Migrant Multimodal Narratives: From Blogs and Print Media to YouTube

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Abstract   Current technology places migrant narratives into a fresh, diverse and at times hybrid act of narrating. Due to the proliferation of digital media and global culture, migrants' journeys are frequently documented through various multimodal forms. The impact of new media on the body of current migrant narratives – particularly those that fall under the canon of postcolonial literature – will be explored in the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Reni Eddo-Lodge and Warsan Shire. This chapter also aims at highlighting how current technology is increasingly used as a means for people to tell their stories, so that their voices can be heard by a wider citizenship and most relevantly therefore might be used as advocacy tools for a cause.

Keywords   Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Reni Eddo-Lodge. Warsan Shire. Racism. Social engagement. Multimodal narration.

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1　Introduction

The current migrants' journey from the home country to the host country, with all the material and psychological consequences of this 'passage', represents a link between by now canonical postcolonial literature and twenty-first-century migrant narratives. The condition of the country of origin in contemporary migrant narratives is often

characterised by political and/or economic crises occurring as a direct result of colonial rule, neo-colonialism, or decolonisation, as the Indian-New York-based author and journalist Suketu Mehta clearly and explicitly claims:

> These days, a great many people in the rich countries complain loudly about migration from the poor ones. But as migrants see it, the game was rigged: First, the rich countries colonized us and stole our treasure and prevented us from building our industries. After plundering us for centuries, they left, having drawn up maps in ways that ensured permanent strife between our communities. [They] built up their economies with our raw materials and our labor. [...] They stole our minerals and corrupted our governments so that their corporations could continue stealing our resources; they fouled the air above us and the waters around us, making our farmers barren, our oceans lifeless. (Mehta 2019, 3-4)

However, global culture and the proliferation of digital media have substantially affected the act of narrating. Authors are increasingly drawn to the possibilities offered by media technology and cannot help but reflect, consciously or unconsciously, models and norms of usage of the language which prevail in our contemporary world of digital media and digital production (Rylance 1994, 9-10). In the last two decades, digital productions have complemented and even supplanted print media. It is not surprising, therefore, that migrants' journeys and their marginalisation that follows upon their arrival in Western societies are depicted and disseminated according to the features and possibilities offered by the Internet platforms and new media. In this chapter I will discuss three postcolonial literary works characterised by the pervasive influence that modern technology has on migrant multimodal narratives. My intent is to shed light on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (2017) and Warsan Shire's *Home* (2017).[1] The authors in question share their views about the persisting issues of racism, migration, fragmented identity and alienation. Furthermore, these young authors also share a common usage of blogs, video-essays and web-participatory projects, even though this does not exclude by no means traditional interventions in print media.

Adichie's novel, Eddo-Lodge's collection of essays and Shire's video-poem represent three different examples of the interaction between new multimodal textual forms fostered by new media and postcolonial literature fostered by new media and postcolonial literature,

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which provides a theoretical framework to interpret current migrant narratives. Due to their distinctive features, the above-mentioned works will be analysed through the lens of multimodality.

2 The Debate on Social Engagement and Digital Storytelling

In her philosophical reflections on the world and human affairs, Hannah Arendt states that individuals distinguish themselves through action and speech as "we exist primarily as acting and speaking beings" (Arendt 1998, 176-81). Arendt conceives the ability of telling a story as the process through which individuals reconstruct their personal experiences and enter a collective space. The notion of storytelling as a spatial practice implies focusing on how stories are shaped through interactions and how they can transform into wider, collective engagements. In literature, specifically in the case of postcolonial literature, this ability of telling a story may be compared at times to a form of social engagement as well as to forms "of emancipation, critique and transformation" (Nayar 2008, xiii).

