of the blogs for her students as "It's interesting how safe their thinking is and I want to push them out of their comfort zone" (p. 325). Paula equates the blog to any other authoritative text that the students must read. This clearly shows the importance of the blog in the novel.

The narrative structure in *Americanah* is multi-layered. At the first degree (Gennett's extradiegetic) narrative level, it is the third-person omniscient narrator who narrates from different characters perspectives. The next level is the second-degree narrative (Gennett's intradiegetic) level, where Ifemelu writes and posts blogs on different issues. Beyond this is the third-degree (Gennette's metadiegetic) narrative that arises from blog comments by blog visitors. We can also obtain responses for the blog comments. This type of narration presents a complex situation because the narrative levels follow no clear pattern. Let us see the level of narration in the following extract:

"...but the most comments, by far, were for Ifemelu's piece about the Niger-politan club: Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York, or anywhere else for that matter..... The second commenter wrote: *my cousin came back....., she saw students standing in line for the bus and she said, "Wow, people actually stand in line here!"* Another early commenter wrote: *Why should Nigerians who school abroad have a choice of where....* That comment sparked more responses than the original post had" (p. 422).

An extradiegetic narrator narrates the first-degree narrative as most comments are because of Ifemelu's blogs. We, then, obtain the second-degree narrative (the blog) is narrated by Ifemelu, the blogger. Then, we get a commenter about the blog. The narrator's voice "that comment sparked more responses" clearly indicates the presence of respondents for the comment, and it is obvious that the responses are by a different narrator. The second commenter's cousin, for example, can be considered as the fourth person who shared her view about students. Here, the blog is the most important element which is directly narrated by the blogger herself. It is the blog content that attracts many individuals to comment. The comments are diverse depending on the ideological differences of the respondents. It helps readers understand the story from different perspectives. Hierarchically, we can draw the agents of each narrative as: the narrator → the blogger → the blog commenter → the comment responder. We can also see three levels of narrations in the following example:

"Years later, she would blog about this: 'On Non-

American Blacks Suffering from Illnesses Whose Names They Refuse to Know.' A Congolese woman wrote a long comment in response: She had moved to Virginia from Kinshasa and months into her first semester of college begun to feel dizzy” (p. 158).

In this example, the extradiegetic narrator cuts across the possible levels of narration in the novel as follows: The first level of narration is the narrator's voice telling us that Ifemelu, the major character, wrote a blog. The second level is the blog itself, which is written by the major character herself, and the third level is a comment by a Congolese woman about her experience of panic attacks in America.

Here, there are three agents or narrators of three different stories: external narrator, the major character, and a minor character, respectively. The extra-diegetic (first-degree) narrator introduces readers as there is a blog that is written by the major character. But she never tells readers what the blog is about, rather makes it to be narrated by the intra-diegetic (second degree) narrator. This is because the important element here in this scenario is the title of the blog, and the authority of the blog is Ifemelu. It is about non-American blacks having illness, which is one of the serious issues in diaspora fiction.

Since the blog is the mouth of many diasporas in America, this important concept should be narrated by the blogger herself other than the narrator for emphasis to have the effect of intimacy with the readers. Here, readers can read the title of the blog equally with the narrator character. However, unlike the voice by Ifemelu, the comment by one of the major characters (a Congolese woman) is compiled and narrated by the narrator, not by the character herself; readers could not get her exact utterances rather informed what she replied to Ifemelu's blog. This shows that her comment is not as important as that of the blog itself by the major character. The narrator's intention here is not beyond presenting that the blog has readers and people had the same experience in the USA. In this instance, we can say that the extradiegetic narrator presents the blog contents from the meta-diegetic level. After showing that the novel is rich in narrative levels, it is important to see the relationship between them.

