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**Reimagining Nigerian Unity:
Identity, Ethno-Nationalism and
the Depiction of the Nation in
Nigerian Novels by Female
Authors**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2017

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Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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Abstract

The research undertaken in this thesis looks to fill the gap in understanding how female authors construct images of the Nigerian national identity in relation to the characters ethno-national identity. Within this it seeks to understand how the role of the mother figure is portrayed in relation to nurturing these supra-national and ethno-national identities, and the way in which independent female characters are depicted as playing crucial roles in furthering the process of Nigerian nation building. Thus, my critical line of inquiry will engage with the following questions: (1) How do Nigerian novels by female authors build national identities in their narratives? (2) What does a Nigerian identity look like in these novels? (3) If the narratives of these female authors are not concerned with nationalism, then what is the thematic focus of these works in relation to identity in Nigerian society? The core of my analysis will be a direct engagement with the aesthetics of Nigerian novels by female authors, both early and contemporary. As identity is an important aspect of my critical inquiry I will look to use post-colonial discourses as a framework through which to understand the more contemporary constructions of black and African identities. Through the application of concepts such as W.E.B Du Bois' (1994) "double consciousness", Alcinda Honwana's (2012) idea of "waithood" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2016) concept of "choicelessness" I analyse the experience of young Nigerians based in Nigeria and the diaspora in negotiating both an ethno-national and Nigerian identity. Finally, I will also engage with discourses surrounding nationalism, both in its general theoretical context. I argue that the characters and experiences constructed by female authors are more inclusive and empathetic to all Nigerians regardless of gender. That female authors narratives demonstrate the importance of female figures in the construction of the nation.

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Introduction: The Nigerian Novel, Literary Purpose and Nigerian Nationalism

Throughout the world, the histories and current realities of women from various societies, present an image of exclusion and silence. These images can often be found in the narratives of both fictional and non-fictional texts in multiple languages. Whilst there have been efforts to reverse this trend, there is still a need for further analysis regarding the contribution of women to the literary canon of their society. The research undertaken examines the work of Nigerian female authors and the way in which they construct images of the Nigerian national identity in relation to the characters ethno-national identity. My critical line of inquiry will engage with the following questions: (1) How do Nigerian novels by female authors build national identities in their narratives? (2) What does a Nigerian identity look like in these novels? (3) If the narratives of these female authors are not concerned with nationalism, then what is the thematic focus of these works in relation to identity in Nigerian society? The authors whose work that will be at the centre of my analysis are Buchi Emecheta, Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chibundu Onuzo and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. The authors chosen for my analysis predominantly represent ethnic groups from the southern region of Nigeria. Sefi Atta is the only author who is representative of a northern ethnic group, as this is where her father derives from. I have chosen to exclude other female authors from the northern region as a result of the limited literary canon of the Nigerian novel in English. For reference, examples of some of the key authors are Zaynab Alkali whose body of work includes *The Stillborn* (1984) and *The Virtuous Woman* (1987) and Hauwa Ali who wrote *Destiny* (1988). In this research I argue that the aesthetic of the Nigerian novel by female authors offers readers a critical lens through which to view aspects of society that are obstacles to national growth. That in their intent to critique the patriarchal structures of society that confine women, they also look to demonstrate how those same structures are equally restrictive to men. I also argue that novel's aesthetic frames both the ethno- and national-identities in Nigeria as equally important and interchangeable depending on the locality of the individual.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter one discusses the portrayal of women in the novels of Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta. It looks to interrogate the role of the mother, the family and the influence that these characters are depicted as having over the process of nation building. To understand the counter narrative that female authors have created, an examination of the comparative images of the female characters of both male and female authors is necessary. It argues that the work of female authors and the female characters they have constructed in their novels adds an important contribution to the Nigerian literary canon, by focusing on the experience and contribution of women in Nigerian society.

Chapter two discusses W.E.B Du Bois' theory of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1994:2) and its relevance to the experience of both male and female characters living in Nigerian diasporic communities in Western countries. It argues that these encounters with double consciousness contribute to the sense of a Nigerian identity and the development of nationhood within Nigeria. It also examines the idea of unbelonging, how it affects those living in the diaspora and how the characters respond to the duality of their identity within the various narratives. In relation to the two young male characters from Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* (2000) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), the role of the mother in fostering a sense of national identity in their children will also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, there will be an exploration of the differences between the African-American experience with that of the African in America: (1) how does a sense of unity in the diaspora relate to this contemporary portrayal of these experiences? (2) If and how this affects the construction of a Nigerian identity whilst living in the diaspora?

Chapter three discusses the concepts of "waithood" (Honwana 2012; Sommers 2012; Hansen 2015; Branch and Mampilly 2015) and "choicelessness" (Adichie 2013: 276) in contemporary Nigerian society, identifying the consequences of these experiences in causing the arrested development of the Nigerian youth. It examines the experiences of three

characters, two of which are temporarily caught in these states of “youthhood” and one who is an example of a young Nigerian with choice. It argues that the image of the youth in contemporary Nigerian novels written by women will offer the discourse on Nigerian literature an indication on the future development of the Nigerian nation and state. It also questions whether a sense of national identity is even a pre-occupation for those who are caught in a period of “waithood”, arguing that some of the cultural pressures in Nigerian society can at times lead these characters to make choices that they may never would have considered under different circumstances. It also considers the entrepreneurial spirit of the Nigerian youth in carving out new futures for themselves and their country, in the absence of finding employment through conventional means.

Chapter four explores the differences in experience of the haves and have-nots in Nigeria’s former capital city, Lagos. The term haves and have-nots will be used in my analysis to differentiate between the very rich and the poor within the context of the novel. The analysis focuses on Chibundu Onuzo’s first novel *The Spider King’s Daughter* (2012) and questions the stability of the Nigerian social strata by exploring the experience of one of the novel’s protagonists, Runner G, and his transition from an affluent lifestyle to one of poverty. Through Runner G’s experience I question whether or not a relationship and/or concern with a national identity is in fact a privilege. Furthermore, the analysis in the chapter will also look to explore the character’s relationship and definition of his personal identity and how this can change after one has experienced such an extreme change in lifestyle. Within the novel itself, it becomes clear that the concerns of the haves, is quite often at odds with that of the have-nots. As a result, I question how the development gap in Nigeria affects the sense of unity within the country; whether or not ideas of belonging differ depending on the class of the character and ultimately, how this influences the process of nation building.

Finally, chapter five focuses on the Nigeria-Biafra War and the civil war literature that was written both shortly after the war and within the last two decades. My primary line of inquiry will look to understand how the Nigerian nation has been betrayed within these narratives and whether

there remains a possibility of there being a unified Nigerian identity after all the events that took place both before and during the Nigeria-Biafra War. Through this line of questioning I examine the image of both the Biafran and Nigerian nations within the chosen narratives, questioning the differences between the nations and countries within the novels. I will also look at the way in which nationalism has been framed in the narratives, focusing predominantly on the civilian experience during the war, as well as the role that civil society and women played in the process of nation building through grassroots politics during that era. Finally, I also explore the experience of the ethnic minority groups during the conflict and question whether the way in which they are depicted in the novels effects the image of the Biafran nation as inclusive or solely focused on a pan-Igbo nation building project.

Nigerian Female Authors: An Introduction

Over the years there have been numerous critical assessments of the works of early African male authors¹. During the decades in which African countries were gaining independence from European colonial rule, many of these critical inquiries focused on the way in which these male authors used fiction to “write back” to narratives written by Europeans about African identities (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002; Ashcroft 2001; wa Thiong’o 2006; Currey 2003). These narratives dehumanised the peoples of Africa and sought to rob them of any claim to a history, culture or intellect, prior to the arrival of Europeans to the continent. These African male authors used their work to subvert these master narratives that related to all people of African descent. However, despite the success of their work in challenging those images of African peoples, those same male authors have also experienced a similar challenge to their work by female authors of African descent, who focused their attention

¹ Examples of some of the important critiques of key Nigerian male authors: Wole Soyinka — see the works of Biodun Jeyifo, James Gibbs and Yemi D. Ogunyemi. Chinua Achebe — see the works of Carole Boyce-Davies, Ernest N. Emenyonu, C.L. Innes and Berth Lindfors.

predominantly on confronting the fictional portrayals of women within those same male authored narratives (Erwin 2002; Ladele 2010).

The most common critique postulated by these female authors and academics focused on the image of women that had been portrayed in novels written by men, suggesting that those portrayals misrepresented the realities of how women viewed themselves in African societies (Boyce-Davies 2014; Boyce-Davies 1986a; Stratton 1990; Chand 2005; Stratton 1994; Nwapa 2007). Boyce-Davies argues that to date:

“African feminist criticism so far has engaged in a number of critical activities which can be conveniently categorized as follows: 1) Developing the canon of African women writers; 2) Examining stereotypical images of women in African literature; 3) Studying African women writers and the development of an African female aesthetic; and 4) Examining women in oral traditional literature” (Boyce-Davies 1986a:13-14)

This body of work—both fictional and non-fictional—that has been produced and collected since 1966, has been an integral part of giving a voice to women of African descent. It not only critiqued inaccurate representations of African women in literature, but it also created spaces for discourses to take place amongst African women themselves as points of empowerment and self-discovery. One of the first African female authors to begin the trend of “writing back”, was the Nigerian author Flora Nwapa (Sackeyfio 2017; Griswold 2000; Stratton 1994; Andrade 2011b; Condé 2012). Consequently, she has been credited with leading the way for other female authors in Nigeria, such as Adaora Lily Ulasi, Zaynab Alkali, Buchi Emecheta, Helen Obviagele and many more.

Within the narratives of the novels written by the aforementioned authors, can be found similar themes regarding the experiences of womanhood, motherhood and nationalism, both in Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora. Flora Nwapa was the first female author in Nigeria to be published by Heinemann African Writers Series (Currey 2003). Her body of work includes novels such as *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One is Enough* (1981) and *Women are Different* (1986). Arguably,

Nwapa's first intentions as a writer were not political as she states: "I started writing because when I was a high school teacher, I had too much time on my hands and did not know what to do with it" (Nwapa 2007:526). Nwapa, like many of her other female literary peers began writing by focusing on portraying an image of the experience of those around them: "In my first two novels, I tried to recreate the experiences of women in the traditional African society – their social and economic activities and above all their preoccupation with the problems of procreation, infertility, and child-rearing" (Ibid.528). Though her intentions were perhaps not initially political, through the process of presenting alternative narratives and challenging the literary constructions of women, her work became political.

Nwapa's legacy was continued by Buchi Emecheta, who also began the process of writing because she had stories to tell rather than for any political pursuits: "I am just an ordinary writer, an ordinary writer who has to write, because if I didn't write I think I would have to be put in an asylum" (Emecheta 2007:551). Furthermore, she likens her experience of story-telling to the Igbo oral tradition of the Big Mother²: "I am simply doing what my Big Mother was doing for free about thirty years ago. The only difference is that she told her stories in the moonlight, while I have to bang away at a typewriter I picked up from Woolworths in London" (Ibid.552). The Big Mother, is a hugely influential figure to all the children in her community through storytelling and as a result has a very significant place in the process of nation building (Emecheta 2007; Emecheta 1994c). It could be argued then, that other female authors have, knowingly or unknowingly, taken on the role of the Big Mother with their writing, but with the ability instead to reach an audience beyond their own community (Ogunyemi 1996). Emecheta's body of work includes titles such as *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Kehinde* (1994) to name a few. Though ethnically Igbo, Emecheta was born in Lagos but divided her time between

² A Big Mother is a name usually given to the female storyteller in the community. These figures are more commonly found in village novels rather than city or diaspora novels. Buchi Emecheta often credits her desire to become a storyteller to that of her Big Mother in Ibuza (Emecheta 1994c).

the city and her parent's village Ibuza in the Eastern region of Nigeria (Emecheta 2007:551). As a result, Emecheta was the first female author to begin blending multiple ethno-national experiences into her work, predominantly combining both Igbo and Yoruba cultural elements into her narratives. The importance and progressiveness towards a focus on unity as a result of this cannot be understated. Her offering narratives to readers that presented characters from various ethno-nationalities in Nigeria who embrace and respect other cultures in the country. Similarly, to Nwapa, Emecheta's novels became political by its very existence, however, as her body of work expanded, her critiques of motherhood, the gender roles assigned to women and the racism in the diaspora became a focus of her work.

Arguably two of the most important contemporary Nigerian female authors are Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Sefi Atta's work includes titles such as *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2008) and *A Bit of Difference* (2012). As a writer, Atta certainly focuses her attention on writing for the middle and upper classes in Nigeria: "people who buy my book in Nigeria are people who can afford to buy the book, people who are educated and professional and they get tired of reading stories that negate their experiences" (Atta & Collins 2007:127). This is an important contribution to the Nigerian literary canon as it presents some of the readers in Nigeria with a reflection of their realities. Her work has also gone a long way towards engaging with the contemporary concerns of women in Nigeria, further building on the foundational work of those female authors who came before her. Atta, like Emecheta, also includes in her narratives characters and experiences from multi ethno-national backgrounds. Much of this is because Sefi Atta is herself a mix of two ethnic groups in Nigeria: "I had an unusual upbringing in that sense and was surrounded by people from other ethnic groups and religions. Many Nigerian writers I meet feel that they are Yoruba, Igbo or something else, but I actually feel Nigerian and it comes out in my writing" (Ibid.123). Atta goes on further to state that she writes "...about people who don't have any strong ethnic allegiance or people who are in mixed marriages" (Ibid.123). As another example of someone of mixed ethnicity in Nigeria,

Chibundu Onuzo, a new contemporary Nigerian author, follows a similar trend in her narratives and often includes couples who are in mixed relationships within a reduced focus on ethno-national differences. Arguably, what is evidence through the work of contemporary authors like Atta and Onuzo, is the legacy of Emecheta's work through the continued use of this important aesthetic in the Nigerian novel.