Postcolonial literature and, by extension, contemporary migrant narratives, provide a narration that mirrors the real world in a realistic setting, under specific circumstances and, in this ability to reproduce the world back to an audience, these narratives might be regarded as a highly sophisticated laboratory for observing contemporary society. The laboratory metaphor shapes the mental image of a cutting-edge experiment involving collaboration between writers and citizens seeking to create equality, social justice and human rights guarantees. For instance, the Kittitian-British writer Caryl Phillips, by centring the stories and experience of people who have often been overlooked in Western culture, suggests that literature, with its potentially more inclusive scope, offers a vital tool for bridging the gaps in the mainstream, dominant culture's version of history:

> I had learnt that in a situation in which history is distorted, the literature of a people often becomes its history, its writers the keepers of the past, present, and future. In this situation a writer can infuse a people with a sense of their own unique identity and spiritually kindle the fire of resistance. (Phillips 1987, 99)

In addition to this notion that literature reflects, absorbs and explores the diversity of society, Phillips confers it the supplementary feature of social activism, already referred to as "resistance":

> As long as we have literature as a bulwark against intolerance, and as a force for a change, then we have a chance. [...] for liter-

ature *is* plurality in action; it embraces and celebrates a place of no truths, it relishes ambiguity, and it deeply respects the place where everybody has the right to be understood. (Phillips 2011, 16; italics in the original)

That being said, the definition of postcolonial writing as "a literature of emancipation, critique and transformation" (Nayar 2008, xii) reflects a common concern between by now canonical postcolonial literature and twenty-first century migrant narratives. Practices of giving voice to marginalised individuals excluded by mainstream Western history along with the attempt to raise awareness of persisting issues of racism, identity, belonging, trauma and diaspora have merely adapted themselves to changes that have been occurring over time. Current migrant narratives are both an account of events told and/or written by postcolonial authors and a first-hand testimony told and/or written by individuals who have lately made the journey. Although migrants are not a monolithic group, but originate from many regions and speak numerous languages, this chapter addresses some migrant narratives written, spoken and or visually recorded in English. Furthermore, the dichotomy between belonging and longing for home, that is to say the figurative stepping forward (into a new culture)-stepping back (into one's roots) movement is analysed through migrant narrations by and about authors fleeing countries of origin that have a history of colonialism.

This act of narrating can integrate a variety of modes, such as words, images, audio and videos. The current, multimodal storytelling is feasible because of the considerable and user-friendly features provided by the Internet. The globally connected network system facilitates worldwide communication and allows users to interact through digital platforms such as social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram along with media sharing platforms like YouTube or Vimeo. Moreover, digital platforms share the attributes of ease of use and immediate appeal for users/citizens (Landow 2006, 345). The virtual space created by digital connectivity has the power to temporarily erase national borders and catalyses feelings of belonging and longing for home offering in return a sense of digital citizenship. This virtual space which functions as the migrant's ephemeral but inclusive, safe *locus* also simulates a highly sophisticated laboratory for understanding and promoting social and collective engagement and multimodal storytelling.

Contemporary migrants' journey is most often expressed through the use of both words and images. This juxtaposition of words and images, of two diverse codes of conveying storytelling, requires a double reading, that is to say of the written word and of the visualised images. In a short essay "Words and Pictures" (1967), Michel Foucault argues that the relationship between "the sayable" and "the visible" along with

their coexistence and isomorphous feature merely depict the author's culture in a precise moment in history and place (Foucault 1967, 12). Moreover, in terms of multimodality, this interdisciplinary approach to storytelling may be conceptualised "as a special mode or language of representation" (Moslund 2010, 4). Furthermore, the art historian William John Thomas Mitchell describes the growing presence of the visual image as a means of conveying stories as the "pictorial turn", a moment in culture where the human face itself has gained a digital life. The consequent 'facialization' of life experience allows individuals to take a predominant role as real-life protagonists in their own real-life stories. Such double decoding is exemplified by the Internet that may become "a means of defining and communicating a newly recreated identity" (Landow 2006, 345). Although ephemeral, this digital potentiality grants a sense of sameness to individuals who are invisible, unheard and marginalised at the borders of white, Western societies.

This impact of the digital world on literature distinctly emerges in Adichie's, Eddo-Lodge's and Shire's works. These young writers, who may arguably be defined as 'digital-new-avant-garde', are just three names within the larger evolving, growing field of postcolonial and migration studies.

