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Decoding the Perception of African Women in Amma Darko's and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Selected Novels

Celestin Gbaguidi and Lonlonyo Amouzou

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to analyze how patriarchal society negatively perceives African women using Amma Darko's and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's selected novels as backdrop. Through in-depth study and critical appreciation of the novels, these two authors depict the way the African woman is regarded, understood, and interpreted by herself in the male-dominated community or in a foreign territory; the African woman is nothing more than a naïve, second-class citizen, reproducer, mere commodity, and man's appendage. Analysing the female characters in these novels, with a focus on Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* and Ifemelu in *Americanah*, we can understand the perception of African women from their own perspectives, while also considering the perception of African women by others in their given environment. Finally, this article will be informed by the decoding theory in terms of how these novels address the perception of the post-colonial and the modern African woman.

Keywords: feminism, oppressed, patriarchy, subordinate.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Perception, according to *Encarta* (Database, 1999) is an impression, attitude, or understanding formed by what is observed or thought by an individual or a society. The African woman has always been a multifaceted and complex being. For centuries, her survival has been audacious, beautiful, and brilliant, and she has been largely dominated. Interestingly, Kolawole (1997) posits that the majority of male authored writings in the early African literature depicted the relegation and stigmatization of African women in society. Likewise, Chukukere (1992) contends that the ideal female character created by men writers generally does things according to the traditional norms as spouse and mother. In the same wake, Fonchingong (2006) buttresses this view by pointing out that the traditional African woman gains respect and love from the patriarchal institution when she abides by the conventional roles set by patriarchy. On this score, Gbaguidi (2018a) highlights "the phallogocentric organisation of the African societies where women are nothing but naïve, second-rank and sexually addicted people, reproducers, mere commodities and men's appendage" (p. 40). Likewise, Mikell (1997) contends that: "in Africa, female subordination takes intricate forms grounded in traditional culture, particularly in the 'corporate' and 'dual-sex' patterns that Africans have generated throughout their history" (p. 9). Gbaguidi (2018b) confirms this trend by stressing that the "authoritarian phallogocentrism generally determine what must be the role of woman folk in society" (p. 79). Who exactly is an African woman? What characterizes her existence? Where does she fit in? What defines the African woman's perception? Even though we know that the perception of the African woman varies from country to country in Africa, the general perception is the same. Drawing on their own experiences as African women, the authors shed light on the way that African women think of themselves, and the way others think of them. They present the perceptions of African women in different circumstances of life: educated and uneducated, living in Africa and living abroad, married and unmarried, with children and without children. Adichie and Darko both skillfully employ realistic characters and scenarios to give insight into the perception of the African woman.

II. THE PERCEPTION OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN AS A WIFE

In African culture, a woman is only deemed respectable within the context of the family; she is expected to accept marriage and have children because marriage is regarded as the ultimate goal of African women. A decent woman prioritizes the interests of her family and husband above all else, even her own personal interests. It is not expected of an African woman to be concerned about trees and the environment. Rather,

she is expected to be concerned about her family and children. If she were to be concerned about trees, it would be in terms of firewood, which she relies on to heat her home and supply fuel for cooking for her family.

It is established in the African woman's psyche that she exists to serve her family, first and foremost her husband. The mantra "obey and worship your husband" (Darko, p. 13) is ingrained in an African woman's upbringing, and as a result, her view is shaped accordingly. An African woman's obligation as a wife is to live up to the cultural expectations, ideas and understanding of what it means to be a wife, regardless of the circumstances of her marriage.

The protagonist, Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*, believes that Akobi's maltreatment of her is absolutely acceptable because she witnessed the same behaviour in her parent's marriage.

Darko captures Mara's thoughts in this way:

I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat while he slept all alone on the large grass mattress since, after all, mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure. And if demands like that were what would give him pleasure, even if just momentarily, then it was my duty as his wife to fulfil them. So that even those nights when he ordered me to sleep on the thin mat on the hard floor, even if I laid there and could not sleep and suffered a splitting headache the next day because of lack of sleep, I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife, and endured it just like I would menstrual pain (Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, 1995, pp. 12-13).

In traditional African custom, a decent woman is one who does not speak back to males. Silence is interpreted as respect in this context, but it is vital to consider what keeps women silent and the ramifications of their silence in today's African nation-states. Do African women keep their mouths shut out of respect or because their upbringing shapes their perception? An African woman raised in a local household to ultimately become a good wife has the impression that the true attributes of a woman are to 'obey and never complain'.