Whilst Sefi Atta's work has received critical acclaim within the literary community, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has become somewhat of a global icon, not only from the popularity of her novels, but also her contribution to feminist³ and other political discourses through social and mainstream media sources (Emenyonu 2017; Carotenuto 2017). Emenyonu suggests that Adichie is "easily the leading and most engaging voice of her era..." and "...has bridged gaps and introduced new motifs and narrative varieties that have energized contemporary African fiction" (Emenyonu 2017:1). Her body of work includes titles such as *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013). Adichie's work is undoubtedly political in many forms, however, she too was initially drawn to writing with the intent to tell stories. She states that in her early writing efforts, she was very much influenced by the images and characters represented in the narratives: "I thought that all books had to have white people in them, by their very nature, and so when I started to write, as soon as I was old enough to spell, I wrote the kinds of stories that I was reading" (Adichie 2008:42). It was in fact her introduction to the work of the male Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, that let her know that her "...world was worthy of literature, that books could also have people like me in them" (Ibid.42). The aesthetic intent of Adichie's novels include subject matters that appear to be important to her as a person and the popular reception of these novels suggest that they are equally important to the readers. Adichie's engagement with the Nigeria-Biafra War in her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and the framing of American race contentions in *Americanah* (2013) have provided important critiques

³ See Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's published feminist essays, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017).

on historic, but still, contemporary subject matters that have often had their narratives subverted by state level power bases. With all of her novels and non-fictional books, Adichie's contribution to the Nigerian literary canon has been invaluable and at only 38 years old, Adichie will no doubt continue to produce work that is "...relevant to people of all ages – across racial and linguistic boundaries – whose needs, dreams, peculiar circumstances, successes and failures, hopes and aspirations, she has come to represent" (Emenyonu 2017:1).

In the last twenty years there has been a marked increase in the number of Nigerian female authors being published. The advent of the Internet has allowed the current generation of Nigerian female authors to reach a wider audience, receiving national and international critical acclaim for their work. It has also allowed the history of the first Nigerian female authors to reach a wider global audience. This is an important set of perspectives to analyse because, as just discussed, the work of female authors from Nigeria has been largely ignored in the decades following independence from British colonial rule. As a further consequence of female voices and bodies being controlled, their contribution to the national space has also been excluded and silenced.

Literature Review

Among existing studies on the subject nationalism written by African female authors, Susan. Z Andrade appears to be one of the key authorities on the topic, presenting analysis in her works regarding the domestic space and its relationship with the national space (Andrade 2011b; Andrade 2007). Her work has focused primarily on the family and the way in which the woman's authority within domestic spaces links to the public and national space (Andrade 2011b; Andrade 2007; Andrade 2011a). On the topic of the portrayal of women in literature—both of women in African countries and those in the diaspora—both Carole Boyce-Davies and Florence Stratton have both contributed significant bodies of work to the discourse. Whilst both writer's work has critically engaged with the discourse on female positions of power in African patriarchal societies, Boyce-Davies work has also had a specific focus on the experience of African women in the diaspora. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has also contributed important analysis on the discourse of Nigerian female authors and nationalism. Her work has highlighted the importance of "Womanism" in the work of Nigerian female authors, which offers an alternative to Western feminist discourse, providing perspectives that take into consideration the experience of the African woman (Ogunyemi 1996). Through her work, Ogunyemi has furthered the discourse on Nigerian women in the national space through her examination of the role of women in a patriarchal Nigerian society; in particular, the role of the mother. The remaining literature continues to focus on the national space through the deconstruction of gender authority and masculine assertions in Nigerian society (Jeyifo 1993; Erwin 2002; Akung 2012; Pandey 2004).

In his critically acclaimed book *Imagined Communities* (first published in 1983), Benedict Anderson suggests that "nation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse" (Anderson 2006:3). Consequently, in order to analyse and interrogate whether Nigerian novels present an image of a unified national identity or not, an understanding is required of the level of cultural and

ethnic diversity in Nigeria. Some critics suggest that a unified Nigerian national identity does not exist and furthermore, is not what citizens of the geographical entity that is Nigeria, are concerned with (Agbiboa 2013; Siollun 2009). As Griswold rightly questions in her own work: “if Nigeria is rather new as a geopolitical entity, and if its people’s identity as Nigerians is tenuous, then why use “Nigerian” to demarcate the cultural object of my study?” (Griswold 2000:11). This is a question that I have also had to consider in my own research and have concluded that I use the label Nigerian as a way of acknowledging not only the political and geographical identity of the authors and the setting of their work, but also as a way of not prescribing an identity for the authors or dismissing those who in fact do identify as Nigerian.

If we accept the possible assertion that Nigerian citizens are not interested in engaging with a Nigerian national identity, then what role has the novel played in bringing this thematic focus to the attention of the reader? Post-independence authors “...dug into indigenous history and achievement to find new inspiration for a new nation” (Bourne 2015:96). Within my research I will endeavour to understand whether these author’s intentions were to write a Nigerian identity into their narratives or to focus on more ethno-regional identities. White suggests that within Benedict Anderson’s body of work he identifies the novel as an agent “...of the imagining of a nation...” (White 2015:627-628). This claim would suggest that there is a valid line of inquiry in exploring the theme of nationalism within Nigerian novels. One of the key ways that I believe authors have been able to explore these national identities in their work is by focusing on the human experience (Hawthorn 2010; Irele 1990; Griswold 2000). This is especially pertinent to the works of female authors, examples of which I will present in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

When creating images of the human experience in the novel, authors are asking the reader to engage with their stories, knowing that it is only “representative” of life (Hawthorn 2010:2). Wolfgang Iser suggests that much of the control over the reception of the text sits with the reader and not the author:

“The “willing suspension of disbelief” will then apply, not to the narrative framework set up by the author, but to those ideas that had hitherto oriented the reader himself. Ridding oneself of such prejudices—even if only temporarily—is no simple task” (Iser 1978:8)

Whilst Iser’s critical assessment is relevant to any reader, the importance of this in relation to the Nigerian reader is the relationship that the reader has with their sense of ethnic, religious and gender identity; this would almost certainly change the way in which the text is received. Bernard suggests that a “...prefabricated critical process...” has sometimes acted as an obstacle to the reception and expectation of nationalism in novels (Bernard 2013:34). Thus, the expectations of how nationalism should be portrayed in Nigerian novels acts as a barrier to the reception of any newly constructed conceptions that the authors may be suggesting within their narratives. These framings of nationalism in Nigerian novels and the reception of these texts will be examined in the subsequent five chapters of this research.

Brief History of Nigeria

The history of how Nigeria became a country/state is of great importance to any study of Nigerian literature. So intricately connected are the two, that it could be argued that the contemporary Nigerian novel in English was born out of the birth of Nigeria as a unified federal state. For years, the geographical region that came to be known as Nigeria was ruled by the British as a Northern and Southern protectorate and was only amalgamated into a single country in 1914 and was subsequently given independence on October 1st, 1960 (Falola and Heaton 2008; Siollun 2009; Offodile 2016; Griswold 2000). From the advent of its creation as a country, Nigeria would have to manage the ethnically diverse make up of its new citizens and population. There are more than “...200 different ethno-linguistic groups” in Nigeria and the three largest of these groups are the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo (Falola and Heaton 2008:4). As there is such a significant number of smaller ethnic groups in Nigeria, I will

not list them all in this introduction, however, some of the larger minority groups would be the Fulani, Ijaw, Ibibio, Nupe and Tiv people, to name a few (Ibid.4).

With only the shared experience of European enslavement and British colonialism, Nigeria—like many other African countries that were former European colonies—has never resembled the kind of homogenous societies that can be found in contemporary European countries. Siollun has argued that as a result of the level of diversity in Nigeria “...some of its leading politicians initially doubted it could constitute a real country” (Siollun 2009:12). This is arguably still the belief of some in Nigeria today and can be seen in the ongoing struggles for regional autonomy. However, as Ladele highlights, “the Nigerian experience...is a micro-narrative of this widespread African narrative” (Ladele 2010:463). Whilst many African countries have also struggled with varying levels of ethnic conflicts over the years, many of the governments of these countries have pushed for national unity whilst also acknowledging the diversity within their borders. Consequently, in order for Nigeria to work as a unified and competitive state in the global capitalist system, there was a need for its first leaders to create a narrative of unity that would not function along ethnic or religious lines; unfortunately, this was not to be.

It would however be an unfair assessment of the history of Nigeria, to place the blame solely on the new Nigerian political class and omit to acknowledge the huge part that the British colonial regime had—long before Nigerian independence—in pitting the ethnic groups in that geographical region that would eventually come to represent one country, against one another. As the Northern and Southern protectorates were governed separately, the exposure that the two regions had to a “European education” was markedly different (Bourne 2015:35). Islam is more commonly practiced in the Northern region of Nigeria than in the Southern part and during colonial rule in order to keep the emirs in the North happy, the British did not allow Christian missionaries to operate in the Northern protectorate (Salamone 2010:3). As a result, a gap began to form between the level of education of the those in the South compared with those in the North. The outcome of this was that more people from the

ethnic groups in the Southern protectorate could be found in civil service jobs than those in the Northern (Gould 2012; Siollun 2009; Bourne 2015). When the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated into one country, this became a concern for the political class in the North, believing that in a unified state they may not hold as much political sway as they were accustomed to. As a way of pacifying the concerns of the Northern leaders regarding unification with the South—coupled with Britain’s belief that the emirs would be the better allies in an independent Nigeria—the British played a key role in the country’s first democratic elections and the election of a Northern Prime Minister (Bourne 2015; Gould 2012). This act by the British was clearly a defining moment in the history of Nigeria and would have huge consequences, ultimately leading to the secession of the Eastern region of the country and the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra War towards the end of the 1960s.

Why is this particular part of Nigerian history important to the analysis of my research? It is important because as a subject, it has not only been the inspiration for many of the first Nigerian novels that were published, but it also goes a long way toward explaining why the subject of *a Nigerian identity* remains a key focal point in the discourse of Nigeria across a wide range of academic disciplines. As Falola and Heaton argue, “colonial rule inspired anti-colonial resistance from the very beginning, although it had not organized around a pan-Nigerian consciousness...” (Falola and Heaton 2008:136). Once the country had achieved its goal of independence from British colonial rule, the test was then set to keep the country as one. It has been argued that “Nigeria is not a nation...” (Siollun 2009:12) and that the name Nigeria essentially only describes the geopolitical entity or expression that came into existence in 1914 (Griswold 2000; Siollun 2009; Joseph 2001). Like many other African countries that achieved independence around the same time as Nigeria, the newly created states in Africa were constructed with little consideration from the Western nations for the ethnic, religious and historical complexities of the peoples who they were grouping together under the banner of a single state (New African 2016; Magee 2012; Ladele 2010). As a result, the lack of a unified national identity is still as relevant in 2017 as it was in 1960.

The Nigerian Novel

Any research concerning the history of the contemporary Nigerian novel in English will ultimately lead the reader back to Chinua Achebe and his debut novel, *Things Fall Apart* (first published in 1958). Whilst this novel is arguably the most famous Nigerian novel, it was not the first. In the 1930s the first Nigerian novels were published in either the Hausa or Yoruba language, not in English (Griswold 2000: xvi). The first Nigerian novel that was published in English was Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (first published in 1952) followed two years later by Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (first published in 1954). Whilst Tutuola's novel was the first Nigerian novel written in English, the language has been described as "broken English" (Andrade 2009:183), which was likely to be the main reason why it did not receive the same critical attention as Achebe's novel. In her book detailing the history of the Nigerian novel titled, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (2000) Wendy Griswold highlights how some literary critics of the time described the works of Tutuola as "...not *really* novels" (Griswold 2000:14 italics in original). The dismissal of Tutuola's novel, highlights not only an element of elitism in the literary world, but also a rejection of certain African literary aesthetics during that era.

This kind of literary elitism was not solely reserved for the works of Amos Tutuola. Many literary critics appeared to delimit Nigerian authors by those who were university educated and those who were not (Lindfors 1982:10). Consequently, the history of the Nigerian novel that has received the most critical inquiry has in fact been the history of the Nigerian novel in English. Questions then come to the fore as to what the function of the Nigerian novel in English was and—in many ways—still is? (Andrade 2011b; Andrade 2009; Innes 2014). The most common response to this critical line of inquiry is that novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Thing's Fall Apart* and those subsequently published in English were written as a way of responding to the "falsehood...ignorance and misinformation..." (Boyce-Davies 1999:99) that had been previously

published about the whole of Africa by Western novelists and historians⁴. When considering the motives behind Achebe's first novel, Lindfors suggests:

“...that the type of nationalistic fervor to which he was exposed as an undergraduate, a type that led him, to question the cultural legacy of colonialism, would have been experienced with the same degree of intensity elsewhere” (Lindfors 1982:9)

The groupings of the university and non-university educated Nigerian authors is perhaps then a useful way for literary critics to understand the intended aesthetic reception of the novels. This is not to say that one group's contributions were in anyway more valuable than the other; in fact, it is clear, that both groups played a vital role in transferring the history of storytelling⁵ in Nigeria to the contemporary novel in English.