3 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Blending Digital Writing and Print Media

In 2013, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie published *Americanah*, her third novel. In Adichie's novel everyday forms of electronic communication such as blogs and emails appear and blend with the narration. The female character Ifemelu moves from Nigeria to the USA with the prospect of improving her life and career. Her story begins in the host country where she writes "an anonymous blog called *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (Adichie 2014, 4; italics in the original). This is Ifemelu's 'calling card' and is a foretaste of her attempts at conforming to global prevailing standards of expression along with her attempts to feel fully included in the host country. The virtual space provided by her blog allows Ifemelu, a non-African-American black immigrant, to explore issues of racism and discrimination which are deeply rooted in the American, white society. Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins emphasise

> the importance of digital storytelling as a means to raise and amplify voices that are unheard or suppressed in public spheres as a means to find stories, to share them and then to analyse what influence the sharing of such representations can have on public discourses. (Dunford, Jenkins 2017, 7)

Ifemelu's blog represents such a virtual space, where she can "raise and amplify" her voice with the intent to interact with the social issues and concerns of the citizens of her host country.

Americanah is an obvious example of the junction between literature and new media. This junction involves storytelling and technology that meet to point in a new direction enabling authors to craft personal stories using imagery, text and the spoken word (Dunford, Jenkins 2001, 4). Ifemelu's blogposts may be understood as a digital attempt to, at first, comprehend – and later blend – into the culture of the host country. In essence, the virtual location functions as her "in-between space" that may:

> provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate[s] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjectivity and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (Bhabha 1994, 2; italics in the original)

"The emergence of the interstices", or the feeling of "in-betweenness" also introduced by Bhabha, implies at the same time the "collision of cultures", and "denotes transition, passage, process" which are actions that take place in a

> liminal zone without clearly identifiable borders, where diverse cultures converge without merging. (Dingwaney, Maier 1995, 8)

In this context, Ifemelu's blog houses her reflections, her observations, her political views and her daily life in the United States where, in her eyes, "whiteness is the thing to aspire to" (Adichie 2014, 253). In the end, Ifemelu's attempts to engage in virtual conversations with her readers still remain a "liminal zone". Indeed, she does not reply to comments posted by her readers; as a counter effect, those comments nourish instead a sense of anxiety as they make her feel "eager to be fresh and to impress" (Adichie 2014, 6). Ifemelu's blog as an "in-between space" should, following Bhabha's logic, help her to create a new identity; in reality, however, the negotiation process proves to be difficult to achieve, and eventually the act of posting leaves her feeling hollow and inauthentic:

> She began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people's stories for something she could use. Sometimes making fragile links to race. Sometimes not believing herself. The more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false. (Adichie 2014, 6)

Nonetheless, digital stories can be used as advocacy tools for a cause:

> As engagement is a subjective feeling and participation is a concrete action, it may be that participation is easier to measure; feelings of engagement must be elicited, whereas participation can be observed. (McPherson 2015, 137)

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

> She had written the final post only days ago, trailed by two hundred and seventy-four comments so far. All those readers, growing month by month, linking and cross-posting, knowing so much more than she did; they had always frightened and exhilarated her. (Adichie 2014, 5)

Ifemelu's twelve posts embedded in the novel may resemble open letters addressed to an anonymous "Dear American Non-Black" on the subjects of racism, discrimination, politics, white privilege and social injustices and intended for the general, hopefully also white readership. Although, the non-African-American black immigrant Ifemelu does not seem interested in taking action, she does take advantage of her blog. The blog becomes a virtual container that holds questions and possible suggestions to overcome some racial issues at the core of the host country society:

> Dear American Non-Black [...] don't put on a Let's Be Fair tone and say "But black people are racist too". Because of course we're all prejudiced (I can't even stand some of my blood relatives, grasping, selfish folks), but racism is about the power of a group and in America it's white folks who have that power. How? Well, white folks don't get treated like shit in upper-class African-American communities and white folks don't get denied bank loans or mortgages precisely because they are white and black juries don't give white criminals worse sentences than black criminals for the same crime and [...] So after this listing of don'ts, what's the do? I'm not sure. Try listening, maybe. Hear what is being said. And remember that it's not about you. American Blacks are not telling you that you are to blame. [...] Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. (405-6)