An African woman is equally delighted to accept polygamy as a natural part of her culture; she believes her husband is entitled to as many wives as he wants. Mara's mother obliges when her husband marries another woman. Even though she is not happy with the decision, she is obligated to stay in the marriage as a good woman. Additionally, we observe that Mara, despite her worries that her husband is having an affair with another woman – Comfort, makes no objections: "for after all polygamy was inherent in my upbringing and tolerance was the code word here" (Darko, 1995, p. 41).

III. BEYOND THE 'BLACK' HORIZON

The characters in the novels have been made to believe that living overseas is a profitable and successful way to gain wealth. Both protagonists in *Beyond the Horizon* and *Americanah* have gotten a taste of life "beyond" and have realised that it is not as glamorous as they initially thought. In both novels, the desire to travel abroad is fueled by the descriptions they have heard about America and Europe. Notice how the people in Mara's village suddenly begin to treat her with dignity as she prepares for her trip to Germany. Going abroad is a dream they all share but for them, it is an unattainable dream; anyone who has succeeded at this is therefore deserving of their respect. Mara's upbringing in such a village shapes her perception of Europe and America as locations where all her problems are solved. In Africa today, many women have similar beliefs and expectations. They are eager to travel abroad without giving any thought to the difficulties they might encounter.

In the novel *Americanah*, a similar scenario is depicted. While in Nigeria, Ifemelu's lover, Obinze, convinces her that America is the way of the future, and she falls for it. According to the media and African returnees from America, America is a lovely place to live and everyone who lives there is doing extraordinarily well. This continuous stream of misleading ideas has an impact on the minds of African women. They are coaxed into believing that their only hope of success lies abroad. Inadvertently, this causes African women to lose confidence in themselves. Rather, they believe that a white person in a foreign land holds the key to their advancement in life.

We can see how the lives of the main protagonists in both writers' novels create the impression of a poor Africa in need of aid from Europe and America in order to get back on its feet. In the eyes of Ifemelu's acquaintances, her decision to return to Nigeria even though she is a successful businesswoman in America is a step backwards – a regression. Their reactions make Ifemelu aware that returning to her origins will help form her outlook on life.

IV. SOCIAL PERCEPTION

Social perception greatly influences a person's ability to make appropriate conclusions about others based on their physical appearance and verbal and nonverbal patterns of communication. Narrowing it down to the African women, it is important to understand how society affects the perception of African women. How does society perceive beauty in an African woman? What does the African woman herself think to be beautiful? Throughout these stories, the writers speak about how these women see beauty - how African women, both then and now, wish to equate beauty with what the western world considers to be the standard of beauty. A woman of African descent believes that beauty cannot be defined solely by what her culture prescribes. The real marker of beauty in the eyes of an African woman, is to look as westernised as possible. Notice how Mara conforms to the image of a beautiful, modern African woman: "with their green violet and blue painted eyelids and scarlet smeared lips. I, illiterate Mara, had turned into a modern woman" (Darko, p. 55). Much as Mara aspired to be a "modern" woman, the majority of African women today are likewise characterized by the westernised culture and lifestyle they have adopted.

Adichie and Darko highlight the different experiences of womanhood by painting pictures of women in various roles and circumstances of life. In the text that follows, we zoom in on some of the roles in which women are portrayed in the short story collection.

A. *Women in Traditional, Sexist Roles*

Adichie's references to sexism in her stories are very strong. Many of her female characters are discontented with their marriages and relationships but remain trapped because the sexist societies they live in have made them believe that they have no options. In the stories, women are compelled to comply with the gendered roles that traditional and contemporary society dictates for women. In "The Arrangers of Marriage," Chinaza is forced into an arranged marriage with a doctor in America. This is supposed to be a good thing. Firstly, because a man is willing to marry her, and secondly, because this man is an American doctor. According to her auntie, this combination is like winning a lottery on her behalf. Chinaza in turn is expected to be humble, grateful, and dutiful as a wife. Nkem plays a similar role in "Imitation" - the role of a grateful and submissive wife.

