

A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Edited by

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‘A Kind of Paradise’
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Claim to Agency,
Responsibility & Writing

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

*The language you taught me rolls
From your mouth into mine
The way kids will pass smoke
between them ... I feed you
My very own soft truth. We believe.*

(Tracy K. Smith, ‘Self-Portrait As the Letter Y’, 2003, 60)

The creative singularity of the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie seems resistant to theoretical interpretation, being always already informed by the translation of complex thoughts in a language and a form of writing whose goal is to communicate to her public, a vast audience, a global readership. Some might suspect a commercial interest in this choice of language; I will rather experiment an interpretative approach which does not want to disrespect the clarity and the simplicity of Adichie’s poetics, but which intends to give insight into the critical chance of sharing creative and theoretical languages.

The specific resistance I want to deal with, concerns the ‘postcolonial question’, nowadays often reflected in academic debates that appear obscure, self-referential, difficult to comprehend. In my experimentation, I would like to prove that the voices of some postcolonial authors share the same intellectual vocation of Adichie. Edward Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, Achille Mbembe, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, Hélène Cixous and Denise Ferreira da Silva are intellectuals, philosophers and writers organic to – Palestine, the Indian subcontinent, the African continent, the ‘undercommons’, *l’écriture féminine*, the excess of female desire, the globality of the diasporic world hybridized by migration, exile and displacement. Said offers us the first figuration of intellectual

organicity¹; Spivak invites us to make it reach out for the un/limits of the planet; Mbembe knows the 'African question' and vindicates its singularity for the destinies of humanity; Moten and Harney emphasize the insubordination of the radical intellectual;² Cixous writes of women's laughter in the face of patriarchy; da Silva un/represents the radical desire of the black female body.

On her part, Adichie is a 'storyteller' organic to her art and her seducing and enjoyable language, bringing her 'amateurish' voice to the highest plane of poetic utterance (Said would find her public utterance as gifted as nothing else, in the resistance to the 'professionalism' he so critically suspected). Adichie's discourses, virally circulating on the internet, are globally followed; her novels – so dense as to gain already the quality of classics – are extremely popular; her feminism is even evoked by the female Deans of Italian universities when urging for the academic implementation of a politics of gender. We speak of Adichie; we discuss the issues she brings to our attention; we read and enjoy her writing. She finds the right and just language to utter and narrate stories of difficult realities, scenes of migratory experiences, and new utopias of future salvation.

My experimentation traces some of these sensitive 'questions' (the interrogative form is congenial to Adichie's poetics) by following their relevance woven around the claim of 'agency' for the ones deprived of creative existence by the modern – colonial/postcolonial – single story of the West, and, if contemporaneity remains patriarchal in its global socializations, around the urgency of an intense discussion on the question of gender. Alterity and female difference are consistent issues in the poetics of Adichie; it follows the extraordinary question of 'responsibility' – to oneself, the other, the past, the present and the future of the planet. Memory and utopia are the themes Adichie offers her audience with grace and in simplicity. Art reigns over all; writing is what Adichie would perform even without a public, her necessity, the unconditionality of her desire. On this level, her public vindication for the 'multitude' of stories narrating of women exposed to the dangers – erasure, disengagement, contraction – of history and society,

¹ For E. Said's influence on postcolonial studies, Mbembe (2008) remarks: 'The cultural analysis of the discursive infrastructure and of the colonial imagination would gradually become the very subject of postcolonial theory.' The analysis of both the 'discursive infrastructure' and 'colonial imagination' is central to Adichie's creative work.

² '[T]he subversive intellectual enjoys the ride and wants it to be faster and wilder; she does not want a room of his or her own, she wants to be in the world, in the world with others and making the world anew' (Halberstam 2013: 10).

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power and culture, provides the metanarrative traits supporting her passionate investment in the construction of her singular 'writing'.

Inside/outside Adichie's public voice and intimate writing, there is a flavour or a sensibility which could be called 'religious'; in my experiment, Adichie's singular drive, and the thinking of the organic intellectuals I quote, are as sacred as worldly and earthly. The claiming of the stories negated by history gains a 'kind of paradise'; the declaration of feminism creates a culture of respect for the 'humanity' of women; the material/affective gesture of writing is a sacred 'shivering'. The planet opens its cosmos to the encounter with the Other, in full joy, sisterhood and love.³ Adichie's 'belief' in the future is always already in full act...