As soon as Ifemelu "meld[s] into a piercing homesickness" (7) after having

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

she definitively leaves for Nigeria, her home country and the place
where being black does not stand for being the Other:

> Finally, Zemaye said, "So you were a famous race blogger in Amer-
> ica. When Aunty Onenu told us, I didn't understand".
>   "What do you mean?"
>   "Why race?"
>   "I discovered race in America and it fascinated me".
>   "Hmm," Zemaye murmured, as though she thought this, discov-
> ering race, an exotic and self-indulgent phenomenon. (499-500)

The safe *locus* created by digital connectivity, while temporarily eras-
ing national borders, catalyses at the same time feelings of belonging
and longing for home. Despite of her Western, university education,
Ifemelu seems no longer able to negotiate between a culture marked
by white supremacy and her own culture that does not contemplate
the concept of race, as shown in the passage above. Furthermore, the
act of blog writing eventually does not serve a purpose in her Amer-
ican life. Her blogposts neither reach a large, significant audience
nor trigger serious debates among black and American Non-Black
blog readers. If, on the one hand, *Americanah* shows the pervasive-
ness of new media in daily life, besides being characterised by differ-
ent, at times hybrid, writing styles and strategies; on the other hand,
it seems to emphasise the ephemerality of Weblog or of a user-gen-
erated Web site that provides commentary on a particular subject.
However, Adichie's novel witnesses the new life of books as object.
Books are no longer isolated; they no longer have the function of a
closed container of words, ideas and reflections: books have opened
to the World Wide Web and the boundaries of writing have crossed
the front and back cover to cross over into a net of multiple relation-
ships via the World Wide Web (Cappello 2021, 11).

4 Reni Eddo-Loge: from Internet to Print Media

A further example of how new media interact with and cooperate in the field of postcolonial and current migrant narratives is the work of London-based journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge. Since March 2010, Eddo-Lodge has been communicating and displaying literary discourse on the Internet through her website and her blog, Twitter and Instagram accounts. Differently from Ifemelu's blog, which was generated with the intent to feel fully included in the host country, Eddo-Lodge, born and raised in London by a Nigerian mother, generated her blog in her home country focusing on feminism and exposing structural racism. Eddo-Lodge's blog is an example of a safe and inclusive *locus*, and represents at the same time a form of activism. In 2017, Eddo-Lodge published her first non-fiction book whose title was taken from a piece she had posted on her blog three years earlier:

> On 22 February 2014, I published a post on my blog. I titled it 'Why I'm No Longer talking to White People about Race'. It read: I'm no longer engaging with white people on the topic of race. [...] After I pressed publish, the blog post took on a life of its own. Years later, I still meet new people, in different countries and different situations, who tell me that they've read it. In 2014, as the post was being linked to all over the Internet, I braced myself for the usual slew of racist comments. But the response was markedly different, so much so that it surprised me.
>
> There was a clear racial split in how the post was received. I got lots of messages from black and brown people. There were many 'thank yous and lots of 'you've articulated my experience'. There were reports of tears and a little bit of debate about how to approach the problem, with education being rated highly as a solution to bridge the communication gap. Reading these messages was a relief". (Eddo-Lodge 2018, ix-xiii)

The responses to Eddo-Lodge's post corroborate the above analogy: individuals from different background and origin gather in her virtual space to engage in conversation, exchange ideas, life experiences and personal feelings. In this safe digital space, every individual has the right to say a word along with "the right to be understood" (Phillips 2011, 16). Ultimately, as mentioned above, the right granted by digital connectivity simultaneously allows forms of activism. Organisation of people, ideas and other resources are at the core of activism and, Brian Alleyne employs the notion of activism in the form of a

> type of politically-oriented action that is conceived and deployed largely outside of established state structures. (Alleyne 2002, 2)