3.2. Relationship between Narrative Levels

Genette (1980, pp. 232-233) differentiates three main types of relationships that can connect the embedded narrative to the primary narrative in which it is inserted. The first type of relationship is direct causality between the events of the metadiegesis and those of the diegesis, conferring on the second narrative an explanatory function. He further explains that these kinds of embedded narratives seek to answer the question “what events led to the present situation?” The second type

consists of a purely thematic relationship, therefore implying no spatio-temporal continuity between metadiegesis and diegesis: a relationship of contrast or of analogy. The third type involves no explicit relationship between the two story levels: it is the act of narrating itself that fulfills a function in the diegesis, independently of the metadiegetic content as a function of distraction, and/or obstruction.

Bal (1985, p. 57) observes that when the embedded text presents a complete story with an elaborate fabula, we gradually forget the fabula of the primary narrative: “this apparently loose relationship between primary and embedded text is relevant to the development of the primary fabula”. Another possible relationship between the two texts presents itself when the two fabulas are related to each other. This structure has two possible meanings: either the embedded story explains the primary story or resembles the primary story. In the first case, the relationship is made explicit by the actor narrating the embedded story; in the second, the explanation is usually left to the reader, or merely hinted at in the fabula.

In *Americanah*, the narrator provides us with background information about the blogger (Ifemelu) and the blog itself. Readers are introduced to the blog in the first chapter of the novel when blogging is stated as the task of the major character as:

“They were conditioned to fill silence. If they asked what she did, she would say vaguely, “I write a lifestyle blog” because saying “I write an anonymous blog called *Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes by a Non American Black)* would make them uncomfortable” (p. 4).

This is an indication to the reader that the blog is an important part of the novel and its story. The blog in “*Americanah*” has an external introduction. From the outset of the novel, readers become aware of the presence of a blog and get a feel of what the blog is about when the narrator mentions some posts in the blog and visitor comments on the next pages of the novel. Here, the secondary narrative (the blog) and primary text have a close relationship. There is spatio-temporal continuity between the meta-diegesis (second degree narration) and diegesis (first degree narration). This relationship is not of direct causality. The second narrative takes on an explanatory function.

Some stories in the novel also resemble one another, and the blog is entangled with the primary narrative. The blogs are incidents of interest that Ifemelu experiences or observes in her day-to-day life. There is a repetition within the blog of events that the reader has already seen in the primary text. An example is when Ifemelu works as a babysitter for a white family that lived in a grand stone house with white pillars; she encounters a carpet cleaner who is hostile to her because she is black and a black

should not own such a stately house. By remembering the situation of his physical appearance, she, then, would post,

"She would begin the blog post "Sometimes in America, Race is Class" with the story of his dramatic change, and end it with: *It did not matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned, I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse, "Blacks" as a whole are often lumped with "Poor Whites". Not Poor Blacks are Poor Whites, But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing, indeed*" (p. 166).

Before the blog, readers are told by the extradiegetic narrator that Ifemelu was angry on the carpet cleaner because he never expected to find her with a white person in that house. Her experience with the carpet cleaner (white), which is narrated by the first-person narrator, is repeated in a blog post, which is narrated by the second-degree narrator. This shows that the issue raised in the blog is a very important element in which Adichie wants to raise. From the narrator's voice, readers can simply understand that the man became hostile on her. The reason for his hostility is not stated clearly. Then, the blog is inserted to justify the ideology of most Americans about blacks' and whites' privileges. It clearly states how America's public discourse assimilates blacks' status with poor whites. The narrator states his physical appearances as "...he stiffened when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then, it ossified to hostility" (p. 166). This attitude makes the carpet cleaner first surprised and then annoyed by Ifemelu's presence there. He never expected her to be an owner of the house because of her color only.

Another example is a blog on the expensive lifestyles of some young Nigerian women. The blog post is about the lifestyle of Ranyinudo, Ifemelu's friend. A description of Ranyinudo's relationship with her the chief executive person has been narrated by the external narrator in the earlier pages as: "*working for an advertising company, living in a one-bedroom flat whose rent her salary could not pay...dating a married chief executive who bought her business class tickets to London*" (p. 389). The blog, then, reads,

"There are many young women in Lagos with Unknown Sources of Wealth. They live lives they cannot afford. They have only ever traveled to a business class in Europe but have jobs that cannot even afford them a regular ticket. One of them is my friend, a beautiful and brilliant woman working in advertising" (p. 422).