In "Tomorrow is Too Far," the female narrator is angry because her grandmother does not allow her to do the same things her brother is allowed to do. Her reason is that it is not a girl's place to do those things. She is not allowed to climb trees like her brother, and she is not allowed to pluck coconuts because her grandmother says girls never pluck coconuts. When her grandma gives extra food to just the narrator's brother, the explanation she offers is that she is teaching the narrator how to take care of her husband one day. This is a clear depiction of the idea that a woman is secondary to a man and that her main purpose is to take care of a husband. In "Cell One", we encounter a similar female narrator whose existence in the family appears to be secondary to her brother's. The narrators in both stories are unnamed and voiceless; fulfilling the traditional expectation that girls should be quiet and unassertive.

Another gender role that is imposed on women is motherhood. For many years, women have been taught that bearing and raising children is the real proof of one's womanhood. Because of this, several women have sought their essence in their children, and have devoted their lives to taking care of children. "The Headstrong Historian" shows how much emphasis society places on a woman's ability to bring forth. Additionally, Kamara, and the narrator of "The American Embassy", both believe that focusing their attention on children is the perfect way to escape from the troubles in their marriages. Furthermore, the narrator of "The American Embassy" has to give up her journalism job when she becomes pregnant. Although a personal choice, it is a choice that is presumably influenced by cultural suppositions. It shows how women are expected to give up their careers in order to put the family first, whereas men are not held to the same standards.

B. *Women under Domestic Oppression*

Domestic oppression is a broad term that categorizes the intimidating or domineering behavior of one family member over other family members. Very often, domestic oppression is seen in the relationships between husbands and wives. As the definition suggests, domestic oppression is not necessarily physical or even verbal abuse. It often presents itself in very subtle demonstrations of dominance. A few of the female characters in Adichie's stories experience this kind of oppression where their male partners are so dominant in their lives that the women lose the power of choice and the right to an opinion. Nkem is a victim in this category as well. There is also another character of interest with respect to the topic of domestic oppression: Ukamaka in "The Shivering". One of the first things that strike a reader about Ukamaka is her preoccupation with her ex-boyfriend, Udenna. The story opens with Ukamaka anxious about whether Udenna has been on a plane that crashes in Nigeria. This immediately suggests that Udenna is so dominant in their relationship that even in a break-up, he is still somehow a part of her life. Ukamaka appears to enjoy talking about Udenna and their past relationship. When she makes friends with a fellow Nigerian, Chinedu, she bonds with him mainly because she feels that he understands her complex feelings

about Udenna and their breakup. She looks forward to Chinedu's visits so that she can talk to him about Udenna; her excitement about his friendship is because she has someone to listen to her go on and on about Udenna.

Given the way Ukamaka talks about Chinedu, one might assume that it has been a perfect relationship; but the things Ukamaka herself says shows that their relationship is far from perfect. Just like Nkem, Ukamaka defers to Udenna; she always agreed with him about almost anything. For the three years of their relationship, Ukamaka has arranged her life around Udenna, making plans to move to Abuja because Udenna wants to move back there after school, discussing the names of the children they would have, buying organic fruits and vegetables because that is what Udenna wants, cooking with hot pepper because Udenna likes it. After the breakup, she still cooks with hot pepper even though she does not have to. She explains to Chinedu that she still cooks this way because she is used to it, once again demonstrating how much Udenna has dominated her life. Her assessment of her new friend Chinedu is guided by thoughts about how Udenna views Chinedu. Udenna may call him bush for eating rice with a spoon. Apart from that, Chinedu reminds her of a Nigerian student that Udenna has snubbed because he did not make the cut. It appears that Ukamaka has not yet come to terms with the reality of her breakup; a part of her does not accept that things are actually over. When her phone rings, she hopes it is Udenna. Perhaps that is why she still keeps a picture of him, unable to deal with the finality of putting the picture away. Perhaps that is why she still talks about him so much, as if to somehow keep the relationship alive with her words. What is probably most interesting about Ukamaka is that she is aware that her relationship with Udenna is unhealthy, yet she has stayed with him for three years. And now that they are no longer together, she still cannot move on. She tells Chinedu about how Udenna never said 'I love you', how he makes her feel that she is not smart enough, and how he always finds a way to downplay the things that make her happy. Ukamaka makes two profound statements which suggest that she is not ignorant about what a good healthy relationship looks like: "How can you love somebody and yet want to manage the amount of happiness that person is allowed?" and "How can a person claim to love you and yet want you to do things that suit only them?" (Adichie, 2009). Despite this knowledge, Ukamaka is for some reason unable to break away from her ex-boyfriend's oppressive and suffocating behavior.