Furthermore, in relation to activism, Alleyne acknowledges at the same time the crucial role played by new, advanced technologies in current social movements. In this particular case, the blogger Eddo-Lodge and her readers become a group of persons, even better, an online community willing to "debate about how to approach the problem" (Eddo-Lodge 2018, xiii) of racism. Undoubtedly, the introduction of the subject of racism in the education system would be an impactful first step. Nonetheless, because of its democratic feature, in terms of representing the benefit of the people at large, the Internet's expansiveness renders Eddo-Lodge's blog accessible to everyone and, to some extent this may represent a starting point of approaching the persisting issue of racism in Western societies:

> What I wasn't expecting was an outpouring of emotion from white people who felt that by deciding to stop talking to white people about race, I was taking something away from the world, and that this was an absolute tragedy. 'Heartbreaking' seemed to be the word that best described this sentiment. [...] Another commenter pleaded: 'Don't stop talking to white people, your voice is clear and important, and there are ways of getting through'. (xiii-xiv)

It can be argued that Eddo-Lodge engages in a new-media, multimodal authorship. Her debut published book along with her website, blog, social media and podcasts are interconnected platforms where a collaborative, at times complex storytelling process occurs. After having "watched in disbelief" (121) Nick Griffin on television – the former British National Party leader who is a notoriously conservative, anti-migration advocate – Eddo-Lodge managed to interview him:

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

As Griffin "hardly ever goes to London, as it's 'largely a foreign country'" (122) to him, they agreed to speak on the phone. That "surreal" (123) phone conversation was faithfully reported in dialogically form by Eddo-Lodge in her published collection of articles.

It must be said that new media have also legitimised informal writing style strategies. Unlike in a novel, for instance, where word choice, register and tone are carefully observed and crafted to conform to the prevailing edicts of literature, as Knut Lundbly suggests, the interlocutor – Eddo-Lodge in this case – invites people to tell their own personal stories in their own words, in new accessible ways, re-

gardless of whether or not these stories satisfy accepted literary conventions. Eventually, this storytelling reflects and welcomes forms of community communication, thus ensuring democratic participation (Lundbly 2008, 124).

Moreover, Alleyne calls attention to the relevance acquired by the technological dimension in contemporary, ordinary life. Consequently, the ability to use new media is decisively important for activists wanting to constitute, expand and sustain their projects. In point of fact,

> these new technologies are 'force multipliers' for the collective generation of knowledge in which all activists must engage in order to pursue goals for social change. (Alleyne 2002, 80-1)

Evidence of these "force multipliers" are detectable, for instance, in Eddo-Lodge's denouncements of racism, police brutality and social injustices in Britain but also in the United States where

> the burgeoning Black Lives Matter movement had gone global, with the new technology of smartphones shining a harsh light on long running injustices inflicted by law enforcement onto black communities, the blurry footage posted on social media, igniting the righteous rage of a new generation of activists. (Eddo-Lodge 2018, 228)

Therefore, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* may be defined as a collection of articles whose topics are racism and blackness as the Other. Eddo-Lodge deals with British history of slavery and colonialism, racism, the feminism question, social class injustices and inequalities. Eddo-Lodge's articles contain dates and detailed facts on racism or, as defined by the author,

> structural racism [that] is about how Britain's relationship with race infects and distorts equal opportunity. (81)

Through these topics Eddo-Lodge openly takes a stand and states:

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

Differently from postcolonial authors who committed themselves with a "literature of emancipation, critique and transformation" (Nayar 2008, xiii) relying on the publishing industry, Eddo-Lodge's social engagement officially started on the Internet where she reached a considerable audience. Nonetheless, as she states in the preface of her first published work:

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

It may be argued that the freelance journalist, blog writer and activist Eddo-Lodge commits herself to the cause of social justice becoming an advocate for those individuals who are discriminated and marginalised in white, Western societies. In doing so, she relies on both the Internet and print media.