Regarding this, Bal (1985, p. 60) defines resemblance "when two fabulas can be paraphrased in such a way that the summaries have one or more striking elements in common". In the case of the two blog posts cited above in one the resemblance with the text is that both texts address the issue of race in America using the same incident. The difference is their level of narration. The first

one is the narrator's voice about Ifemelu's feeling on her friend, Ranyinudo, whereas the latter is a blog written by Ifemelu herself. In the second, the blog and text are a social critique of the lives of certain women in Nigeria. When confronted by Ranyinudo for airing her story in public, Ifemelu says "Your story is so common" (p. 422). Ifemelu uses Ranyinudo's life story to talk about women "who define their lives by men they can never truly have and are crippled by a culture of dependence" (p. 422).

So far, the study has tried to examine the narrative levels, and the relationships between the first degree (extradiegetic) narrative and second degree (intradiegetic) narrative. This concludes that the relationship is one where the embedding narrative justifies the embedded narrative. This discussion leads us to look at the function of the embedded texts and how it contributes to developing novel's thematic concerns.

3.3. Functions of the Blogging As Embedded Strategy

Authors choose to employ a multi-layered narrative technique in their work for various reasons. Rimmon-Kennan (2002, p. 95) discussed three types of embedded narrative functions that can be found separately or in combination. The first one is the actional function, where telling itself develops the plot. It happens when some "hypodiegetic narratives maintain or advance the action of the first narrative by the sheer fact of being narrated". The second function is explicative, which explains the diegesis or the primary narrative. The thematic function is another one, which is *mise en abyme* in French stories that reflect in some way the narrative around them. This study begins discussing the functions of the embedded narrative from the functions identified by Kennan and then expands to other functions revealed in *Americanah*.

3.3.1. The Explicative (Explanatory) Function

Embedded narratives may serve as an answer to questions that arise in the primary narrative. This function helps readers understand how the events in the primary narrative came to be. All these narratives, explicitly or not, according to Rimmon-Kennan (2002, p. 95) answer a question of the type "what events have led to the present situation?" The blog Ifemelu puts up in *Americanah* explains the countless different approaches to race, gender, ethnicity, and beauty both in Nigeria and in the United States of America. From the title of the Ifemelu's blog: "Raceteenth or Various Curious Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by Non-American Blacks", it is clear that Adichie wants to tackle race from an African perspective. To avoid the subjectivity that may come from an American Black because of the history of slavery and earlier racist practices that they were subjected to, the narrator looks at it from an outsider's perspective (through Ifemelu).

The primary narrative presents to the reader the action of the story, while the blog explains the "why" and "how"

of the situation in the primary text. The blog allows the public to comment on the issues at hand. The blogs in the novel play a complementary role while facilitating the explanation of the primary text. Some instances are when Ifemelu and Curt walked into the restaurant with linen-covered tables. The host looked at them and asked Curt "Table for one?," and the owner of the bed and breakfast in Montreal refused to acknowledge her and looked only at Curt (p. 294). Ifemelu felt slighted by this treatment but she "could not tell Curt because he would say she was overreacting". Finally, when Ifemelu starts her blog, her first post entails the prejudices she experienced when seen with a white man and the racially skewed magazines. She ends the blog with words she remembered a long time after that post and recited at the dinner table of a French and American couple. The blog reads:

"The simplest solution to the problem of race in America is Romantic love. Not friendship. Not a kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved. And because that deep romantic love is so rare because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved" (p. 296).

This post explains her honesty to a comment by a Haitian poet who had dated a white man for three years. The poet said that race was never an issue for them. Ifemelu reacts by repeatedly saying "That's a lie" (p. 290). Through this narration and the blog post, Adichie expresses her anger at the idea of sweeping of the race issue under the carpet by saying "race is not an issue" or race does not matter (p. 291).