The Organic Intellectual

I collect
wings what are
you bird or animal?
something that
lights on trees
breasts pawnshops
I have seen
another
path to this
rendezvous

(Sonia Sanchez, 'Sonku' in *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums. Love Poems*, 1998)

The time of the encounter with the Other is always a time of violation of innocence by – internal/external, past and present – experience. In the 'Danger of a Single Story' (Adichie 2009b), Adichie narrates being saved from the universality of history by her encounter with the African literature of Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye.⁴ In her early attempts to write, she used to imitate the 'models' provided by

³ 'I propose the planet to overwrite the globe ... the planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system and yet we inhabit it, on loan.' (Spivak 2003: 71).

⁴ For the inspirational influence Achebe had on Adichie's work, see Whitaker (2011) and Franklin (2009). Adichie does not use the word 'universality' but she would agree with the postcolonial 'demonstration': 'Postcolonial thought demonstrates that colonialism itself was a global experience which contributed to the universalization of representations, techniques and institutions ... It shows that this process of universalization, far from being a one-way street, was basically a paradox, fraught with all sorts of ambiguities' (Mbembe, 2008).

the Western 'single story' of the other, up to the moment she enjoyed the chance of inscribing her alterity on the page, the alterity of the ones never included in the Western single story, that the univocality of its vision is only rendered in abusive and discriminatory traits. The experience is persistent and consistent; when Adichie is 19 years old, at university in the United States, the meeting with a flatmate proves the shock of seeing herself inscribed, according to simplified and incompressible schemes, into a hypothetical and definite African identity. In 'We Should All Be Feminists' (Adichie 2014), in a similar way, she encounters the word 'feminism' when, during a discussion among adolescents, a friend accuses her of being a 'feminist'. It is a word she did not know at the time, and that, from that first encounter, will never stop substantiating her personal life and her evolution as a public figure. How could it be otherwise, if what still necessitates of feminism, in a more remote infancy, forbade her to assume, as she deserved, the role of class leader because she was a girl?

The expression of the danger of the single story, the public discussion on the condition of women: it is Adichie's intellectual mission. She identifies the causes and the mechanisms of the implementation of narrative empire and imperial patriarchy. Adichie speaks of 'power' and 'society': power turns a provisional story into the definite one, in detriment of the complexity of the other; society – the socializing process – defines the criteria of acceptability, respect and opportunity that rule the lives of women everywhere in the world. Power plays the definition of the ways, subjectivities and times of narration, in the refusal of the plurality of existing and relevant stories; society defines the contests, premises and forms of policing the desires of men and women.

What is indeed fatal is that power and society share a danger, one that impedes knowledge and understanding, and a mechanism, one that affects the historical, social and personal un/conscious: the instillation of pity and the patronizing attitude to the other; the interiorization of gender's social norm/ality. In the world of the other, the danger allows the – always possible – fall into 'the trap of the radicalization and race glorification' (Mbembe 2008), for instance, African literature's single story of 'authenticity'. In the world of feminism, the interiorization of the norm can always already induce 'the greatest crime' of female misogyny: women hating women, mobilizing their puissance against themselves, executing virile needs (Cixous 1976). In the world of Adichie, they prove her own involvement in what she so radically criticizes. She has often read the other through the lens of stereotypes, interacting with the boy working in the house under the spell of the single story of poverty provided by her mother, or involuntarily

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assuming the media coverage of the Mexican clandestine as 'abject'. She has given herself up to social expectations, for example in the appropriateness of the dress code chosen for a lecture with students. She has often felt her un/conscious vulnerability to the presuppositions of femininity.

The organic intellectual might be using the confessional mode to prove the 'sense of drama and revolt' (Said 1997, 17) that Said expected from any engaged voice to incite attention in his/her public. Indeed, once the communicative and participating contact is gained, Adichie's vocation attires her public into a space that is ethical more than instrumental. If she is herself touched and affected by power and society, it follows that 'we all' partake in subjugated exposure to the universality of history and to the interiorization of the norm.⁵ 'We all' should feel 'responsible' for the destinies of the other in the historical world, and for the injustice experienced by female alterity in society: the act of

responsibility towards oneself and towards an inheritance ... It is a thought of responsibility, responsibility in terms of the obligation to answer for oneself, to be the guarantor of one's actions. The ethics underlying this thought of responsibility is the future of the self in the memory of what one has been in another's hands, the sufferings one has endured in captivity, when the law and the subject were divided. (Mbembe 2008)

In 'The Danger of a Single Story', Adichie speaks of our responsibility in impressing another origin to historical negation.

Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story. (Adichie 2009b)

The imperative is ethical, indecisive, gaining substance in the interrogative form that follows.

What if my roommate knew about my friend Funmi Iyanda, a fearless woman who hosts a TV show in Lagos, and is determined to tell the stories that we prefer to forget? What if my roommate knew about the heart procedure that was performed in the Lagos hospital last week? What if my roommate knew about contemporary Nigerian music? ... What if my roommate knew about the female lawyer who recently went to court

⁵ Mbembe (2008) calls it a 'politics of fellow-creatures'; 'a stress on humanity-in-the-making'.

Silvana Carotenuto

in Nigeria to challenge a ridiculous law that required women to get their husband's consent before renewing their passports? What if my roommate knew about Nollywood, full of innovative people making films despite great technical odds? ... What if my roommate knew about my wonderful ambitious hair braider, who has just started her own business selling hair extensions? Or about the millions of other Nigerians who start their businesses and sometimes fail, but continue to nurse ambition? (ibid.)⁶

What would have happened, might happen, and will happen if ...? Adichie's interrogations echo Said's mandates to the organic intellectual who, in posing questions and operating dissections, recalls to memory 'everything we tend to neglect in the urgency of uniting to the judging chorus, to the collective action' (Said 1996, 46). At the same time, if Adichie is thinking of Nigeria, it is Africa to substantiate her call to the 'multiplicity' of necessary stories.

Look at any single thing on the continent, it always comes under the sign of the multiple ... One of the tragedies of colonialism has been to erase that element of multiplicity which was a resource for social development in pre-colonial Africa and which was replaced by the paradigm of 'the one', the kind of monotheistic paradigm. So how do we recapture the idea of multiplicity as precisely a resource for the making of the continent, its remaking, but also for the making of the world? (Mbembe 2008)

Africa informs its own destiny and the destinies of the world; in Adichie's 'recapture', African multiplicity opens the humanity of 'we all' to a zone of future coexistence and comprehension, a 'kind of paradise'.

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispose and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity. When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise. (Adichie 2009b)

This line of thought works also for the destinies of our global world, built on the discrimination of the difference of women. 'We all' should acknowledge the condition of women; if it is true, as it is, that 'there is no escape from the need of justice' (Mbembe 2013), and that 'Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change' (Adichie 2014, 21), 'we all' should feel rage at the injustice of gender dynamics. 'We

⁶ See Azuonye (2010).

Adichie's Claim to Agency, Responsibility & Writing

all' should interrogate the premises of education and, starting from our subjectivity, unlearn and dismantle any un/conscious interiorization: 'I have chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femininity. And I want to be respected in all my femaleness. Because I deserve to be' (ibid., 39). Once again, Adichie's interrogation – 'What if, in raising children, we focus on ability instead of gender?' (ibid., 36); 'What if she saw it as something normal and natural, that he should help care for his child?' (ibid., 37) – marks the opening of imagination and self-creation to the non-said, the unimaginable-unimagined future of an answer, substantiating the 'dream about and the plan for' (ibid., 25) a culture of respect: 'Culture does not make people. People make culture: if it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture' (ibid., 46). Our responsibility is to allow the dream inform the plan; if in the eventuality the dream stays a dream, it will have imparted a lesson of postcolonial thinking:

postcolonial thought is also a dream: the dream of a new form of humanism, a critical humanism founded above all on the divisions that, this side of the absolutes, differentiate us. It's the dream of a polis that is universal because ethnically diverse. (Mbembe 2013)

The Organic Writer

I go ahead intuitively, and without looking for an idea: I'm organic ...
I immerse myself in the near pain of an intense happiness –
and to adorn me leaves and branches are born out of my hair
(Clarice Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 1989, 16)

I would like to anticipate a note of clarification to my analysis of Adichie's collection of stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (Adichie, 2009a). What follows does not intend to be exhaustive of the complexity and the beauty of the collected stories; still, my reading is deconstructive, not in ideological terms, but as an intimate appreciation of the art of writing. At a certain point of their progress, the stories created by Adichie present a metanarrative reflection, a thread structured by clear and direct comments on writing. I decide to follow this thread, without wanting to dismiss the multitude of other elements that weave Adichie's passion as a storyteller.⁷ In this sense, I decide – it is my responsibility – to read the stories according to their internal rhythm of writing, in the