5 Warsan Shire: Return to Orality?

Warsan Shire is another distinguished representative of multimodal storytelling. She was born to Somali parents in Kenya and experienced first-hand the journey from her home country to Europe. Her *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, published in 2011, provides an insight into the use of colonial language by non-native speakers while simultaneously presenting first-hand, personal narratives of journeys by African migrants intended for a Western public. Shire's collection allows for a reflection on the role played by the English language over the centuries. In the colonial past, it functioned as a tool of subjugation, as emphasised by Bénédicte Ledent: "colonized by language, and excluded by language" (Ledent 2002, 99). In present times, asylum seekers are still excluded by language, specifically by the bureaucratic language spoken by European immigration officials:

> They are dealing with an asylum applicant who might talk about 'witchcraft' and ritual violence in a 'dreamlike' language that challenges the bureaucratic grammar of human rights (Noo Saro-Wiwa 2016, 128-9)

The legal criteria for assessing the migrant or refugee status correspond to an idealised perception of what an asylum seeker should conform. At the borders of Western societies different cultures – the white supremacist culture and cultures of the Other – collide. Applicants are questioned, "tested and quizzed like crime suspects" (127). Communication barriers make applicants anxious as "their sense of identity is not wedded to birth certificates or utility bills" (128) and somehow conscious of the fact that the asylum process is thus marked by subjectivity:

> Asylum seekers are seen as liars, vectors of disease or religious fanaticism; economic 'migrants' who are capitalising on war to enjoy the benefits of life in the UK. (127)

In particular, in *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, Shire expounds the causes behind the journey made by current migrants. Her poems and short stories are real accounts of events:

> No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there's no space for another song, another tongue or another language. I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs. I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with a language I can't afford to forget. (Shire 2011, 24)

The term "tongue", in the passage above, besides its various meanings, also characterises the feature of physicality that distinguishes Shire's short stories and poems. She seems to emphasise, through this peculiarity, that the violence experienced on an emotional level can manifest itself on the human body as if to gain visibility. If we read it from a phenomenological perspective, physicality is nothing other than

> the Ego that makes the body the essential experience of the 'presence-in-the-world'. (Merlau-Ponty 1945, 106)

Shire seems to reproduce in her writing, one of Bill Ashcroft's reflections:

> The body itself has also been the literal 'text' on which colonization has written some of its most graphic and scrutable messages. (Ashcroft 1995, 321-2)

Thanks to her living in the digital age, Shire has managed to make her voice heard, literally, through her readings available on YouTube, for example, and has thus gained great visibility. Shire is among a generation of young poets who have attracted a larger audience by initially publishing their poetry online. In 2014, the virtual visibility gained on the World Wide Web conferred her the "London's Youth Poet Laureate" title (Zakaria 2016).

Shire first became prominent through Tumblr and later on Twitter and Instagram which count thousands of followers. Besides providing immediate visibility, social media platforms encourage poets to track their follower counts and engagement rates, as said before. The number of followers recorded by Shire are more akin to a television or movie celebrity than to those of a poet. Moreover, to a larger audience, Shire is best known for collaborating in 2016 with the American singer Beyoncé on "Lemonade", a visual album in which the singer's music is intercut with Shire's poetry. As it may be implied, Shire resorted to digital media to become more well-known

and more widely read than other poets who still rely on the tradition-
al route of printed poetry collections and pamphlets.

Shire started as a blog writer too but, differently from Ifeme-
lu – Adichie's character – and Eddo-Lodge, her blog reads more like
a textual and visual diary that receives attention on tags rather than
on any formal information, communication and reflection on issues
such as racism, migration and discrimination.

However, the eclectic author takes advantage of the Facebook
platform to reach Somali refugees and support their cause; she also
supports the African women feminist movement along with engaging
herself in conversations in the form of interviews or podcasts about
racism and migration. Nonetheless, her social and political engage-
ment do not exempt her from exploring alternative ways of storytell-
ing. In 2017, Shire uploaded on the YouTube platform a video that

> contains pictoral cinepoetic renderings and analysis. Audio is au-
> thor reading her own work. (Mogge 2017)

In this video, Shire reads her poem *Home* (2′52″), which has just been
printed (2022) in a collection of poetry, nonetheless it has already
reached millions of virtual 'readers'. Shire's poem captures the pain
and trauma of the refugees' experience and has gone viral multiple
times. Shire based *Home* on a previous short story she wrote in 2009:
Conversation About Home (at the Deportation Centre) that can be
found in the earlier mentioned poetry pamphlet *Teaching My Mother
How To Give Birth*. The short story was inspired by a visit she made
to the abandoned Somali Embassy in Rome as some young refugees
turned that building into their home. Arguably, that deliberate act of
occupation of an African safe location in a hostile host country may
be read as a paradox.