Blog posts are also used to explain the meaning of concepts around the race issue that cannot be explained in the primary text. An example is the blog post titled "Understanding America for the Non- American Black: A few Explanations of What Things Really Mean" (p. 350). This blog raised three basic issues that should be clear to non-American blacks. First, it captures the evasive nature of Americans when handling conversations on racial issues; they become uncomfortable with race. They refer to race using abstract terms such as "simplistic" or "complex", in which they use to shut up blacks to raise racial issues. Second, the blogger discusses how diversity means different things to blacks and to whites as: "Diversity means different things to different folks. If a white person is saying a neighborhood is diverse, they mean nine percent black people..." (p. 351).

The third issue raised in this post is the Americans attitude toward 'culture' when they mean race. If a certain film is liked or done by white folks, they say it is 'the mainstream.' When they say urban, it means black and

poor and potentially dangerous. Another post is "What Academics Mean by White Privileges, or Yes It Sucks to Be Poor and White but Try Being Poor and Non-White" (p. 346). This post is one of the lengthier posts, spanning close to two pages. It discusses, explaining at length the imbalances created by racism. An example is given about what would happen if a black person was found in possession of drugs and if a white person was found in a similar situation. The post reads "the white guy is more likely to be sent to treatment and the black guy is more likely to be sent to jail" (p. 346). Here, the blogger effectively describes how whites are academically privileged relative to blacks.

The "Raceteenth" blog in *Americanah* helps the reader trace the histories around the race issue; this explains the reader how the current situation arose and why the race issue remains unresolved. In the post "Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking About Blackness." (p. 325), Ifemelu outlines the ways in which the whites offer alternative explanations about racial issues and how they want to wish away the past. In this post, she records history to anchor the reader on the race issue:

"Dear Non-American Black, If an American Black person is telling you about an experience about being black, please do not eagerly bring up examples from your own life. ...Do not be quick to find alternative explanations for what happened. Do not say "Oh, it's not really race, it is class. Oh, it's not race, it is gender... A century ago, the white ethnics hated being hated, but it was sort of tolerable because at least black people were below them on the ladder. ... Being American means you take the whole Shebang, America's assets and America's debts, and Jim Crow is a big ass debt. ... Don't say "Oh Racism is over; slavery was so long ago." We are talking about the problem from the 1960s not 1860s" (pp. 325-327).

The mention of the historic events, the slavery, Jim Crow, blacks stepping off the curb because a white person was passing, and white women standing outside schools shouting "Ape" because they did not want their children to mix with black children among other incidences mentioned in the post gives the reader background information on why the racial wound still festers. At the end of this blog post, Ifemelu does not stop at listing the do's and don'ts of the appropriate way whites should respond to blacks discussing race. Generally, the blogs stated above are strategically used to explicate the external narration by an extra-diegetic or first-person narrator.

3.3.2. Actional Function

The actional function occurs when the very telling of the embedded narrative develops the plot. This function borrows from Genette's (1980, p. 233) third type of

function where such an embedded narrative: “involves no explicit relationship between the two story levels: it is the act of narrating itself that fulfills a function in the diegesis, independently of the metadiegetic content, a function of distraction, for example, and/or obstruction”. There are other characters from the primary text who are involved with the blogs either directly or indirectly in the novel. Ranyinudo, Ifemelu’s friend, for example, is upset that Ifemelu had written about her in one of the blog posts. Ifemelu had posted a blog about “the expensive lifestyles of some young women in Lagos”. Ranyinudo calls Ifemelu and says “It is obviously me! Look at this! Ranyinudo paused and then began to read aloud” (p. 422). This post was, then, taken down by Ifemelu.

Paula like Ranyinudo also reads a blog post to her friends. She also requires her students to read Ifemelu’s blog. It is noted that Obinze read the whole archive of Ifemelu’s blog posts, his reaction to blogs is also accounted for. Some experiences Ifemelu has and the observations about life and the other characters form a significant part of the blog. Blaine contributed to the blog indirectly by influencing Ifemelu through his comments. He reminded Ifemelu what he thought was her role and what the purpose of the blog should have been “Remember people are not reading you as entertainment; they’re reading you as cultural commentary. That is a real responsibility. There are kids writing college essays about your blog” (p. 312). The extent to which the other characters contribute to this blog gives it an actional function. In addition to the functions forwarded by Genette (1980) and Rimmon-Kennan (2002), the study discusses some functions of the embedded narratives found in the novel.