⁷ Griswold explains that 'Nigerian novelists see themselves as storytellers. They tell stories of a particular kind and with a particular intent, however, for these writers understand themselves to be bearing witness to Nigerian social experience' (2000: 3).

order by which Adichie wrote the stories, which is different from the one gathered in the published collection: ‘the stories in this collection are stories I’ve been working on really for the past nine years. So, I’ve had time to let things, you know, percolate’ (Raz, 2009). Assuming the ‘percolation’ of Adichie’s writing through the agency and the responsibility of ‘we all’, my choice seems appropriate to show – quickly, too quickly, I apologize – the organicity (roots, praxis, matter, promise, exposure and gesture) of the approach of Adichie as a writer to (the) writing (of the other, of power and society, culture and art). I assume responsibility for the partiality of my choice, hoping it might provide insight into how Adichie takes care in her own writing of the simple truth she utters on the public scene: ‘how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story’ (Adichie, 2009b).

The Thing Around Your Neck consists of twelve stories written in the timespan from 2002 to publication in 2009. This text regains its ‘kind of paradise’ with the multitude of stories it collects, its culture of respect for women knitting together immigration and gender.

I think gender affects the way we experience immigration. And just observing immigrant communities in the U.S., I think that – and I think immigration in itself is a difficult thing, that it sort of involves layers of losses and gains. And I find that women, it seems to me, deal with immigration differently, and I’m interested in that. (ibid.)

Adichie is an organic writer. She goes to the ‘roots’ of writing, where her vocation finds a specific dialectic: writing must keep memory of what substantiates it, witnessing its legacy for the coming of the future. Past and future / witness and advent: in 2002, ‘The American Embassy’ deals with this basic radicalism.⁸ One morning, indifferent to her surroundings, a woman queues outside the American Embassy, waiting to receive the answer to her visa application. Her child has been killed by the soldiers who were looking for her husband, a radical and engaged journalist who uses writing to criticize the Nigerian establishment, as the woman dramatically understands, out of ‘utter selfishness’. The story is focused on impressing on the page the atrocities lived by the woman, together with the ability of writing to witness the horror. At the same time, writing seems unable, if not in silence and

⁸ Mbembe (2008), sharing the critique with Adichie, would interpret the scene according to a precise lack of responsibility: ‘The global politics of the United States today is a politics that seeks to free itself from all constraints. In the name of security, it seeks exemption from all responsibility. This politics of boundless irresponsibility must be subjected to a firm, intelligent and sustained critique.’

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by dismissal, to claim the future from the 'faces' of the ones in charge. The instant when the woman is exposed to the verdict of the personnel who might entrust her the visa, closure is inscribed on the page: 'Her future rested on that face. The face of a person who did not understand her ... She turned slowly and headed for the exit' (ibid., 141).

Incomprehension and refusal: the woman will, perhaps, one day, 'recapture that category of the future and see to what extent it could be remobilized in the attempt at critiquing the present, and reopening up a space not only for imagination, but also for the politics of possibility' (Mbembe 2013). To recapture its possibility, indeed, writing needs 'time' and 'agency': 'New Husband' (in the published collection, 'Arrangers of Marriage', Adichie 2009a, also 2003) and 'Imitation' narrate the instances of two women whose innocence is exposed to the experience ('fort/da') of discovering what they did not know, what they need to understand, before they can vindicate their difference for the advent of the future.

In 'New Husband', a woman arrives in the United States to discover the deceit of the man she has married by arrangement, the fallacy of his mainstream life, performance, and conformed language, even his failure in providing her with the Green Card their marriage should guarantee. If 'agency' is assumed as a given, writing necessitates 'time' to operate its creativity: when the woman decides to leave her husband, the only female friend she has, invites her to a different wisdom: "You can wait until you get your papers and then leave," ... She was right, I could not leave yet.' (Adichie 2009b, 186). Time is as necessary to writing as it is agency, decision, 'will' (Carotenuto 1998): in 'Imitation', a rich husband keeps his wife in America, while he lives in their Nigerian house with his new girlfriend. Through a game of copies and originals, some Benin masks are the commercial treasures that constitute the husband's collection; for the woman, their sculptured eyes speak an idiom that strongly affects her sensibility. At the arrival of the first original in the house, her decision is immediate, uttered in the voice of agency: "We are moving back at the end of the school year" ... She stresses the "we" ... She gently turns him around and continues to soap his back. There is nothing left to talk about. Nkem knows: it is done' (Adichie 2009b, 41–42).