To their credit, despite many other African countries also producing novels that challenged the Western literary tradition of 'othering'⁶ African histories, cultures and identities (Ardell 1994; Egbunike 2014; Egbunike 2017), Nigeria has produced and published the largest number of novels in the English language from the 1950's to date, across Africa (Griswold 2000; Jones 2007). Whilst authors challenged “...the image of Africa as “the other world,”...” (Achebe 1990:3) and wrote their own version of their cultural, historical and religious practices into written form, they also used their novels as a way of sharing this knowledge amongst other ethnic

⁴ Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (first published in 1899) is one of the most famous examples of Western literature that portrayed Africans as *brutes* and *savages*. The works of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes are further examples of Western authors, whose work had a huge influence on some of the master narratives about Africa and African people.

⁵ As in many African cultures, many of the ethnic groups in Nigeria have a long history of oral storytelling. Oral literature has not been given the same level of critical focus because, as Finnegan suggests, “the unwritten forms...are far less widely known and appreciated. Such forms...are harder to record and present, and, for a superficial observer at least, they are easier to overlook than the corresponding written material” (Finnegan 2012:3).

⁶ “In general terms, the ‘other’ is anyone who is separate from one's self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one's place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and the colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007:154-155)

groups in Nigeria. Despite many African authors using the novels to tell their own stories of their realities, Western literary critics were unable, in the initial stages, to accept the novel as having an authentic African aesthetic and as a result were often unable to fully engage with the intended function of the novel (Bishop 2007; Miller 2007; Irele 1990). Furthermore, although African novelists presented within their work an image of their reality and customs, it would be problematic and misguided for any reader—African or non-African—to receive these texts as some sort of anthropological study, rather than a piece of literary fiction (Miller 2007).

Over the years the function of the Nigerian novel has changed as the country itself has undergone its own changes. After the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra War (this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five) the landscape of what constitutes a Nigerian identity was forever changed. Civil war novels (as they have often been categorised as) that were written during and after the war focused on a national trauma that was never acknowledged or dealt with by any official governmental modes of inquiry. The result was that artists—whether literary or not—took it upon themselves to try to acknowledge and deconstruct what had happened, as a way of helping not only themselves, but the people of Nigeria mourn the dead and the countries that could have been (be that a unified Nigeria or Biafra). Years of military coup d'états and successive military rule also had an affect not only on the country from a political and developmental standpoint, but also on Nigerian authors:

“There was a massive brain drain from Nigeria during those years. Particularly intellectuals, writers, and academics were targeted because they were speaking and writing out. Some were killed, a lot were persecuted in different ways, their families were attacked”
(Fasselt 2015:233)

Those that attempted to use these literary forms—fictional and non-fictional—to critique and expose the corrupt practices of these military governments in Nigeria did so at their own risk. Authors such as Chinua

Achebe, Wole Soyinka⁷, Ken Saro-Wiwa⁸ and many others found themselves either in exile, imprisoned or murdered by the military leaders in charge at the time.

With the return to civilian rule in 1999, the function and aesthetic of the Nigerian novel would change once again. Despite the country conducting its first democratic elections since independence, Nigerian authors remained critical of the way in which the country was being governed. At the turn of the twenty-first century, a new surge of Nigerian novels and novelists began to have their work published. The novels of authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chris Abani, Helen Oyeyemi and Sefi Atta began to give some of the newest insights into the literary aesthetics of a new generation of writers. Whilst these contemporary Nigerian authors maintained that critical eye on the way in which the country has been governed, their narratives have often focused more on the daily lives of different peoples living in Nigeria. From 2007 onwards, there has been a significant increase in the number of novels by Nigerian authors being published—both at home and abroad—with 2015 seeing at least seven new novels published that year alone⁹. Some credit for this increase must be given to the creation of the Nigerian publishing company, Cassava Republic Press:

⁷ Wole Soyinka is a prominent Nigerian “...playwright, poet, actor, teacher, social critic, and political activist...” (Falola and Heaton 2008:xxxii). In the late 1960’s through to the mid 1970’s, Soyinka was arrested and later exiled from Nigeria by the regime of the military leader Yakubu Gowon. He was also “...the first African to win the Nobel Prize for literature” in 1986 (Falola and Heaton 2008:xxxii).

⁸ Ken Saro-Wiwa was an author and political activist who came from the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta. He was part of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) who protested the environmental devastation of the Niger Delta at the hands of multiple petroleum companies and the Nigerian government. Saro-Wiwa was famously executed with other key members of MOSOP by the military government of Sani Abacha in 1995 where he was falsely accused of murder (Falola and Heaton 2008:xxxii).

⁹ Those seven novels are *Blackass* (2015) by A. Igoni Barrett, *The Fishermen* (2015) by Chigozie Obioma, *Born on a Tuesday* (2015) by Elnathan John, *Season of Crimson Blossoms* (2015) by Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, *What is Not Yours, Is Not Yours* (2015) by Helen Oyeyemi, *Under The Udala Tree* (2015) by Chinelo Okparanta and *The Book of Phoenix* (2015) by Nnedi Okorafor. It is worth noting that three of the seven aforementioned titles were published by Cassava Republic Press.

“Our mission is to change the way we all think about African writing. We think that contemporary African prose should be rooted in African experience in all its diversity, whether set in filthy-yet-sexy megacities such as Lagos or Kinshasa, in little-known communities outside of Bahia, in the recent past or indeed the near future” (Cassava Republic Press 2018)

The publishing company has gone to great efforts to take back ownership of the publishing of Nigerian narratives, find new literary talent in the Nigeria and also to help increase readership of novels both in Nigeria and in the diaspora. However, the new publishing house has not been the only new breakthrough for the Nigerian novel in the last eighteen years.

As many of the contemporary Nigerian authors reside between Nigeria and western countries (predominantly America and the United Kingdom) many of their novels have evolved to include topics that are relevant both globally and in Nigeria. Where the ‘been-to’¹⁰ narrative had previously been included in the works of a handful of authors, it has now become more common place for characters to not only be able to move between Nigeria and the rest of the world, but also for those who remain in Nigeria to have a greater knowledge of the world outside of the country. This has been an important reflection of the lives of some young Nigerian authors and has consequently contributed to the positive receptions of the novels in western countries. Of equal importance is the fact that several of the novels published in the last twelve years have become so popular globally, that film adaptations of the texts have been produced or are in a pre-production phase. For example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) was released as a film in 2013 and following the success of her most recent novel *Americanah* (2013), there is also a possibility of a film adaptation of this novel being produced too. Tomi Adeyemi’s novel *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018), which is the first book in a fantasy series, has received popular acclaim globally amongst readers young and old and is also in a pre-production phase of filming (Pan

¹⁰ The term ‘been-to’ is a colloquial term used in Nigeria to refer to those who have travelled outside of Nigeria, more commonly to a North American or European country. There are regional variations on this term and a more contemporary example of this label for those who return to Nigeria from abroad is ‘repats’ (Egbejule 2016).

MacMillan 2018). However, Nigerian novels have not only made it to the cinematic stage of production, but also the theatre, in the form of stage adaptations of the texts. In particular, Chigozie Obioma's novel *The Fishermen* (2015) was turned into a stage play by Gbolahan Obisesan and saw its first UK tour completely sell out, staging its final performance at the Arcola theatre in north London (Arcola Theatre 2018). The significance of such events is that it highlights not only the global success of the contemporary Nigerian novel, but also the evolution of the aesthetic of the novel, carrying with it the art of Nigerian storytelling into other mediums.

Ezeigbo suggests that in Nigeria "literature has become an important means of understanding and interpreting aspects of society such as politics, religion, social conflicts, class struggle and the human condition" (Ezeigbo 1991:1). Whilst Ezeigbo's suggestion that the Nigerian novel has an important critical function for engaging with the landscape of Nigerian society, Griswold demonstrates that there are three main schools of thought on the function of the African novel as a whole:

"The universalists maintain that African fiction treats the human condition and that it should be evaluated no differently than fiction from anyplace else. The traditionalists stress a specifically African aesthetic, interpreted as a cultural conjunction of racial and historical elements. And the neo-Marxists, regarding the first two as just different forms of idealism, emphasize the social and economic context of African literary production" (Griswold 2000:14-15)

Whichever group that African literary critics falls into, the fact remains that the Nigerian novel (as well as the African novel as a whole) derives its function from its history of purpose. Ever changing and responding to new and old themes that relate to the societies in which they belong to. Authors maintain their connection to the long tradition of storytelling in that region of West Africa by continuing to create stories and use the literary form of the novel to reach wider audiences.

The Role of the African Author

The discourse on the role of the African author is quite significant. As with Nigerian authors, many early African authors¹¹ used their work as critical tools that engaged with the history of slavery and colonialism in Africa, highlighting the damaging effects that both have had on the African peoples (be that those who still reside in Africa or members of the global diaspora). As Ezeigbo suggests, “the African writer, being part of the new socio-political elite, has been very much influenced by politics and Africa’s political history” (Ezeigbo 1991:12). Much debate has taken place over the years regarding the role and function of the African novel, but of equal importance in this discourse has been the role of the African author themselves. Even when taking into consideration all the different schools of thought on this matter, Griswold posits that first and foremost “...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” (Griswold 2000:3). Consequently, when conducting any type of inquiry into the discourse of Nigerian literature, that the function of telling stories is paramount compared with all other thematic intentions by the author.

The renowned Nigerian literary professor, Abiola Irele, recounts in one of his many literary journal articles how he heard the author Chinua Achebe once say that, ‘All art is propaganda, though not all propaganda is art’ (Irele 1990:1). This, Irele argues, was Achebe’s “...understanding, as both writer and responsive individual, of the nature and function of art” (Ibid.1). Many African literary critics and African authors have suggested that art in many African societies has historically had some form of functionary purpose and has rarely been ‘art for art’s sake’ (Achebe 1973; Achebe 1990; Ezeigbo 1991; Sougou 2002). This is not to say that such intentions for art in Africa do not exist, however, Achebe recalls that the

¹¹ Examples of other African authors who criticised colonialism in their work would be: Ngugi wa Thiong’o with works such as *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *Petals of Blood* (1977); Ayi Kwei Armah with works such as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968).

pre- and post-independence generation of authors in Africa were faced with a choice of tackling "...the big subjects of the day..." or writing about "...roses or the air or about love..." and he, like many others "...chose the former" (Achebe 2013:54). In many ways, fewer people at the time would have been able to so openly and honestly engage with the colonial African experience than authors (Irele 1990; Lindfors 2007). Bearing witness to the experience of colonialism in Africa, allowed those authors to use their work to afford meaning to both contemporary and centuries old African cultures and realities (Lindfors 2007; Chielozona 2005; Griswold 2000).

In addition to the role of the author, there has also been a key line of inquiry in the African literary discipline which has questioned who African authors are writing for (Fasselt 2015; Gordimer 1975). This is not a concern reserved only for African texts, as key theoreticians in the field of Reader-Response theory also question the intended audience and reception of the texts from multiple genres (Iser 2000; Iser 1978; Segers, Jauss and Bahti 1979; Jauss 1994; Hohendahl and Silberman 1977). I have already acknowledged the intent of many authors to create counter narratives to that of the Western master narratives and negative portrayals of Africa, but there is also a need to understand whether or not the people of those African societies were also intended to consume these novels. As the majority of these novels were written in English, a large part of the populations in African countries were unable to engage with the aesthetic intent of these novels; most commonly because they did not read or speak English. Bamgboşe argues that language both includes and excludes certain groups from participation in many areas of life in Africa (Bamgboşe 2000:4). It must be noted, however, that whilst an inability to converse in European languages can limit certain groups and classes of people to being labelled illiterate in a contemporary African city setting, the reverse can result in a feeling of exclusion in relation to one's sense of cultural identity. The language question became somewhat of a dilemma for some authors, who in later years began to question themselves as to who they were writing for:

“We are not talking about his concern for Africanness. But there seems to me to be a genuine need for African writers to pause momentarily and consider whether anything in traditional African aesthetics will fit their contemporary condition” (Achebe 1973:619-620)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, for example, made a conscious decision to no longer write his novels in English and instead began to produce narratives written only in his native language of Gikuyu (wa Thiong’o 2006). However, some contemporary authors have argued that the colonial languages have been part of their experience growing up in the various African countries and see the ownership of those languages being as much theirs as it is the European countries from where the languages originated.