3.3.3. Aesthetic Function

Aesthetics in literature refers to the investigation of the nature and perception of beauty in a piece of literary work. The use of embedded narratives is one of the aesthetic choices Adichie makes to creatively present her work. It positively affects the presentation of the works to the reader. The external structure reveals break, with an indented and bolded typeface in the novel. In chapter thirty-one of the novel, the tension raised by a heated discussion on race and relationships at a dinner party is cooled off by the insertion of a blog that discusses hair as a race metaphor:

“Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of woolly hair or tight spirally curls..... She would totally rock, but poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote” (p. 297).

The tone of the blog is that of discussing race with a light touch and is peppered with humor. The reader is expected to get relief from the humor contained in the blog. Through the description of Michelle Obama’s hair

as woolly and the effect of that on Obama’s election results, the heavy matter of race is discussed even if humorously. The embedded narratives help break the uniformity of the primary narratives. *Americanah* is a novel that spans four hundred and seventy-seven pages. The blogs give readers a much needed break from the monotony. They appear both within the chapter and sometimes at the end of the chapter to give readers fresh perspectives offered by Ifemelu and her blog followers.

Additionally, the embedded narratives help create suspense. Since the reader must wait for the reading of the embedded narrative to pass, the experience of suspense is lengthened. Any questions raised in the readers’ mind must be held in suspense till the embedded narrative is read for a possible resolution. An instance of suspense is seen when a blog follows this statement: “When months later, Ifemelu had the fight with Blaine, she wondered if Shan had fueled this anger, an anger she never fully understood” (p. 337). Immediately next to this statement, Adichie inserts the blog: “Is Obama Anything but Black?” The blog is totally unrelated to the preceding passages. It is still wondering how and why the break-up will occur; readers should wait for the event reading the inserted blog and thus suspense is created.

The embedded narratives also serve to help effectively introduce new plot lines. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she transits into a home different from what it was thirteen years back. The novel captures an aspect of the returnee narrative through a post in the blog: “The small Redemptions of Lagos” (p. 418). The piece about the NigerPolitan Club describes the arrogance of Nigerian returnees who gather on a weekly basis to moan the disparities between Lagos and the cities they come from-New York. Ifemelu uses this post to mock the air of pretention that surrounds them and encourages the returnees to accept the way of life back home. This post highlights the definition of an “Americanah” presented earlier in the novel: “....who had come from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred *r* to every word she spoke” (p. 65).

3.3.4. Advancing the African Oral Storytelling

In a widely quoted TED talk titled “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009), Adichie has tackled commenting on the power of stories to influence people’s explanation of reality: ‘Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize’. Obiechina (1992, p. 199) observes that “the oral tradition impulse is strong in the modern African novels because the writers themselves are products of both oral traditions and literate education”. Hewett (2005, p. 78) also observes that “Adichie like her peers is directly engaged with the Nigerian literary canon and is furthermore making a case for her inclusion in it”.

Adichie is conscious of her position and role as an African writer and demonstrates this by borrowing from the rich reserves of traditional oral story-telling techniques. Narrative embedding is linked to the oral story-telling tradition. The first narrative level functions similarly to a storyteller's role. The embedded narrative is an artistic device that enhances the performance of narrating. Irele (2001, p. 24) argues that the interplay between orality and literacy is:

".....the dominance of orality in the cultural environment of African expression seemed to offer possibilities for validating the endeavor to state the relevance of orality not only to a general understanding of the processes involved in human communication but also, and in particular, to formulate an all-encompassing idea of imaginative expression, one that would point toward a universal concept of literature".