Finally, when Chinedu has had enough of Ukamaka's talk about her ex-boyfriend, he confronts her with a very important question: why did you let him? Udenna may have indeed treated her badly, but it is only because she has allowed it. Here, the author is sending out a clear message that women do have a choice in how they are treated by men. There is a saying that we show people how to treat us by what we allow. That is perhaps the most accurate way to sum up what Adichie is trying to convey here.

C. *Financially Dependent Women*

Traditionally, people always think of men when it comes to financial issues. It is men who are expected to be the breadwinners and the financial backbones of the family. Because of this, many women are brought up to be financially useless, and to look to a man for provision. This is one of the main reasons why marriage has been promulgated so strongly over the years. It is an avenue that allows a woman to be taken care of by a man. This also explains the fuss surrounding the status of the man that a woman marries.

Unfortunately, many women find themselves trapped in unhappy and unpleasant relationships because they are financially dependent on their male partners. There are far too many stories of women who are stuck in abusive relationships because they have no money, nowhere to go and no means of survival without their male partners. There are young girls who are forced to put up with sexual abuse because the abusers provide their only hope of getting an education. In some cases, the entire family is dependent on these young, oppressed women for survival, and so it truly seems as though there is no other option. In "Imitation", Nkem recalls the huge responsibility that lay on her shoulders as the first daughter, to ensure that her younger siblings are taken care of. As a result, she feels compelled to have sexual relationships with various 'big men' who can provide for her family. Even though she has experienced firsthand what it is to be entirely dependent on a man for survival, Nkem does not seek to make a living for herself in America. Maybe she has accepted that her lot in life is to be taken care of by a man. That may explain why she feels that any plan Obiora makes for her life would be better than anything she can ever imagine for herself.

In the title story "The Thing Around Your Neck", Akunna's uncle blatantly tries to take advantage of her because he knows that she has nothing. When she refuses, he tries to win her over by promising to do many things for her. He calls the women who give their bodies in exchange for financial gain 'smart'.

Adichie challenges the notion of helpless, dependent women, and presents the idea that women too can be financially savvy and can make a life for themselves. She expresses this through Chinaza, who is excited at the sudden and new thought of earning her own income. But things do not go as expected and for several months, she remains unemployed. Later when she discovers her husband's American wife, she is unable to move out of the apartment because she has no money. Although the situation looks hopeless at first, her friend Nia encourages her to pull herself together, find a job to support herself and then start afresh.

Nwamgba is another character worth talking about in this regard. She is by no means a helpless woman. Even though her husband is a wealthy man, she keeps busy by running an active pottery making business. And after her husband's death, she assumes control of her husband's farms and property and successfully supports her son throughout his education.

Adichie also portrays other female characters who are aiming high and making a life for themselves: Chika is a medical student, Kamara has a master's degree, Ujunwa is a writer, Ukamaka is a student at Princeton, and Afamefuna is a famous historian.

D. Women as Sex Objects and Commodities

There is no doubt that human beings are sexual creatures 'sold' out by parents. Interestingly, Blay (2014) points out that:

African women are presented to the readers as individuals who should be given to the highest bidder. Mara is given out to Akobi whose father presents two cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewelry and two bottles of London Dry Gin. In the community of Naka where the story is set Akobi's father is the only person who can afford these. Hence Mara is sold to Akobi very expensively in order that her father gets wealth and other material gains (p. 110).

However, in the case of women, sexuality is often seen as a negative thing because it is often misused by men. Some men view women as sex objects meant solely for the gratification of a man's sexual urges. It may sound extreme and unlikely, to think that one human being could consider another human being as a mere object for sexual fulfillment. Even so, female objectification indeed exists in both covert and overt forms and is a pressing social issue.

Adichie uses the stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* to show how female objectification presents itself in everyday scenarios, and how women dealt with being treated as sexual objects. As a matter of fact, Akunna in *The Thing Around Your Neck* is sexually harassed by her supposed uncle because he assumes that any young girl in her position would willingly give in, in order to survive. His comment that smart women do it all the time, shows exactly what he thinks of women.