Is it possible then that there is no one single purpose or intention of the African author (wherever they may be from)? As discussed, the Nigerian novel has evolved over the years in relation to the political and social changes in the country as a whole. There are still those that use the novel as a tool to critically engage with the socio-political realities in Nigeria and there are also those who focus on writing stories that engage with more romantic portrayals of the everyday experiences, set both in Nigeria and the diaspora. Ezeigbo highlights that “some critics are of the opinion that any form of social involvement or political commitment on the part of the literary artist jeopardizes the aesthetic effectiveness of such an artist” (Ezeigbo 1991:74). However, Achebe’s theory that art and propaganda are intrinsically linked suggests that an artist’s ability to suppress their “political commitment” would be difficult, if not impossible. Who then can the author write for and does the writer’s freedom of expression appear to be somewhat restricted through such critical assessments as the above? Gordimer responds to such discourses by stating:

“To me it is his right to maintain and publish to the world a deep, intense, private view of the situation in which he finds his society. If he is to work as well as he can, he must take, and be granted, freedom from the public conformity of political interpretation, morals and tastes” (Gordimer 1975:45)

Thus, the African author—more specifically to my research the Nigerian

author—acts as a social conduit through which the interpretations of history, the present and the future of any society is presented through the medium of the fictional novel in English. As long as their connection to the act of storytelling is unbroken, then the control over the aesthetic reception of the novel lays not with the author, but with the reader.

Chapter 1 - The Fempire¹² Writes Back: Narratives of Resistance in the Works of Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta

¹² Fempire is a term made popular by the television broadcaster Lifetime, which continues to run a campaign that brings to the fore some of the significant achievements of women around the world (see www.mylifetime.com/blog/fempire-diaries).

This chapter will examine the way in which women are portrayed in Nigerian novels and how those depictions suggest that women play a vital role in the process of nation building in Nigeria. It will look at the works of Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta, two Nigerian female authors, with a focus on some of their most important novels spanning across several decades. I will begin by taking a comparative look at the ways in which both female and male Nigerian authors have portrayed female characters within their novels and how these depictions symbolise some form of influence over the national space, if at all. In the second section of the chapter I will examine the role of the mother, focusing primarily on the ways in which motherhood has been culturally portrayed and the construction of female authority within the context of the community. The final section of this chapter will examine the relationship between the family unit and the national space, focusing the analysis on the theme of temporary spousal separation and the motivations of certain female characters who permanently separate from their husbands. In addition to this I will also look to explore the framing of locality in the novels (in relation to one's sense of personal and national identity) and any experience of a national identity that the authors try to imbue in their characters throughout the narratives.

Whilst as authors, Emecheta and Atta differ greatly in their style, they have often written about similar subject matters concerning Nigerian society. Whilst Emecheta has written most of her work about characters from working-class backgrounds living in both Nigeria and the diaspora, Atta's characters usually come from more middle-class backgrounds and have at some point lived as part of the diaspora. As a result, both authors offer readers an insight into some of the numerous groups of people from Nigeria by giving a voice to those varying perspectives. It has been argued that Emecheta's work also gives a voice to the experiences of Nigerian women in challenging situations, many of whom deal with the struggles of class, gender and modernity (Chand 2005:49). Through several minor-narratives in Emecheta's work, she subsequently contributes an important and alternative perspective to the canon of African literature (Sougou 2002:1). Emecheta and her literary body of work has been described by

Susan Z Andrade as “...pathbreaking...” because it has—similar to Emecheta’s predecessor, Flora Nwapa—carved out the space into which new female authors, such as Sefi Atta, have stepped into (Andrade 2011a:93). Sefi Atta has herself received critical acclaim for her novels and short stories, with her experience in theatre also being credited as “...enlivening her works” (Akung 2012:118). Her novels focus on the experience of women both in Nigeria and those in the diaspora, in many ways building on the work of Buchi Emecheta but with a focus on stories that are relevant to contemporary readers. Atta’s work is often didactic in style and she has herself admitted that she endeavours to create rounded characters that encourage “self-discovery” in her novels, rather than allow the themes of the novel to “overshadow” the narratives and characters (Atta & Collins 2007:130-131).

As well as focusing on the experiences of female protagonists in their novels, both Emecheta and Atta have also explored the narratives surrounding ‘been-to’ characters: their integration back into Nigerian society and its subsequent effect on motherhood and family life in general. This can be seen in Sefi Atta’s novels in characters such as Deola from *A Bit of Difference* (first published in 2012) and Enitan from *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). It can also be seen in Emecheta’s novels in characters such as Kehinde from the self-titled novel *Kehinde* (1994) and Adah from *Second-Class Citizen* (first published in 1974). Whilst both authors explore these types of characters, it is more common to find that Atta’s female protagonists make a permanent return to Nigeria, while Emecheta’s almost always do not. Arguably this is because through her writing Emecheta “...seeks resolution and accommodation between languages, cultures, and identities...” (Cooper 2007:146), so her characters often appear as hybrids of their cultural surroundings, both old and new. These aspects of the author’s styles and more will be discussed in further detail throughout the course of my analysis in this chapter. Before examining the chosen novels of both authors, I feel it is important provide some historical context to the way in which female characters have been portrayed, both positively and negative by both male and female Nigerian authors.

Perspectives on the Construction of Female Characters in Nigerian Novels

Across Africa, some of the most influential female authors such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head and Miriama Bâ began to include in their narratives, portrayals of their societies, told through the lens of a female perspective. These authors have led the way for more contemporary female authors around the world such as Toni Morrison, Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Chibundu Onuzo and Chinelo Okparanta, to name a few¹³. Given the diversity in culture, experience and socio-economic circumstances, their stories have endeavoured to present varying depictions of what life can be like for women across multiple African societies. Prior to the publication of Nwapa's novel *Efuru* (first published in 1966) Nigerian novels written by male authors featured female characters that many argued were often denied a voice and credited with little or no influence over the family, the community and consequently the national space as a whole (Banyiwa-Horne 1986; Boyce-Davies 1986a; Ward 1990; Newall 1996; Ladele 2010). Examples of such novels can be traced as far back as Chinua Achebe's critically acclaimed novel *Things Fall Apart* (first published in 1958). Achebe's novel has received both positive and negative criticism over the years, with Achebe himself admittedly being unsure of the reception of the novel when writing it (Achebe 2013:53). The portrayal of women and their role in society in the novel has arguably been a focal point of some of those debates.

Okonkwo, the novel's protagonist, acts as both the hero and the villain in the narrative. He is a champion wrestler and the pride of his father's village, but this also brings about Okonkwo's downfall through his blinded pursuit of masculinity, resulting in his forced exile from his father's village and his eventual demise when he commits suicide. One of the key criticisms of Achebe's novel is not only the relative absence of Okonkwo's

¹³ This is not an exhausted list of female authors and also does not intend to dispel the influence that many male authors (such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka) have also had on these female authors and others.

mother, but also the limited engagement that the reader could have with the character's wives (Smith 1986; Jeyifo 1993). Further critiques focus on the overall absence and silencing of female characters in the novel:

“His first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) therefore is a redemptive story of the typical African patriarchal society as exemplified by the Igbo. Achebe's first novels clearly valorised manhood and the women characters were tucked away in cultural effrontery in the side and back domains of history” (Chukwuma 2014:128)

Furthermore, Boyce-Davies argues that as a writer, Achebe, similar to his other male counterparts was “...locked into some specific representations of the political issues of decolonization, in which African women were represented in a less than favourable light and for sure, in which African masculinity was posed as the response to European colonial dominance” (Boyce-Davies 2014:119).

In response to these critiques, Jeyifo argues that silence proves to be an important critical tool in Achebe's novel, seeking to demonstrate the absence of the female perspective in the narrative rather than an intentional decision to deny them a voice; an example of which would be Okonkwo's mother, who is discussed only once in the whole novel (Jeyifo 1993:847). Okonkwo's father on the other hand is described in great detail, but arguably what Achebe presents to the reader through this is a critical assessment of the power of “masculine traditions” in the community (Osei-Nyame 1999:150). Whilst Okonkwo's mother is not given a written presence in the novel, Okonkwo's wives (whilst relatively silent) are written into the narrative in some form. At one point in the novel Okonkwo refuses to enter the dark forest in order to chase after his daughter, however his wife Ekwefi does not hesitate to do so and chases after her daughter, regardless of the risks. Osei-Nyame further argues that Ekwefi's actions in the novel present the reader with an example of feminine authority, because through her defiance of her husband, her actions “...constitutes an important statement on her challenge of Umuofia's sacrosanct masculine traditions” (Ibid.158).

Jeyifo goes on further to argue that the significance of this maternal absence and details about Okonkwo's mother results in a “...particular

brand of misogyny and neurotic masculinist personality...” (Jeyifo 1993:848). However, Harrow argues that, “what Achebe resists in *Things Fall Apart* is the romanticizing of the African past. Even though he constructs a male-centered gaze...he is critical of all that is human in that past society of the Igbos” (Harrow 1998:177). A reading of Achebe’s novel in this way could suggest that silence has in fact been used as a tool to criticise the way in which Igbo society once perceived women and their role in the community. Harrow goes on further to argue that:

“In fact, Achebe problematizes the patriarchal order repeatedly in the novel, ultimately blaming the fall of Umuofia on its masculinist rigidity, the failures of its governing bodies to adapt to new circumstances, and on a male-dominated authority that overreacted in its rejection of female qualities” (Harrow 1998:177)

Through the readings and critiques of both Harrow and Osei-Nyame it can be argued then that Achebe does not attempt to portray a perfect or wholesome construction of this historical Igbo society. They also argue that Achebe’s novel offers a critical discourse on masculinity and feminism in African literature and an alternative perspective on the work of male authors, which charges literary critics to re-interpret those male-authored novels.

If we were to look again at Osei-Nyame’s analysis of the text, it could be further argued that Achebe’s novel suggests that female authority and motherhood play a vital role in the community and consequently the national space. This is because the women in Achebe’s novels, whilst mostly voiceless, carry with them a sense of stability and permanence in the community that male characters do not. Chukwuma argues that “Womanhood suffered trauma and fear in the early novels of Achebe (*Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*) and the society fell apart because the matrix could not hold” (Chukwuma 2014:129). However, it has been argued that in his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (first published in 1987) Achebe tried to “rectify” the way in which he constructed his female characters (Ibid.129). This is further supported by Flora Nwapa, who argues: “The heroine, Beatrice Nwanyibuife, is a liberated and powerful woman, leading one to surmise that she symbolizes perhaps a sudden

awakening to the importance of woman-being” (Nwapa 2007:528) in the works of Nigerian male authors. Finally, Boyce-Davies argues that in the *Things Fall Apart* “...Achebe is suggesting that for survival and transcendence and safe passage into the future one must learn to unite both male and female qualities, to fully respect both male and female and combine them into an ideal existence. If this is resisted then self-destruction follows” (Boyce-Davies 1986b:246).

Achebe is not the only male author that has been accused of presenting a distorted image of the value of Nigerian women through the representation of their female characters. It has been argued that other male authors in Nigeria, such as Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi and Wole Soyinka (to name a few) have also constructed voiceless and powerless women in their work (Newell 1996; Stratton 1990; Nwapa 2007). Newell has argued that this can be attributed to Nigerian men’s own colonial and postcolonial “...sense of social and economic powerlessness [which] is often displaced on to fictional women” (Newell 1996:182). Consequently, where silence in these novels is sometimes seen by female authors as a key part of the misrepresentation of women in Nigerian societies, those same female authors also acknowledge that there are social and power restrictions placed on African males by colonialism and its legacy (Arndt 2000; Ogunyemi 1996). In Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (first published in 1979) the colonial oppression of both the male and female characters in the novel is framed in the form of Nnu Ego (the protagonist) and Nnaife’s (her husband) difficulties in securing a stable income. Robolin suggests that the novel is:

“...engaged in a (fictionalized) theoretical enterprise in its own right, one which posits a specific nexus of political, cultural, economic, sexual, and religious forces that constitute a colonial society and elucidates how such forces bear upon the individuals within it” (Robolin 2004:77)

Robolin’s argument here rightly acknowledges the likelihood that these characters, both male and female, were at the mercy of the British colonials that lived, worked and served in either the civil service or the

armed forces in Nigeria during that period of time. Emecheta demonstrates this in her novels by creating images of how city life and colonial influence robs male characters of their sense of masculinity within their own society/community. Nnu Ego and her husband Nnaife are seen to be at odds with these societal heteronormative ideals of what is expected of a man in Nigeria at that time: ‘...if things had worked out the way they should have done, I wouldn’t have left the house of Amatokwu to come and live with a man who washes women’s underwear. A man indeed!’ (Emecheta 2008:50). In this instance, Nnaife’s sense of masculinity is being challenged by two female forces around him; namely, his female employer and his wife. This causes him to feel humiliated with little power to change his situation. Comparing the idea that the farming of certain vegetables and crops was seen as being a masculine job to have with that of colonial domestic staff, Nnaife’s job in the city emasculates him despite his acceptance that there is an element of degradation that can come with city life during colonial rule. As a result of Nnaife being unable to take out his frustrations with this feeling on his employer, his wife Nnu Ego bears the brunt of her husband’s frustrations. Consequently, through Nnu Ego and Nnaife’s relationship, the novel demonstrates how both men and women were exposed to oppression and silenced under colonial rule, with women in Nigerian society enduring somewhat of a multi-impact oppression from both men and the British colonisers. Unfortunately, there are few to no examples demonstrating occasions when male authors in Nigeria have acknowledged the oppressive experience of both women and men under colonial rule. There is also little research or supporting evidence that demonstrates where male authors have at least attempted this, which demonstrates a clear knowledge gap in the field of Nigerian literary studies.