Home is an eight-stanza poem, it has no rhyme scheme or set me-
tre but contains literary devices such as metonymy: "you only run
for the border | when you see the whole city running as well" (12″-
14″); personification: "no one leaves home | unless home chases you"
(28″-29″); metaphor: "no one leaves home | unless home is the mouth
of a shark [...] "the barrel of the gun" (2′00″-2′04″); anaphora "no
one [...], than [...], unless [...]"; alliteration: "no one leaves home un-
less [...], home is the mouth of a shark" (06″-09″); enjambment: "the
anthem under | your breath [...] fourteen men between | your legs"
(1′48″-1′51″); imagery: "no one puts their children in a boat / unless the
water is safer than the land" (48″-49″). *Home* is a poem that seeks to
give voice to the people whose voices have been silenced as they deal
with the constant struggles of life as refugees. The employed words,
figures of speech and stylistic strategies vividly depict the journey
made by refugees along with their brutal living conditions of undoc-
umented individuals in Europe. While watching the video, the virtu-

al 'reader' is simultaneously present at Shire's performance. Black and white animated drawings illustrate Shire's lines. The rhythm of her voice becomes more intense when she explains the reasons for these inhumane journeys; her voice breaks when she describes painful moments experienced by human beings who have been forced to leave their homes; her voice fades out in the closing lines. The performance is accompanied by instrumental, soft background music. Arguably, Shire's intermixing of poetry recital, music, moving images, graphic art packed in one performance may be envisioned as a return to orality or, borrowing Ruth Finnegan's definition: a return to "oral art as literature" (Finnegan 2012, 3-6) whose vehicle of transmission becomes the given performance.

The lexical item "home" evokes feelings of belonging and hospitality:

> Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. Robert Frost. (Phillips 2000, 179)

Nonetheless, as Shire puts forth in her poem, for migrants that place identified both as domicile and national identity can become so hostile that "you only leave home when home won't let you stay" (Shire 2017, 0′24″-26″) and makes the unwanted resident and citizen wish to be somewhere else as "anywhere is safer than here" (Shire 2017, 02′40″-41″). It is not accidental, then, that the line "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark" has become the worldwide rallying call for refugees and their advocates.

To conclude, Camelia Crisan and Dumitru Bortun define digital stories as strong pieces of evidence to support a particular cause: the narrator/performer is the interpretative advocate for the case which is uploaded online and made available for anyone browsing the Internet and watching. Furthermore, digital stories can be tools in calling to action because they elicit emotions, they reveal the journey of their narrator, they provide first-hand account of events (Crisan Bortun 2017, 156).

6   Conclusions

Adichie, Eddo-Lodge and Shire's works represent different forms of narration addressing closely related topics and all, to varying degrees, exist at the intersection between formal written text and digital text, between written narration and audio/visual narration as a result of the intermingling of codes and media.

The free and widely available platform offered by the Internet based channels like YouTube and social media in general allow authors to be visible and gain an audience. According to Marshall McLuhan "the medium is the message" and the use of new media in general may be understood as the medium. This new generation of postcolonial writers relies on forms and methods that give rise to a fresh but simultaneously multimodal narration. Their work encompasses forms and practices not circumscribed to the employment of words or written stylistic strategies alone. In the current digital age, the multimodal narration in terms of communication becomes "movement of information" (McLuhan 2015, 97). In doing so, these authors address both the enduring issues of race and racism along with producing transnational political dialogue that travels across digital space, and in so doing, they create a new way to stand out in the cultural industry as well as in the World Wide Web by engaging the European audience, scholars and intellectuals in new ways of "reading/listening".

It may be argued that, this young generation of writers are creating a new literature, a sort of 'digital-new-avant-garde' movement, not to mention the expansion and reinforcement of the canon of postcolonial literature.

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