Chinaza's new husband also treats her as being good for nothing more than sex and food. He shows no interest in her as a person. He hardly talks to her, except to patronizingly tell her that she will get used to America; or to correct her English as one would correct a small child. His main interest is sex. She is nothing more than an outlet for his sexual energy.

Ujunwa and her fictional self, Chioma, are the most obvious depictions of women as sexual objects. At an African Writer's Workshop, Ujunwa has to deal with sexual harassment from the British workshop coordinator. He looks at her lustfully and passes suggestive comments. His behavior is so conspicuous that her fellow writers cannot help but notice. This behavior in itself is bad, but what makes it worse is that he does not take her story, or the story of the other girls seriously. His attitude towards Ujunwa suggests that he finds her good when it comes to sex and her body, but he does not consider her writing to be good enough.

In the fictional story that Ujunwa presents, Chioma is a girl who also experiences sexual harassment and objectification at the hands of different men. After struggling to get a job after school, Chioma finally lands an interview with a potential employer. But things do not go as expected. After asking only a few questions, the interviewer reaches over her shoulders to squeeze her breasts. Later, when she manages to get a job with her father's help, she has yet another experience of harassment. It is supposed to be a marketing job, but she soon discovers that she is expected to use her body to lure top male clients to the bank. Her degree in economics is useless; all that matters is her body.

Both Ujunwa and Chioma rebel against the objectification of women by walking away from the situations that place them in that light. On two occasions, Ujunwa walks away from Edward at the workshop. And Chioma walks away from the alhaji and from her job. Akunna in "The Thing Around Your Neck" also walks away from sexual harassment by moving out of her uncle's house. The act of walking away signifies women who are turning their backs on a culture that make it okay to regard women as mere sexual objects.

E. The Extremely Liberal and Assertive Woman

On the opposite end of the scale, Adichie shows us a different type of woman. She shows a woman who is confident in her female identity. She knows exactly what she wants and is not afraid to go after it. This woman is bold and assertive and refuses to be oppressed by any man or society. Chimamanda Adichie uses the characters of Nwamgba and Afamefuna in "The Headstrong Historian" to portray this type of woman. It is interesting that she chooses to saturate this one story with her two strongest female characters. This way, one cannot ignore the strength of these two characters. It certainly does the job of catching a reader's attention.

Nwamgba lives in the immediate postcolonial era in her village. She is deeply rooted in the traditional ways of her people and regards the westernized Christian ways of her son as a ‘bizarre pantomime.’ From her youthful days, Nwamgba has been headstrong and unrelenting in her pursuit of the things she wants. She chooses the man she will marry at a time when it is unheard of for a woman to go after a man. And when her family disagrees about her choice, she threatens to run away and bring disgrace to them if they do not let her marry Obierika. In the end, she gets her way. She stands up for herself against her husband’s cousins who try to cheat her out of her husband’s property and is not hesitant to confront the teachers at the Catholic mission for beating her son.

Grace/Afamefuna is Nwamgba’s granddaughter, whom she believes is the spirit of Obierika reincarnated. Although she is brought up in the Christian faith, Afamefuna is attracted to her grandmother’s tradition. She is interested in the poetry, the stories, and the pottery. Her grandmother describes her as having a fighting spirit. We see this fighting spirit at play multiple times throughout the story. The first instance is when she runs away from Onicha by herself to see her grandmother before she dies. We see it again when she laughs at Sister Maureen for suggesting that primitive tribes do not have poetry. In the University where she is one of the few women in attendance, she changes her degree to history in reaction to the story of a man who claims that African history is not a subject to be studied in school. She is strong enough to divorce the man she marries because they do not share the same ideals, and strong enough to officially change her name from Grace to the local name her grandmother has given her, Afamefuna.

Nwamgba lives most of her adult life during the time when western culture has begun to creep in, and many people, including her own son, consider her traditional ways as sinful. Afamefuna on the other hand, grows up in a more modernized society and receives a western Christian education. The strength of these two women is expressed in different ways: Nwamgba’s strength as a woman is expressed by her staunch belief in tradition even in the face of western criticism. Afamefuna on the other hand, demonstrates strength by going back to embrace African culture and tradition even though she has been ‘westernized’ and ‘Christianized’ by her parents. Adichie places old, traditional Nwamgba and the younger, more modernized Afamefuna side-by-side to show that female empowerment is not a new concept, but rather, one that goes back many years in history.