The Image of The Good-Time Girls and The Prostitutes

In Nigerian novels, male and female authors have often presented readers with polarised images of female characters living in the city. Male authors have tended to focus on themes of virtuous women being corrupted by city life, who consequently begin to ignore the relevant traditional expectations that are commonly associated with village life. Female authors, on the other hand, have tended to focus on how both men and women find a way to survive city life, with female characters in these novels often affording more empathy to the plight of their male counterparts than they receive themselves. Griswold posits that these types of novels could fall into one of two categories: “The City novel” (Griswold 2000:159) or “The Women-and-Men novel” (Ibid.173). Male authored novels of this kind tend to include female characters who are depicted as the typical ‘good-time girl’. Newell has described the ‘good-time girls’ thus:

“Sexually deceitful and financially cunning, women continue to be portrayed in local publications in the process of disguising their intentions beneath beautiful exteriors: the ambiguous, dangerous ‘lip-painted ladies’ of market literature have become fixed, in contemporary literature, as stereotypical ‘good-time girls’” (Newell 1996:181-182)

These hyper-sexualised images of women with malintent to use their feminine powers to seduce men is not only reserved for the literary space. The 1997 Nollywood film *Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute* by director Zeb Ejiro also presents an image of the so called ‘good-time girls’. Okome describes the narrative in the film as offering “...stunning intellectual depictions of the sociology of Domitilla’s life on and outside the streets of Lagos. Tightly written and narratively coherent, the story privileges this sociology, eloquently citing reasons why Domitilla enters the sex trade” (Okome 2012:170). The film presents the dangers of the consumer centred desires for material gains of modern city life in Lagos; something that Domitilla falls prey to, resulting in her “...selling her body...” to achieve her goal of making money (Ibid.171). What the film doesn’t address—as

with many city novels authored by men—is the “...men who patronize these women...” (Ibid.183) ultimately presenting a somewhat hollow stereotype of women.

Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (first published in 1961) is a prime example of these types of novel. The novel, named after the protagonist, deals with several themes in the narrative, but arguably the main thematic focus in the novel is on the modern promiscuous lifestyle of Jagua Nana. Ekwensi portrays Jagua Nana and other women in his novels as 'good-time girls', meaning that she is seen first and foremost as a sexual being: 'a dress succeeded if it made men's eyes ogle hungrily in this modern super sex-market' (Ekwensi 1961:13). *Jagua Nana* is a perfect example of Newell's description of the 'good-time girls' as Ekwensi uses words with prey like connotations to them: '...perhaps he was some youngster whom she could bewitch and sap, draining the pennies out of his purse. Certainly his new car suggested a possible victim' (Ibid.51). When the reader is introduced to Jagua Nana, she is living what one could call a promiscuous lifestyle, as she relies on the financial assistance of the men she meets in order to pay her bills and the luxuries that she desires: 'This was her bread and butter, she told herself. The Syrian's money would buy her that new dress from Kingsway. She had already pictured herself in it. She loved Freddie well, but his whole salary could not buy that dress' (Ibid.15). Here, Ekwensi portrays Jagua Nana as being motivated by materialism, short-term gains and desiring dresses rather than focusing on assuring herself long-term financial security in the city.

A further example of Jagua Nana's materialistic focus appears some pages later when she is once again presented with the option of soliciting herself or staying faithful to Freddie, who she admittedly loves: '...she must go with those men. That was the law of her survival. After all, Freddie was only a teacher in the National College. His salary was not sufficient to buy her one good cocktail dress. He had no money and he knew it' (Ibid.60). In this example Ekwensi uses the word 'survival', however, this framing of Jagua Nana's motivations contradicts the statement that follows, as her survival in the city is not dependent on

luxury clothing. Consequently, Ekwensi undermines Jagua Nana's character as a woman by continually presenting her intentions as superficial, ultimately presenting her as a hollow representation of Nigerian women in the city.

Jagua Nana is not the only novel that Cyprian Ekwensi has written which includes a hyper-sexualised female character that has fallen prey to the ills of city life. In *People of the City* (first published in 1954) Aina, one of the main female characters, is described in similar terms to that of Jagua Nana. Ekwensi's descriptions of Aina often focus on her body, presenting her in the opening pages as first and foremost a sexualised being: 'Her firm bosom heaved against the clinging blouse' (Ekwensi 2004:6). Here again, the reader is presented with women as the point of sexual desire and men as the victims of their mystical feminine charm. Throughout Ekwensi's novels, male characters bodies are not described with any leaning toward a sexualised image, thus presenting the reader with a clear framing of the romantic rules of engagement between Ekwensi's male and female characters: 'To him the past was dead. A man made a promise to a girl yesterday because he was selfish and wanted her *yesterday*. Today was a new day' (Ibid.5). Whilst Aina is not portrayed as being a prostitute like Jagua Nana, she is still referred to as '...a street walker' (Ibid.10), consequently categorising her as a source of danger for men to wary of: 'The girl...didn't I warn you about city women? They're no good. They dress fine, fine, you don't know a thief from an honest one' (Ibid.12). Similarly to Jagua Nana, the term 'witch' is associated to Aina as Sango contemplates the '...confident grip of her power over him' (Ibid.13). Arguably, Ekwensi's novels offer some of the best examples of how females become sexualised as a primary image. Stratton suggests that the "...exploitation of female sexuality, which, in its replication of men's exploitation of women's bodies in phallogentric cultures, reinforces and justifies that exploitation" (Stratton 1990:124). Thus, the shallow sexualised motivations of Ekwensi's female characters appear to be so presented through such a masculine lens, that there would be a questionable reception by female readers as to the believability of such women.

Comparatively, female authors tend to focus on the hardships that women experience living in the city in relation to their family life, the community and more importantly motherhood. In instances where female authors have created characters who sell their bodies at some point in the narrative, their motivations are varied and often, materialism is never their primary focus. Returning to Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* there are clear examples of these experiences with characters such as Nnu Ego and Adaku: beginning with Nnu Ego. Nnu Ego's primary concern is her children and adhering to her cultural traditions, which eventually become somewhat of an invisible prison for her. She finds city life incredibly difficult and throughout the narrative is often living on very few resources to feed both herself and her children. It is only when Nnu Ego returns to Ibuza that she notices that it is easier to raise her children when her family and community are close by than it is, living alone in the city. The structures of the community in many village settings works so that it is the community that raises the child, not just the biological parents. In the city, more specifically in this case Lagos, this is not the case because there is definitely an individualistic mentality that is required in order to survive city life. In this way, cultures across Nigeria have been forced to reimagine some of those traditional structures of the community, further delimiting the urban from the rural experience. Ekwensi does not appear to acknowledge in his novels that this affects women as well as men and as a result, his female characters are depicted as being lost or wayward sexual beings, rather than trying to survive a similar hustle to that of their male counterparts.

In opposition to Nnu Ego in Emecheta's novel is Adaku, who arrives with her daughters to Nnu Ego and Nnaife's house as an inherited wife after the death of Nnaife's brother. It is clear that Adaku did not necessarily want to move to Lagos, however, as a character she shows the resilience that is needed to survive city life. She soon falls pregnant with Nnaife's child—a male child—but unfortunately, the child does not survive. Throughout the novel, Emecheta places Nnu Ego and Adaku in opposition to one another, presenting the benefits and perils of motherhood, framed

through societies patriarchal lens: ‘Adaku had nothing to lose except her girl child, but she, Nnu Ego, had everything to lose’ (Emecheta 2008:148). After a long period of struggling to settle in as a second wife with Nnaife and Nnu Ego, Adaku decides to leave their home and support herself. As Adaku does not have any male children to Nnaife, she is not held in the same high esteem as Nnu Ego, who had several sons for her husband. Adaku explicitly states that she will survive life alone in the city as a prostitute (Ibid.188). Robolin argues that “Adaku's rejection of Nnu Ego's adopted social code reflects her debunking of patriarchal norms, which Nnu Ego seems content to protect in return for a nominal degree of power” which is determined by the fact that she born sons for Nnaife and Adaku has not (Robolin 2004:87). Whilst Ekwensi presents his female character’s motivations for being prostitutes as being materialistic, Emecheta presents Adaku’s as being a pragmatic sacrifice for the future of her daughters:

‘You mean you won’t have to depend on men friends to do anything for you?’
‘No,’ she replied. ‘I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters, though I shall not do so without male companionship.’ She laughed again. ‘They do have their uses’ (Emecheta 2008:190-191)

What is exemplified above is the reclamation of Adaku’s body, suggesting that she will take advantage of societies tendency to view women’s bodies as sexual objects as a way to achieve her financial goals for her daughter’s futures. Here, the difference between Ekwensi’s representation and Emecheta’s is clear. Ekwensi’s characters operate on short-term materialistic goals, however, Emecheta presents Adaku and her children as being representative of a future for women. One where daughters’ education is prioritised just as highly as it is for sons. In this way, the character of the prostitute has a pragmatic reason for choosing this line of work and an end goal that will allow her to retire from this life one day.

A further example of the female representation of the ‘good time girl’ is in Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) in the form of the character, Sheri. Whilst she does not live the same kind of life as the protagonist Enitan, her character represents another type of strong woman

in Nigerian society. After being raped as a teenager, Sheri disappears from Enitan's but they find their way back together as adults, at which point Enitan discovers that Sheri has become '...part of the sugar daddy circuit in Lagos, hanging around senators, and going on shopping sprees abroad. She was given all the titles that came with that' (Atta 2005:76). As a sugary girl, Sheri is not presented in the novel as a prostitute because she is only involved with one man, who maintains a certain lifestyle for her as an extra-marital relationship:

'It was an apartment block not far from my father's house, and I knew she couldn't afford to live there without a sponsor. But Sheri was sugary, as we said in Lagos; she had a man, an older man, a man as old as my father even, and he would pay her rent' (Atta 2005:97)

However, regardless of the lifestyle that Sheri leads, Atta does not present her as a woman of ill morals and this is first exemplified in the imagery Enitan uses to describe being reunited with her childhood friend: 'Sheri Bakare,' I said. It was like finding a pressed flower I'd long forgotten about' (Atta 2005:95). Furthermore, the admiration that Enitan has for Sheri is important as it presents a counter narrative to the contentious relationship of Nnu Ego and Adaku: 'She moved with the rhythm of big women I admired; like a steady boat on choppy water' (Ibid.96). Instead it presents an image of respect and unity amongst women for their decision to live their own lives as mothers or as independent women. In this respect, Sheri's character becomes a representation of those women in Nigerian society who manage their relationship with men with a measure of dependence and independence that appears to suit both parties.

It is unclear as to whether or not Ekwensi's novels serve a similar purpose to that of Achebe's novels in the suggestion that through their depiction of the troubling elements of Nigerian society, they critique the ills of modernity, rather than as a male centred portrayal of city life. What is clear is that Ekwensi's portrayals of women in his novels appear to be sexualised hyperboles in comparison to their male counterparts. Consequently, Ekwensi's work becomes vulnerable to criticism by female authors and critics alike, of what can be argued to be clear

misrepresentations of women in Nigerian society. However, it would be problematic to say that male authors perspectives on Nigerian societies are not valid simply because they present an image of women and men that female readers who consume their work may contest or struggle to relate to. Their perspectives are just as valid as any female author and it can be argued adds to the gender development in Nigerian society because it presents an insight into the male centred gaze of women. However, there is of course a need for an alternative voice on these stories and this is where the female authors have come out in force.

Although Sefi Atta has said on a number of occasions that she intentionally writes about women, even Atta has herself admitted: “maybe the masculine narrative voice is just another way of looking at the same story, trying to understand the other side. What it must be like to have that power to objectify women or whatever” (Atta & Collins 2007:125). In an article published in the *New African Woman* magazine titled *The Defiance of the New African Woman Writer* Tambajang suggests that “contemporary African women writers are preoccupied with deconstructing the notion of what it means to be an African woman” (Tambajang 2014:84). Such notions have also been discussed during a roundtable discussion that took place between Sefi Atta, Chika Unigwe and Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe states that, “...if there is a tendency in...women writers...to write women out of patriarchy, it is because in many Nigerian cultures, it is only in the written word, in literature that women find liberation” (Azuah, Atta & Unigwe 2008:111). The significance of these statements is that they support the idea that literature is a space where identities and new realities can be created and hopefully become influential to the reader consuming them, whether female or male. It supports the reasoning as to why male authors used literature and various other art forms as a way to decolonise the image of African nations and their peoples (wa Thiong’o 2006). It stands to reason therefore that the novel would continue to be a tool through which female authors could challenge the image of female and male characters in novels, even those of their female predecessors and put forward their case as to why they believe women play such a vital role in the process of nation building (Azuah, Atta & Unigwe 2008:111).

Motherhood: Female Bondage or A Source of National Resistance

The role of the mother and the experience of motherhood is an important aspect of Nigerian society and has been present in the Nigerian Novel in English since the first novel was published. Boyce-Davies has argued that a:

“...preoccupation with motherhood is evident in almost all modern African fiction. At some point, almost every novel dramatizes a woman’s struggle to conceive: her fear of being replaced, the consequent happiness at conception and delivery or agony at the denial of motherhood, various attempts to appease the Gods and hasten pregnancy, followed by the joys and/or pains of motherhood” (Boyce-Davies 1986b:243)

The presentation of which, has differed depending on whether the author is male or female. An example of which would be the way female authors acknowledge through their characters the important role that women, whether they are the biological mothers of children or not, play in developing and educating the community as a whole: “it is true that if one educates a woman, one educates a community, whereas if one educates a man, one educates a man” (Emecheta 2007:553). Emecheta’s assertion here derives from her experience growing up in an Igbo community where she came to understand at a very early age the significance that the women around her had on her life. Women—both biological mothers and those from the wider community—are commonly portrayed as having more day-to-day contact with the children around them than their husbands or relative male counterparts. Much of this is due to the way in which mothers and motherhood is perceived in many African societies, which is subsequently reflected as such in the national literary canon.