This statement points to the benefits of creating a situation where oral culture is assimilated and reorganized in written fiction. First, it enhances artistry in a piece of work. Second, it aids in stimulating the process of understanding a text. Besides, Adichie used this strategy as a means of giving maximum authenticity to her writing. Writers look to their indigenous poetics as Obiechina (1992, p. 199) notes "to create works that draw upon their living oral traditions to enrich forms, techniques and styles through literate education". Some characters such as Paula and Ranyinudo read the blog posts aloud as a result of enacting a performance. Unlike the other blogs by the same blogger, these characters are seen reading to their students orally. Here, readers are allowed to read Ifemelu's blog and to listen to the characters' reading performance simultaneously. The phrase "read aloud" in the statements "Ranyinudo paused and then began to read aloud" (p. 422), and "Paula brought out her phone and fiddled with it and then began to read aloud" strengthens the argument.

The finding of this study is different from the previous studies on the same novel. The previous studies mostly focus on the 'what' of the novel. They tend to study the thematic concerns illustrated in the novel that most diasporas face in reality, such as identity crisis, racial and gender discrimination, poverty, etc., whereas this study focuses specifically on 'how' on the nature, relationship, and function of blogs in the novel. Using Gennete's theory of narratives as a framework, this study discusses how the author uses blogs to transfer the themes of the novel to the readers.

4. Conclusion

Basically, three concepts have been addressed in the study. These are narrative levels, the relationship between them and their functions in addressing the intended thematic concerns in the novel. First, the paper tries to assess narrative levels (the embedding and the embedded)

in the novel. It is found that the novel employs up to four narrative levels in which the outer embeds the inner one. The narrators of each level are distinct. Here, readers are free to understand the story from different perspectives. As stated in the title, the study mainly focuses on the use of blogs as an embedded narrative strategy in the novel. The hierarchy of the narrative level is the narrator, the blogger, blog commenter, and respondents of the comments, respectively.

The most important idea is narrated at the second-degree narrative level by the blogs. This is because Sapphic Derrida, one of the most frequent posters, writes about Ifemelu "to create a space for real conversations about an important subject" (p. 5). Blogs are perpetual and can reach a wide audience. Each blog post has its own title and content. Visitors to the blog read the posts and share them so that other people can see and read them. Visitors can also make comments and participate in the discussion. Blogs are also easily accessible through computers and mobile phones. One of the characters in the novel, Paula, reads one of Ifemelu's blog posts in a gathering of friends from her phone (p. 325).

The second point is the relationship between the primary or the embedding and the embedded narratives. The secondary narrative (the blog) and primary text have a close relationship. There is spatio-temporal continuity between the meta-diegesis (second degree narration) and diegesis (first degree narration). This relationship is not of direct causality. The second narrative takes on an explanatory function. Some stories in the novel also resemble one another and the blog is intertwined with the primary narrative. There are repetitions within the blog of events that the reader has already seen in the primary text. This concludes that the relationship is one where the embedding narrative justifies the embedded narrative.

Exploring the functions of the embedded narratives is the last point in which the study has attempted to look for. Embedded narratives may serve as an answer to questions that arise in the primary narrative. The primary narrative presents to the reader the action of the story, while the blog explains the "why" and "how" of the situation in the primary text. The blog allows the public to comment on the issues at hand. The blogs in the novel play a complementary role while facilitating the explanation of the primary text. There are also other characters from the primary text who are involved with the blogs either directly or indirectly. This is for the sake of actional function. The use of embedded narratives also contributes to the aesthetic beauty of the novel. The embedded narratives in Adichie's work positively affect the presentation of the works to the reader. The external structure reveals break, with an indented bolded typeface in the novel. Additionally, the embedded narratives help create suspense and introduce new plot lines.

Considering blogging as an embedded narrative

strategy, this article is limited specifically to the nature, relationship, and function of narrative levels because of different constraints. Since the novel is full of multiple perspectives by different characters, the researcher recommends future researchers to approach the novel from the area of focalization and mind style theories of narrative, which are new and growing narrative theories largely discussed and philosophized by many narratologists.

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