Something round, made of me and her and him.
Something akin to one large ballooning finger, here,
at the full lips of my belly's button where I could feel
the warmth of food; milky brown thick sugar passing

Silvana Carotenuto

from her body's oven into my own whole-wheat capsule.
(Nikky Finney, 'The World is Round:
the Breast of the Garment Measured', 2013, 3)

Indeed, something is done to writing; the axe of Adichie's writing turns round itself to test the matter/matrix of its evolution, difference and safety. After the reflection on testimony and future, on time and agency, in 2004, in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a young Nigerian woman is narrated in her exile in the States, due to the 'lucky chance' of a visa won from the American lottery. She is a complex woman, but the empire of the single story exposes her to constant simplification and stereotyping. During a visit to the family who has long been living in America, the girl is even exposed to her uncle's sexual abuse. Power and patriarchy: she finds her ways of surviving, but a sense of invisibility suffocates her, her body oppressed by a feeling that impedes breathing: 'At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep' (Adichie, 2009b, 119). 'The thing around your neck' – the sentence impresses its versatility on Adichie's writing. Against the emptiness, the void and the 'nothing' that are the common traits of the migrant's life, writing vindicates 'something': the 'thing'. The meaning of the 'thing' is left unknotted, staying around the neck as the secret of the story. Does 'the thing' belong to the unconscious? Does it embody non-representability, alterity to the already-said, indefinite matter? Denise Ferreira da Silva evokes 'the Thing' as the black body's 'undecidable female desire and excess', which, in its difference from the 'object of no value' that Hegel used to read in blackness, produces its unforeseeable difference, 'other desires, other figuration of existence, or any other and all possible modes of being human in the world' (da Silva 2013, 53).

Without Patriarchy and without History ... the desire promised by the sexual female body remains an untraced guide for a radical praxis, which is also a racial critique and a feminist intervention, able to counter the effects of subjugation produced by appropriations of the global subaltern in the name of freedom. (ibid: 56)

What writing knows is that the thing circles around the body, affecting 'your' neck. 'Her' neck, 'my' neck, 'our' neck – in auto/biography and commonality, Adichie's grammar writes its 'compositional' effect.

Everything is compositional ... a process of becoming as a relation; a relation in which the 'I', meaning the subject, is understood as being made

woman leads the girl into an abandoned supermarket, saving her life. The focus is concentrated, private, producing the ‘bond’ of the unforgettable ‘souvenir’ – ‘a stone stained the copper of dried blood’ (Adichie, 2009b, 56) – that will remain in the girl’s remembrance forever. In ‘Ghosts’, an old Nigerian professor meets a colleague he believes to have died during the Biafra war. The encounter is the motif of a series of scenes where ‘souvenir’ encounters ‘survival’: the professor is a survivor, in the same way as the man he meets. He could be a ghost; the man of letters would not be surprised: his own survival is allowed by the return – the visits – of his dead wife. She comes back to massage him, every morning announced by the sound of ‘doors opening and closing’ (ibid., 73). This sensation, this feeling, is indeed an affirmation of life, the double genitive ‘of’ writing celebrating ‘what lies at the heart of a new culture that promises never to forget the vanquished’ (Mbembe 2013).

What kind of writing might assume the responsibility for the past and for the future at the same time? In ‘Jumping Monkey Hill’, a seminar in creative writing is run by an English scholar, who gathers writers from Africa and judges the works they create on the premises. In one of the rare occasions Adichie uses a meta-fictional device; writing literally inscribes difference on the page: the tale of the seminar’s anxious atmosphere mirrors, by splitting, into the tale written at night by one female participant to the workshop. This story is the embodiment of the required task, the proof of a possible talent, the girl’s laughter in the face of canonical standard and judgemental formality.

‘The whole thing is implausible’...

He was watching her, and it was the victory in his eyes that made her stand up and start to laugh ... She laughed and laughed ...