Uko argues that “maternity is viewed as sacred in the traditions of all African societies. In all of them, the earth’s fertility is traditionally linked to women’s maternal powers” (Uko 2017:57). This association of fertility to power becomes a recurring theme in the portrayal of women in Nigerian novels. Consequently, mothers are held in higher esteem in society than those women without children (Ibid.57). The fear of childlessness or rather

being labelled as “barren¹⁴” is placed in opposition to the image of motherhood in Nigerian novels, as the undesirable fate for any woman. Ogunyemi suggest that:

“While motherhood is currently a mixed blessing for [a] Nigerian woman, the childless but powerful woman or the woman without a man remains an anomaly, an enigma, fearfully witchlike. Childlessness is considered tragic, providing an irresistible attraction to writers” (Ogunyemi 1996:31)

As previously discussed, characters such as Jagua Nana, Aina, Adaku and Sheri present the image of the ‘other’ woman; the non-mother. As these characters do not conform to the norms of society, they are unable to be placed—at least not for long—near the family setting. Ogundipe-Leslie states that “the sophisticated woman is shown as completely divorced from life in the country or from relatives and friends who are not living in her city or sharing her night life. Very often she is a prostitute, an early and recurrent figure in African literature...” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:59). In fact, it is only the character of the mother that is given a significant amount of the literary spotlight and “all other women, pale in comparison, are pitied or are even treated contemptuously” (Boyce-Davies 1986b:244). Consequently, in many of these early Nigerian novels, only mothers could become representative of the future of the nation, as childless women were denied any credit or contribution to the national space.

Whilst the portrayal of the childless woman in Nigerian novels can be somewhat limiting, it has been argued that the image of the mother can be equally as restrictive. As a result of the reproduction of the mother figure as the centralised point of national rebirth, the mother figure becomes the continual sacrificial lamb for the nation as a whole (Uko 2017; Boyce-Davies 1986b; Minh-ha 1997; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Ogunyemi 1996). Motherhood, whilst often portrayed as “...a glorious

¹⁴ “barren” is a colloquial term used in Nigeria to describe a woman who is unable to conceive a child or have a successful pregnancy. It is often considered to be associated with some form of divine intervention, but even with a more scientific diagnosis for the condition, it is culturally an undesirable fate to befall a woman.

gift...” (Adichie 2017:9) has also been described as “...just one of the routes to woman’s potential enslavement” (Boyce-Davies 1986b:254). This idea of “enslavement” is very much linked to the way in which motherhood is perceived in Nigerian society, consequently keeping many women in culturally constructed prisons. In response to this, some of the first novels written by Nigerian female authors engaged with these concepts of how the “...“mummy,” always somebody’s mother, even as she is mummified” (Ogunyemi 1996:9). Their aim was to portray something closer to the realities of motherhood by presenting the reader with “...both its joys and pains...” (Boyce-Davies 1986b:244). However, whilst this restrictive image of the mother in Nigerian novels has been predominantly portrayed by male authors, Adichie argues that “sometimes mothers, so conditioned to be all and do all, are complicit in diminishing the role of fathers” (Adichie 2017:13). In this way, what is needed in the Nigerian novel is not only a reimagined portrayal of the mother figure, but also that of the father figure. What is clear in the works of female authors is the more nuanced portrayal of women. Their position in society, past, present and future, whilst taking into consideration the continued conflicting portrayals of the “...(idealized/objectified, central/marginal, powerful/powerless, passive/active, victim/agent)” (Nnaemeka 1997:8).

In both Sefi Atta and Buchi Emecheta’s novels there are key examples portraying varying experiences of motherhood, including the relationships that those characters have with their children and those around them. The following section will examine several characters from a selection of novels written by both Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta. Taking into consideration both the positive and negative critiques of motherhood just discussed, the analysis will look to examine: the function of the mother figure in building the community; the desire that many female characters have to experience motherhood and how this is portrayed in the novels as being important to the process of national development. It will also look to understand if these characters are intended to encourage self-discovery through the reception of these novels.

Buchi Emecheta

Postcolonial Resistance in Emecheta's Second-Class Citizen

In several of Buchi Emecheta's novels, despite their different social circumstances and experiences, many of the women share similar character traits. The most common similarities are: (1) the protagonists have children; (2) they all have a job or some form of personal income; (3) at some point in the narrative they experience a period of temporary or permanent separation from their husbands. Emecheta's novels have produced some of the most important critical assessments on the image of marriage, family life and most importantly, motherhood, in Nigeria. Whilst she never excludes the cultural influences of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria—imbuing her work, predominantly, with both Igbo and Yoruba cultural references as a result of her own upbringing—she almost always creates characters that accept and negotiate life through the dual identities of their ethnicity and nationality. In this regard, her depiction of motherhood and the associated experiences of womanhood endeavour to become inclusive and focus more on the female experience rather than any single ethnic or cultural one. Elements of Emecheta's own experiences as a mother and as a wife find their way into many if not all of her narratives. Examples of which can be found in, *In The Ditch* (first published in 1972) and *Second-Class Citizen*, two bodies of work that could be labelled Emecheta's confessional novels, as it has been suggested that both novels are loosely based around Emecheta's own life experiences (Ogunyemi 1996; Emecheta 1994c). With this in mind it is important to approach a reading of Emecheta's framings of motherhood in these novels with caution, whilst still accepting that these are valid contributions to the Nigerian literary canon.

Emecheta commonly portrays women in her novels as pillars of strength, especially during periods of hardship (physical, circumstantial and emotional). Adah from *Second-Class Citizen* is a clear example of

this. The reader is presented with this idea very early on in the novel when, even as a young girl, Adah is portrayed as someone who knows that she needs to carve out a space for her own success because, as a female, she is aware that no one else around her is going to do it for her. In this respect Adah's character can be read as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal norms both in Nigeria and in the diaspora. Adah's strength is a trait that is evident on several occasions throughout the novel; a characteristic that eventually helps her to leave her abusive husband, Francis, leaving her to effectively raise her children as a single parent. As a black woman living in the United Kingdom during an era when some countries were still under British colonial rule, Adah's decision to live as a single parent family is a clear example of the strength of her character. The journey of motherhood for Adah begins quite early on in her life and in this particular novel is introduced as a small detail that takes place in the process of Adah gaining her independence from her family in Nigeria. This is arguably one of the rare occasions in Emecheta's novels when there is little to no descriptive build up in the text of the birth of a child. It is quite common to find Emecheta placing a greater emphasis on the journey towards motherhood as being inclusive of the actual experience itself.

What is most significant about Emecheta's framing of motherhood is that she was one of the first Nigerian female authors to portray the experience in the context of the diaspora experience. In *Second-Class Citizen*, it is only when Adah and her children emigrate to Britain that the reader is able to witness what the experience of motherhood could be like whilst in a foreign space. Almost immediately the author presents the reader with one of the first challenges to motherhood that an African expatriate living in Britain during that period would have been faced with; namely, the prospect of having to put her children into foster care:

'They would have to be fostered. Most Nigerians with children sent their children away to foster-parents. No sane couple would dream of keeping their children with them. So rampant was the idea of foster-parents that African housewives in England came to regard the foster-mother as the mother of their children' (Emecheta 1994b:44)

For a character with the kind of psychological strength that Adah is depicted to have, this is a problematic situation for her to be in. The suggestion that some of the 'African housewives' began to see the foster mother as the real mother of their children places not only the mother in an emotionally difficult situation, but also puts the development of the ethno-national and state nationality in jeopardy. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe document similar experiences for Afro-Caribbean women in the United Kingdom but suggest that there were occasions when other black women who did not need to work "...were able to take in children..." (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 2018:29). If we accept the assertion that the mother has an influential role in passing on knowledge to their children—language, culture and history—then allowing a woman from another country and culture to take on that role becomes problematic, but also has "...traumatic effects on the children themselves" (Ibid. 29). The fact that those foster mothers were also likely to be white British, adds a further layer of complication to the situation, because the power of knowledge production is once again placed in the hands of Eurocentric agents¹⁵. Emecheta's treatment of this subject in *Second-Class Citizen*, presents the idea of raising your own children as being associated with privilege, not a right: 'only first-class citizens lived with their children, not the blacks' (Emecheta 1994b:46) and 'everybody expected Adah to do the same' (Ibid.45). However, Adah, does not comply with this expectation. This action in the novel can also be read as symbolic of resistance and in this instance, Adah's resistance is against societal norms and the expectation of African ex-patriots in Britain. It could be argued that Adah's resistance is also against other African women who complied with this practice, bringing to the fore images of colonial mentalities that persists in African societies.

It would be problematic to arrive at the facile conclusion that African women who complied with this practice of fostering their children, did so without resistance. Many of the women who acquiesced to this practice did

¹⁵ See Afua Hirsch's book, *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (2018) for a contemporary example of the effects of children of African descent being fostered by white families in the United Kingdom.

so because of the foreign space that they were occupying. Arriving in England would have been a culture shock for them, especially when they were faced with the cost of living associated with the average ex-pat lifestyle. It was, therefore, seen as a privilege only because the monetary costs associated with housing, feeding, schooling and caring for a child whilst also needing to work, were necessities that many Nigerian ex-patriots during that era could not immediately afford. Emecheta, however, challenges some of the other women's decision to comply to this practice:

'Most Nigerian wives would say that they had to send their children away because they lacked suitable accommodation for them, and there was a great deal of truth in this. But what they would not admit was that most of them were brought up in situations, far, far different from the ones in which they found themselves in England' (Emecheta 1994b:44)

In this example, whilst Emecheta empathises with all those women who fostered their children, she also challenges the perception that contesting such a practice was not perhaps as common place as it could have been. This again looks to reinforce the idea that motherhood plays a key role in the development of a nation and the reclamation of black women's bodies is an important aspect of that: be that in Nigeria or in the diaspora. As previously discussed, the responsibility of mothering a child is not solely left to the biological mother but in fact all the women in the community (Dove 1998; Ogunyemi 1996; Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 2018). Placing the experience of motherhood in this context demonstrates how the framing of motherhood for those living in the British diaspora is in stark contrast to that of what these women may have expected, adding a further layer of distance and cultural dislocation: 'Oh, yes, in England, looking after babies was in itself a full-time job. This was difficult for a Nigerian wife to cope with, especially when she realised that she could no longer count on the help the extended family usually gave in such situations' (Emecheta 1994b:45). Consequently, Emecheta's 'been-to' characters find themselves needing to adjust many of their customs and cultural norms in an effort to accommodate the boundaries of their host country with that of their own. The novel, therefore, frames the process of nation building in

the diaspora as problematic, especially in relation to the experience of motherhood. The emphasis is then placed on the importance of the community in raising a child.

In the latter part of the novel Adah reflects on her children's future in relation to the systemic perception in British society that people of African descent were inferior beings and how she can aid them in confronting this. The novel then concludes with a final display of strength and resistance from Adah, derived from a sense of responsibility and motherhood. Upon hearing her husband Francis tell the magistrates court that he would rather his children were put up for adoption than he himself be forced to financially contribute to their upbringing, Adah defies the courts belief that she is unable to raise them alone:

‘Something happened to Adah then. It was like a big hope and a kind of energy charging into her, giving her so much strength even though she was physically ill with her fifth child. Then she said very loud and very clear, ‘Don’t worry, sir. The children are mine, and that is enough. I shall never let them down as long as I am alive’ (Emecheta 1994b:185)

This scene acts as a national allegory for Nigeria, with Francis and Adah representing polarised symbols of the instability and stability of the newly independent country. Adah's decision to stand by her children no matter the consequences acts as a symbol of security for the Nigerian nation as a whole and all ethno-nationalist groups within the borders of Nigeria. It suggests that home and a place in which to return to as being primarily with the mother. Through Adah's experience Emecheta frames the power that mothers can wield over societal norms. This is because Adah's actions demonstrate a literal act of resistance, as well as demonstrating the control and influence that Adah then exerts over the shaping of her children's identities and futures: ‘she was different. Her children were going to be different. They were all going to be black, they were going to enjoy being black, be proud of being black, a black of a different breed’ (Emecheta 1994b:148). As a result, the novel then acts as an example of the strength and power of African women in the context of this fictional

British society. Adah's character in this respect demonstrates how important the role of mothers can be in the context of nation building and constructing alternative futures for societies globally.