It is important that neither of these strong, liberal women give the impression that they do not need men at all or that marriage is incompatible with female emancipation. Rather, marriage is presented as an institution that a woman chooses to go into, or to walk out of, based on what suits her best interest. Nwamgba demonstrates this by choosing the man she wants to marry. And when their childlessness becomes a problem, she makes the decision to look for another wife for Obierika. Notice however, that Obierika does not agree to this. He remains loyal to his wife even though polygamy is permitted in their tradition. This is a sharp contrast to the men in the other stories who readily cheat on their wives and go for younger girlfriends. Nwamgba’s husband is not a threat, but rather a partner in her empowerment as a woman. Although Afamefuna is not fortunate to find a husband like Obierika, her divorce sends the message that marriage is not a prison from which one has no means of escape. A woman does not need to stay with a man with whom she is unhappy, simply for the ‘prestige’ of being called a married woman.

V. THE HEGEMONY OF WOMEN OVER MEN IN *THE HOUSEMAID*

Even though the book focuses on the wrongs that are done to the female characters in the story, there are certain aspects that Amma Darko uses to uncover numerous contemporary gender-based issues in *The Housemaid*, including the topic of women’s power over men. In that vein, Umezurike (2015) pinpoints the “female autonomy against the backdrop of established traditional and modern socio-cultural formations” (p. 152). Indeed, Darko’s *The housemaid* tackles the conflict between African women’s traditional roles and their desire to advance their position. The author clearly intends to reverse men’s patriarchal status. Men’s authority is limited in order to construct a new social order in which women have control. The novel depicts the concept of women’s hegemony through the dominance of males and the disintegration of men’s patriarchal status. Women, particularly African women, have traditionally been viewed as docile and submissive and have consequently become victims of social injustice. Tika’s father, on the other hand, is controlled and dominated by his wife, Sekyiwa, in Darko’s *The Housemaid*. The situation between Sekyiwa and Tika’s father, who is twenty-four years older than his wife, is a striking example of women’s dominance over men. The authoress of *The Housemaid* portrays Sekyiwa as possessive of her husband. Domestic violence, both physical and psychological, has occurred in the literature under consideration. This is shown by Amma Darko in the scene:

He took her in his arms. ‘Now that we have achieved what we set out to, [...] we can begin to really enjoy life.’ But to his dismay, Sekyiwa gave him a scornful jeer. ‘Enjoy what life? What life is there to enjoy with a dead penis? That was how the squabbles started. No day passed without a fight or an

argument”” and All the screaming and yelling had come from her mother; the imploring and pleading from her father. She remembers her mother’s hand flying at her father’s face in time with her insults (Darko, 1998, pp. 18-19).

Tika's father suffers morally and psychologically as a result of Sekyiwa's attitude, and this is the true source of his grief. He is constantly hurt physically and abused by his youthful and sexually driven wife, who has transformed into an unfaithful woman. Young and stout guys begin to vie for Sekyiwa's attention, and she takes advantage of such opportunities to satisfy her overwhelming lust. Throughout the work, Sekyiwa emerges as the most effective narrative element that Amma Darko uses to identify female dominance in the married household. It is clear that Tika's father is subjected to violence and abuse at the hands of his wife, who is suspected of being the cause of his death.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has explored the perceptions of African women, both by themselves and by society in general. It is evident that both aspects of the perception of African women are related. The African woman tends to view herself in the light of what society sees her to be, and what society expects her to be. Often, there is no introspective analysis of who one truly is what role one would like to play in society. All of that is predetermined by socio-cultural values. Through their stories, Chimamanda Adichie and Amma Darko enlighten readers on the perceptions that society has of African women, and the ways in which those societal perceptions influence a woman’s own perception herself. In the same way that society in general consider migration as the key to success, African women also find themselves sharing this view. Unfortunately, life abroad is often harsher on women than it is to men.

The authors also use female characters in different situations to explore the various roles that African women are required to play. We see women in traditional sexist roles as mothers and wives, women as sex objects, women who are financially dependent on men, and women who must accept domestic oppression in silence and humility.

The article ends by pointing how the two authors seek to introduce a new normal by creating female characters who have been able to break the walls society has built around them. Darko and Adichie both present female characters who are liberal and assertive and are able to stand on their own feet financially. This is a true indication of a shift from the traditional and cultural perceptions of African women.

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