There were other things Ujunwa wanted to say, but she did not say them. There were tears crowding up in her eyes but she did not let them out. (Adichie, 2009b, 114)

The process of ‘self-writing’ has started, and will continue, under the spell of the tears and the joy of creation, in the assumption of responsibility to what can be called ‘the unmasking of falsification’:

the stock of falsehoods and the weight of fantasizing functions without which colonialism as a historical power-system could not have worked ... duplicity, double-talk and a travesty of reality. ... this economy of duplicity and falsehood ... the transference of this self-hatred to the Other. (Mbembe, 2008)

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'Tomorrow is Too Far' constructs various scenes or different versions of what binds a girl to her brother's death. Writing goes back and forward in time and space (Sharobeen 2015), narrating the stories of the girl's grandmother, mother and friend, in dealing with the accounts she gives of what happened the afternoon the child fell from the tree. Narrated, re-narrated and narrated again, the re/construction of the girl's lies desperately tries to negate her responsibility in the traumatic event – a ghost that will stay in the fibre of experience, tormenting the texture of writing.

In order to assume responsibility, writing needs no lie or 'model', as it is painfully understood by the Nigerian girl 'with diploma', who, in 'On Monday of Last Week', keeps faith in the human relationship she might create with the Afro-American mother of the child she babysits. She falls in love with the woman the instant she asks her to sit as the 'model' of the paintings she creates in the basement. Is this an offer of communality, singularly addressed to her, the precious sign of sisterhood and female love? In disillusionment, the woman asks the same to whoever arrives in the house.

Rather than to models, the drive of writing goes to invention and strength: 'Cells One' narrates the experience of a spoiled university boy who, taken to prison and there exposed to violence and abuse, gains a new ethical awareness in his life. 'The Headstrong Historian' expands this difference by adding courage; it is the story of a girl whose education has been strenuously supported by her grandmother, the matriarch of pottery, who believes in female lineage and bondage. At the end of the process of narration, the girl finds the courage to finish her history text, dedicated to *Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria*. The book is criticized by her academic colleagues, who suggest changes in topic and style. In truth, critique cannot change the graceful (if Grace is her name) determination to offer her writing to the honour of her beloved ancestor.

On that day as she sat at the grandmother's bedside in the fading evening light, Grace was not contemplating her future. She simply held her grandmother's hand, the palm thickened from years of making pottery. (Adichie, 2009b, 218)

She is not contemplating the future: on the ladder of writing, there is one last step to climb (Cixous 1993). Adichie's last story, 'The Shivering', depicts the relationship between two Nigerian people, an expatriated guy who believes in religion, and an atheist girl. They meet in an instance of fragility for the girl; he would support her with prayers, but

the girl refuses. Indeed, since their first encounter, a bond of friendship has been establishing between them; at the end of the story, the – ‘shivering’ – gesture of writing draws the picture of the friends enjoying the blessing of the gaze of a ‘Madonna with baby’: ‘At first they stifled their laughter and then they let it out, joyously leaning against each other, while next to them, the woman holding the baby watched’ (Adichie, 2009a, 166).¹⁰

The joyful proximity and the visionary company of/with others: in the end, the postcolonial gesture of writing opens and relaunches the future in a singular fashion, responsible to itself, for the other, and before the Other. It is the African celebration of ‘the poetic productivity of the sacred’: ‘After all, what would Africa be without the sacred? Here the sacred represents the imaginative resource par excellence. The sacred is to be understood not only in relation to the divine, but also as the “power of therapy”’ (Mbembe 2013). Adichie’s therapeutic writing might be ‘religious’. In the conclusion of my experiment, I rather believe that the ‘kind of paradise’, the respect for ‘humankind’ and the ‘sacrality’ of Adichie’s writing follow the traces of a vocation which, inscribed on the earth and throughout the planet, here and now (Carotenuto, 2000), organically calls for the multiplicity, the equality and the poetry of the future of humanity.

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¹⁰ See McCandless (2010). On the other side of violence, see the upsetting image of the amputee mother breastfeeding her amputee baby in ‘Concerning violence’ (2014) by Göran Hugo Olsson: <http://dogwoof.com/concerningviolence>. In her ‘Preface’ to the film, Spivak (2014) remarks: ‘The most moving shot of this film is the black Venus, reminding us of the Venus of Milo with her arm gone, who is also a black Madonna, suckling a child with bare breasts. This icon must remind us all that the endorsement of rape continues not only in war but also, irrespective of whether a nation is developing or developed – in women fighting in legitimized armies. Colonizer and colonized are united in the violence of gendering, which often celebrates motherhood with genuine pathos.’

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