The Burden of Being Barren in Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood

Whilst Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and *Kehinde* present an image of motherhood in the diaspora, *The Joys of Motherhood* portrays the experience of motherhood in the village and the city in Nigeria during the colonial period. It tells the tale of a young woman called Nnu Ego (previously discussed in this chapter), born in Ibuza, who in the initial stages of the narrative battles with the prospect of being barren and therefore unable to experience motherhood. *The Joys of Motherhood* does explore this idea of shame and tragedy associated with being unable to conceive, beginning the novel with a scene portraying Nnu Ego running through the streets of Lagos in immense distress:

'Her baby...her baby! Nnu Ego's arms involuntarily went to hold her aching breasts, more for assurance of her motherhood than to ease their weight. She felt the milk trickling out, wetting her buba blouse; and the other choking pain got heavier, nearing her throat, as if determined to squeeze the very life out of her there and then'
(Emecheta 2008:2)

From the beginning of the novel Emecheta sets the scene for how distressing it can be, to be denied the experience of motherhood for a woman in Nigeria. Robolin suggests that thus far in the novel Nnu Ego's "...arduous efforts to achieve motherhood, the very standard of success for women according to the customs of Nnu Ego's community, have yielded nothing but grievous loss, culminating in the death of her first (neonatal) son" (Robolin 2004:76). The image of her reaching for her chest to comfort an ideal or even some form of innate connection to her child is a powerful reminder of the importance of motherhood to many women (be that through perceived natural instincts or a nurtured expectation from society). Whilst this focuses on the experiences of African women, it is a

sentiment that transcends culture and ethnicity; an image that women globally could empathise with. As discussed, during the period in which Emecheta's novel is set, there was an element of shame associated with the experience of being a woman without a child. Even though Nnu Ego loses her child through no fault of her own, she still feels that sense of shame that accompanies such a loss: 'for how would she be able to face the world after what had happened?' (Emecheta 2008:2). This feeling that Nnu Ego has is also connected to the national space, because despite Emecheta's suggestion that a desire to experience motherhood is a natural process, there is also a significant influence that comes from Nigerian society through the expectation of motherhood as an achievement of womanhood (Ogunyemi 1996; Pandey 2004; Uko 2017; Boyce-Davies 1986b; Minh-ha 1997; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994).

Whilst this is how the novel starts, Nnu Ego's trouble begins before she arrives in Lagos. Her desire to be a wife and be a mother is made clear as soon as she is introduced to the reader and her character is given a voice. After marrying Amatokwu, a young man in her village, she believes that her life can now begin, but this however is not the case: 'Nnu Ego and her new husband Amatokwu were very happy; yet Nnu Ego was surprised that, as the months passed, she was failing everybody. There was no child' (Emecheta 2008:29). What is important to note in this example from the text is that Nnu Ego feels like she is a failure not just to herself, but also those around her and the community. This emphasises the responsibility not only of the female to reproduce and have children to carry on their father's legacy, but also brings us back to the significance of the role that the community has in raising a child and the part that mothers play in the process of nation building. The belief that the blame and responsibility should be placed solely on the female to bear children becomes problematic. If a woman is unable to conceive it is never taken into consideration that the fault could be with the infertility of the male, it has traditionally been blamed on the female: 'after a while, Nnu Ego could not voice her doubts and worries to her husband any more. It had become her problem and hers alone' (Ibid.30). In this story, however, the inability to become pregnant and the burden associated with that is connected to Nnu

Ego, because when her husband takes another wife, it is not long after they marry before she falls pregnant.

Regardless of the general perceptions of society, Nnu Ego's junior wife is very empathetic with her situation and does not deny her any opportunities to share in the duties of tending to the new child; allowing her to experience what it is she is yearning for:

'Nnu Ego locked her hut, lay beside the child and gave him her virgin breasts. She closed her eyes as contentment ran through her whole body. The baby's restlessness abated and he sucked hungrily, though there was no milk. For her part, she felt some of the fulfilment for which she yearned. Comforted, they both fell asleep' (Emecheta 2008:32)

Whilst Nnu Ego is unable to feed the baby with milk from her own breasts, what she is able to do is appease her yearning to carry out such acts of mothering towards a child; whether it is her own child or not. She locks herself in her hut primarily because she knows somehow that what she is doing could be seen as questionable by those in her community. The child does not belong to Nnu Ego and so she believes that she should not be forming such attachments to it. When her husband Amatokwu finds out what she has been doing he physically reprimands Nnu Ego and then returns her to her father Agbadi, who subsequently returns the bride price that was paid for her. Fortunately for her, Nnu Ego's father is more aggrieved about her ill treatment at the hands of her husband than he is with her for her inability to become pregnant. Through this sequence of events in the novel Emecheta frames the emotional effects of being "barren" in a fictitious community in Nigeria and criticises that same society through the unwarranted response from her husband and her father's subsequent acceptance of her return to his compound. This, similar to Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, looks to suggest to the reader that the changes in the national space are the responsibility of both women and men, mothers and fathers.

After some time living with her father and his wives, Nnu Ego is taken to meet her new husband Nnaife, who lives in Lagos. When Nnu

Ego arrives, she is less than pleased with the man that her father has chosen for her to marry but decides not to object, as she does not dare bring any further shame on her father's name. This acceptance of her situation and desire not to further embarrass her father can be read as an act that is a symptomatic response to the power dynamics of a patriarchal society (Robolin 2004:82). However, it is only after Nnu Ego finally becomes pregnant with a male child—the child that she loses when the novel begins—that she begins to prioritise motherhood over attraction and love for her new husband:

‘Nnu Ego smiled weakly. ‘I know what you mean. Girls are love babies. But, you see, only now with this son am I going to start loving this man. He has made me into a real woman – all I want to be, a woman and a mother. So why should I hate him now?’ (Emecheta 2008:55)

She is thankful to Nnaife for gifting her with what Amatokwu could not: a child. The belief that Nnu Ego can only be a “real woman” if she is the mother of a child, again presents an image of purpose, constructed in society with powerful masculine ideals for women: If not a mother, then never complete woman? (Robolin 2004:82). As previously discussed in *Atta's Everything Good Will Come*, many of these ideals are then in fact also perpetuated by feminine forces within those societies, often making the process of demarcating sources of oppression problematic. For Nnu Ego, the importance that she places on becoming a mother is key to her character's significance in the novel:

‘She accepted Nnaife as the father of her child, and the fact that this child was a son gave her a sense of fulfilment for the first time in her life. She was now sure, as she bathed her baby son and cooked for her husband, that her old age would be happy, that when she died there would be somebody left behind to refer to her as ‘mother’ (Emecheta 2008:57)

There is a lot of emphasis in Nigerian novels on the importance of preserving a male legacy through children. Here, however, Emecheta also addresses the desires of mothers to leave a legacy after their own death. Whilst their names may not be carried on, their influence will and this Emecheta argues is just as important as that of the fathers. Once again,

this places great importance on the theme of motherhood in Nigerian novels; it's power and use in literature to dismantle the restrictions on feminine power previously constructed in the canon.

Emecheta exploration of the yearnings and desires of some women to experience motherhood critiques the role of society and women themselves for perpetuating these restrictive gender roles in Nigerian society (Boyce-Davies 1986b; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Robolin 2004). As previously discussed, it is only by placing characters like Nnu Ego and Adaku alongside one another that the reader can witness the differences between; those women for whom motherhood is special but not their sole existence and; those who remain constrained by their adherence to societies definition of motherhood. Boyce-Davies suggests that in her body of work, "Emecheta has consistently dealt with those traditional attitudes to women, including those which the woman herself accepts, which trend to enslave her" (Boyce-Davies 1986b:254). Solely relying on the facile conclusion that it is maternal instincts or nature, omits to acknowledge the agency that both people and cultures play in creating the idea that a woman's primary purpose is to bear children and little more. In this respect, Emecheta's novel acts as a critical assessment of the endless cycle of societies demand's on women's bodies and their focus on child bearing and women's subsequent pursuit of this. The subject of motherhood in Nigerian novels is therefore once again very much connected to the future of the nation and the process of nation building. What is most significant in this is whether the mother chooses to bind future generations by the same social standards that she herself was imprisoned by, or does she nurture her children with an open hand, critical and introspective of her own experience for the sake of her children and her children's children.

Kehinde and the Absence of the Mother from the National Space

It is not uncommon to find in the narratives of early Nigerian novels families that experience a temporary period of separation from each other. The structure of such narratives would commonly involve the wife being left behind with the children while she waits for the time when her husband is ready for them all to follow him either to Europe, America or even returning to Nigeria. This is how the relationship begins for Adah in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Kehinde in *Kehinde*: other examples include Efuru in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Dora in *Women are Different* (1986). The significance of this separation is the way in which both husband and wife respond to their time apart. For example, for many female characters it is depicted as a period of newfound independence in married their life. Emecheta's novels, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Kehinde*, both focus on the challenges of motherhood in the diaspora, however, whilst the former novel explores a mother taking full ownership of her children's upbringing, the latter novel *Kehinde* explores the experience of mothering from a distance.

The novel begins in London in the living room of Kehinde and Albert who are husband and wife. Albert receives letters from his sisters in Nigeria, telling him that he should return home so that he may take advantage of opportunities on offer during the 80's oil boom years. This minor-narrative within the novel can be read as a suggestion of strengthening nationalism through the act of repatriation and return to Nigeria. Within the Nigerian literary canon, novels that include such narratives are clear examples of a national novel. The trope of return arises in the novel when Kehinde does not want to leave Britain but Albert does. There are several examples throughout the novel where the reader witnesses Kehinde make concessions to her husband; often to her own detriment. Eventually Albert manages to persuade Kehinde that it would be the best thing for the family to return to Nigeria, presenting the reader with Kehinde's first concession to Albert in the novel. Emecheta frames

Albert's desire to return to Nigeria as a desire to remove himself from a society that he believes allows women to assume positions of authority, traditionally occupied by men. This is exemplified when Albert is conversing with an Indian colleague at work, who wonders what Kehinde's response is to the idea of returning to Nigeria:

'Er...I haven't ever told her yet. But she will do what I say, after a lot of tantrums. Stupid country, where you need your wife's money to make ends meet.'

'I know what you mean. Women rule in this country,' Prahbu said in a long-suffering voice. 'And children are regarded as a luxury' (Emecheta 1994a:15)

Western feminists would contest the suggestion that 'women rule' in countries such as Britain. However, it shows how Albert's unhappiness with his life in London is derived from a feeling of emasculation; his wife earns more than him, she co-owns their family home, effectively presenting Albert with a looming threat of necessity in every aspect of their life. In this respect, Emecheta frames the challenges of purpose that both Kehinde and Albert experience as mother and father, wife and husband and as a woman and a man, both in the diaspora and in Nigeria.

Whilst Kehinde's first concession to Albert is associated with the power dynamics in their marriage, the second concession is more closely related to Kehinde's own experience of motherhood. Shortly after they decide to return to Nigeria, Kehinde falls pregnant with the couple's third child. It is here that the second concession arises in the form of a suggestion by Albert that Kehinde should have an abortion as another child would be an added expense that they could not afford whilst living in Britain. Despite making this request, Albert also tells Kehinde that when they return to Nigeria that she could have more children. Again, Kehinde concedes to Albert's request, adding a caveat this time to the agreement:

'what do you mean, have as many babies as I like? Have you forgotten that they are tying my tubes as well? I meant what I said last night. If I abort this child, I want my tubes tied...I don't want to go through this again, ever' (Emecheta 1994a:22)

This act by Kehinde is symbolic not only of resistance but also control. In denying herself any future opportunity to bear children, Kehinde takes ownership of her body and in so doing reclaims control from society and its masculine imbued expectations of motherhood. Kehinde's decision also exemplifies the way that women control the future of any society or nation through the process of birth and reproduction. This once again places women in a position of strength and importance in the overall process of nation building.

Throughout the narrative Kehinde seems to accumulate a series of losses, the consequences of which appear to solely be felt by her. For example, despite Kehinde already having two children, she finds that Albert's request for her to abort the child in her womb denies her not only the renewed experience of motherhood, but also the return of her father through her *chi*¹⁶: 'the child I just flushed away was my father's chi, visiting me again. But I refused to allow him to stay in my body. It was a man-child' (Emecheta 1994a:32). As a result, Kehinde experiences the loss of her child, but also reengages with the loss of her father and the refusal of his reincarnation through her unborn child. Both the refusal of her father's return and the act of aborting a child appear to accompanying a feeling of injustice for Kehinde. At this stage of the novel Emecheta portrays Kehinde as being strong enough to make a life for herself and her family, but not yet strong enough to defend herself against expectations of her as a female from her husband and those in the Nigerian diaspora. Through Emecheta's reference to Kehinde's father's *chi*, the author brings to the fore the importance of an Igbo persons relationship with their inner *chi* or personal god. In this instance Kehinde's connection to the child that she loses takes on a new layer of meaning when this child has a connection with her departed father. It demonstrates not only the importance of reincarnation in Igbo society (which the Yoruba people of Nigeria also believe in), but it also becomes symbolic of the cultural and historical legacy of a particular group of people continually being reborn through that

¹⁶ "In Igbo land each man was believed to have a personal god known as Chi that protected him in life and helped to complement his efforts" (Afigbo 2005:301).

reincarnation in the form of future generations (Dove 1998; Yuval-Davis 2007; Robolin 2004).

Whilst the permanent separation of the family unit is not necessarily a common narrative in Nigerian novels, it certainly is in the work of Buchi Emecheta. The author uses Albert and Kehinde's relationship to symbolise the wider community's perception of women and their role in society. Her decision to frame Kehinde's experience in this way questions the portrayal of the husband as being the completion of a woman. It raises further lines of inquiry within the novel about the journey of all the characters: Would Kehinde have felt the absence of Albert so much had she decided to go ahead with her third pregnancy? Would she have missed Albert had her children remained in London with her? Or if her friend Moriammo had not distanced herself from Kehinde on the instructions of her husband, would she have felt so isolated? Understanding the significance of these alternative outcomes in the novel could offer the reader an even more critical assessment of the role of women in Nigerian families, especially during these periods of separation.

Within the narrative, Mark Elikwu and Kehinde's response to her, becomes prophetic of Kehinde's fate in the novel. The reader is first introduced to Mary Elikwu, when Kehinde and Moriammo are sitting in a Wimpy diner whilst on their lunch break. Kehinde begins to talk about a woman 'a townswoman of ours' (Emecheta 1994a:11) who has left her husband as a result of domestic violence. Neither Kehinde nor Moriammo show any sympathy for her situation and are in fact more shocked that a woman would choose a life without her husband (Ibid.11). At every inclusion of Mary Elikwu in the novel it is clear that Emecheta suggest to the reader that Kehinde's words may come back to haunt her: 'O Moriammo, be serious. Alby no dey allow me to associate with such women. We no get anything in common!' (Ibid.12). This particular example becomes relevant to Kehinde when she is alone in London and Moriammo begins to distance herself from Kehinde on the instructions of her husband Tunde.

At Albert's leaving party, Mary Elikwu makes her first appearance in the novel and Kehinde unashamedly expresses her distaste for her: 'Mary Elikwu was surprised at Kehinde's reaction...she was learning very fast that a woman who left her marriage would always be marginalised, even by those she and her husband had regarded as close friends' (Emecheta 1994a:39). When Mary Elikwu calls Kehinde by her first name, Kehinde makes a point of wanting to be addressed by her married name: 'Mrs Okolo, if you please,' (Ibid.39). As far as Kehinde is concerned, being a married woman is an important achievement in a woman's life:

'Kehinde swept past Mary Elikwu into the kitchen, sucking her teeth as she went. The woman must be jealous, she told herself, feeling gratified at her own explanation. For all her qualifications, she, Kehinde, was worth more than a woman like Mary Elikwu who couldn't even keep her husband' (Emecheta 1994a:39)

Kehinde's response here can be read as being derived from insecurity and she, similarly to Nnu Ego, appears to find security in the safety of social acceptance, even at the price of her own freedom. In this way, Emecheta creates in a character like Kehinde, all the things that she does not respect about women. That said, her characters are always on a journey of enlightenment in some form or another and after becoming frustrated with Albert's change in attitude, Kehinde soon begins to be considered 'reluctantly...how Mary Elikwu coped on her own' (Emecheta 1994a:41).

Albert is the first to leave for Nigeria, followed shortly after by their two children whilst Kehinde is told by Albert that she should '...wait until he sent for her' (Emecheta 1994a:63). This statement from the novel brings to the fore a key point about roles and responsibilities in Nigerian society. Albert feels it is his duty to go ahead of the rest of the family and ensure that he can create a stable and prosperous environment for his family to join him in. Kehinde is expected to maintain the family and stability that has already been established in London. During the initial stages of this period in the novel, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that Kehinde is deliberately taking her time in selling the house, in order to delay the inevitable return to Nigeria. She does not want to be solely reliant on Albert financially because she believes 'it was too un-African. For an Igbo

woman, her capacity for work is her greatest asset' (Emecheta 1994a:52). It could be argued then that Kehinde's resistance to returning to Nigeria is the start of her exploring what Toivanen suggests is her "...feminine self-discovery and empowerment..." (Toivanen 2013:435).

Difficulties for Kehinde begin to arise in the novel when she begins to notice that '...without Albert, she was a half-person' (Emecheta 1994a:59). This revelation comes about from the changes that begin to take place in Kehinde's life whilst Albert is away. It is worth noting that in the context of Emecheta's *Kehinde*, the protagonist's income is in fact higher than her husbands, so she has no difficulty in supporting both herself and her husband during this period of separation. Through this, Emecheta suggests that Nigerian women's ability to be financially independent places them in a position of strength, reducing their dependency on men. However, one such change that Kehinde is unable to control comes in the form of her friend Moriammo, who begins to distance herself from Kehinde without an explanation as to why. Kehinde eventually comes to understand that this is largely due to the influence of Moriammo's husband, who does not think that it is right for his wife to be friends with someone who is essentially to him, an unmarried woman. It can be argued here that Emecheta's framing of Kehinde's experience of temporary separation also acts as a critique on the response of the wider Nigerian community in the diaspora to her situation. Moriammo's actions also serve as a symbolic example of those women in the Nigerian community who are trapped by conventional patriarchal ideals and do not challenge them the way many of Emecheta's female characters do.

The consequences of her friend's and Albert's departures are that Kehinde loses companionship on two fronts: both from her husband and her female friendships. It is in fact the absence of Moriammo that deals Kehinde the greatest blow during this period of separation, making the experience one of complete isolation. Emecheta's portrayal of the two women in the early chapters of the novel highlights the female bond and need for companionship, which is formed through "...the feminine exchange of gossip and advice..." (Andrade 2011b:60). Thus, Kehinde has assumed the position of Mary Elikwu and Moriammo, Kehinde's. Now

that Kehinde is the one being marginalised, she becomes somewhat introspective and critical of the social constructs that she at one stage sought refuge in. It is not until Kehinde returns to Nigeria to be with Albert and her family—thus ending that period of temporary separation—that she truly realises that it is the feminine relationships in her life that are just as, if not more, significant than the masculine relationships. This can be seen as an example to the women in Nigerian society of how their strength can be found in their solidarity; especially whilst all trying to negotiate their way through many patriarchal societal structures.

During Kehinde's time in Nigeria, she finds that her relationship with her older sister ends up being her only source of solace whilst trying to adjust to the new structures of her family. As her mother died in childbirth it is her older sister Ifeyinwa who acts as the mother figure in Kehinde's life and her return to her for guidance supports the image of the mother figure as one of stability and home in the Nigerian literary canon. As Kehinde's children attend a boarding school in Nigeria, she does not even have the comfort of focusing all her attention on them. Living with Albert and his new wife only exacerbates her feelings of isolation, because without her children there, she realises that it is in fact not Albert that makes her feel like a 'half-person', but her children and the important in women in her both in London and Nigeria. Kehinde grows resentful not only of the additional wife that Albert has taken, but also the fact that his request to abort their baby in London denies her the opportunity to have another child but not him. After having been away from her children for so long, she realises when she is reunited with them again that her position in the family has changed:

'Kehinde was both relieved that they had adjusted with apparently so little trauma, and confirmed in her opinion that there was no place for her in the family. The circle had closed in her absence, and she did not have the strength to fight her way back in'
(Emecheta 1994a:91)

Believing that her children no longer need her, Kehinde's sense of motherhood is somewhat displaced. It can be argued then that what

Emecheta suggests through Kehinde's reaction is that a certain aspect of motherhood is about being needed in the same way that it would be with fatherhood. In this case it is not that Kehinde's children no longer need a mother, but Albert's new wife is now tending to the functioning role of mothering Kehinde's children. Unable to reacclimatise to life in Nigeria, Kehinde decides that it would be better for all concerned if she returns to London.

Emecheta includes a chapter in the novel that is dedicated to a letter that Kehinde writes to her friend Moriammo. This letter acts as Kehinde's epiphany, where she systematically unpacks her life and how she came to arrive in her current circumstances. She questions the fear that men have of independent women: 'why do our husbands feel threatened by wanting to live alone for a while? Because that was the way I saw it' (Emecheta 1994a:92). Here Emecheta questions men's role in restricting controlling women in their societies and further questions when women are complicit in their own bondage at the expense of other women around them: '...we earned more than our husbands, and we were in better jobs. So I didn't understand your reason for feeling guilty and agreeing with Tunde in shunning me. I thought our friendship had gone beyond that, and we were more like sisters' (Ibid.92). Kehinde's questioning of Moriammo's behaviour in London leads her to confess to her own mistreatment of Mary Elikwu:

'Can you locate Mary Elikwu for me? I tried to reach her before I left. She had been on my conscience since the night of Albert's party. She has foresight, going to college and having herself educated, after so many children. Raising children is no longer enough. The saving grace for us women is the big 'E' of education' (Emecheta 1994a:95)

Of significance in the example above is the statement 'Raising children is no longer enough'. Despite the fact that *Kehinde* was published in 1994, this message still relevant today, with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also disseminating the message to: "be a full person...but do not define yourself solely by motherhood" (Adichie 2017:9). It can be argued then

that *Kehinde* is somewhat of a didactic novel, with the lesson being that the future of Nigerian women is dependent on women pushing to educate themselves: “I want very much to further the education of women in Africa, because I know that education really helps the women. It helps them to read and it helps them to rear a generation. It is true that if one educates a woman, one educates a community, whereas if one educates a man, one educates a man” (Emecheta 2007:553).

The absence of Kehinde from Joshua’s life becomes apparent when he returns to London to collect money from Kehinde. When Kehinde refuses to sell the house, Joshua informs his mother that ‘legally, all this is supposed to be mine. Dad said so several times, you heard him yourself’ (Emecheta 1994a:138). Here the reader is able to witness how the absence of the mother figure in Joshua’s life has resulted in his perspective of the world has being informed by his father’s masculine ideas of ownership and power. This can be read as an allegory of the national space, suggesting the absence of women and mothers from the process of nation building will result in little progress beyond patriarchal power structures in Nigerian society. Toivanen further argues that Kehinde’s “...return to Africa can be interpreted as a failed attempt to reconnect with a lost maternal figure” (Toivanen 2013:438). Kehinde’s character can then be seen as an example of the nation’s over reliance on the mother figure in as a way to progressive the nation: ‘most Igbo women liked taking on the whole family’s burden, so that they would be needed. His mother no longer cared. How could you deal with a rebel who happened to be your mother?’ (Emecheta 1994a:141).

In *Kehinde*, Emecheta creates a character that one can be both envious of for the strength she displays in her independence and survival, but also a character who is left open to criticism for leaving her children and family behind:

“In my books I write about families because I still believe in families. I write about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable” (Emecheta 2007:553)

Emecheta's comments above can easily be attributed to the experiences of marriage and motherhood for Kehinde, Adah and Nnu Ego. This would suggest that Emecheta not only writes about her own experiences and those around her, but also suggests to the reader ideas surrounding who Emecheta believes an African woman could be, if they were afforded the space to explore such possibilities.

In effect, the loss of her family to someone new forces Kehinde to reconsider what she will do with her life. It also forces her to reconsider her position and role in the family unit. Not content to stay in a polygamous relationship, she returns to England to live alone, finalising that "...feminine self-discovery and empowerment..." (Toivanen 2013:435) previously discussed. *Kehinde* as a novel then represents a challenge to the process of nation building in Nigeria, not only through the difficulties of transposing a sense of nationalism in the diaspora to that of Nigeria itself, but also the need for women and mothers to pursue a journey of empowerment so that they might ensure that they are not excluded from the process of nation building in Nigeria.

Sefi Atta

Motherhood: A Responsibility to Pursue Gender Equality in Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come

Whilst motherhood is an important trope in the canon of Nigerian novels by female authors, these portrayals seldom construct images of perfection in their mother characters, which in turn offers a more human and relatable character in the narratives because they are flawed. In Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* portrays a somewhat strained and complicated relationship between the protagonist Enitan and her mother is framed throughout the novel. Enitan and her family live by Lagos Lagoon in what would be considered a house belonging to people from a more middle-class background. Despite coming from an affluent background, Enitan's home life is not without its issues, much of this can be attributed to the breakdown in her parent's marriage caused by one quite significant event in their lives; the death of Enitan's brother. After his death, Enitan's mother seeks a solace in Christianity and the church. Her father, however, does not, causing a rift to grow, not only in their marriage, but also between Enitan and her mother. Throughout the narrative it is clear that Enitan does not appear to have a very close relationship with her mother. Consequently, Atta challenges the notion that mothers bear a greater part of the responsibility of raising and influencing a child than their fathers. This in turn suggests that within the national space there is a requirement for all to contribute, once again demonstrating the female authors look to include the experiences of men as well as women.

Many of Enitan's characteristics can be traced back to her mother: not only her strength and resilience in the face of adversity, but also the way in which she relates to the men in her life. An example of which is the pressure that is placed on Enitan's mother by her in-laws to give birth to a son. This is a very common theme in the Nigerian literary canon and has been depicted in the narratives of both female and male authors alike. In most cases the in-laws pressure leads to threats of finding a second wife

for their son, regardless of the wishes of either the daughter-in-law or their own son¹⁷:

‘After you were born, I told him I didn't want another child. God had blessed us with a healthy child. Why risk having another? But his family wouldn't hear of it. He had to have a son, so they started threatening that he would take another wife, and his mother, that woman who suffered so much herself, threatened me too. Your father never said a word to support me’ (Atta 2005:173)

It could be argued that Atta's deliberate inclusion of the difficulties between Enitan's parents demonstrates the power of patriarchy in Nigerian society. As a result, Enitan's father—despite not wanting to take on another wife or having certain expectations of the women in his life—becomes symbolic of the power of patriarchy in Nigerian society. His decision to remain silent on the subject of a new wife demonstrates the aloofness of Nigerian society to want to change the masculine constructions, even if they are not supported by all. Her mother's portrayal as constantly being combative acts as a symbolic challenge to that same patriarchy that her father simultaneously represents and rejects.

Unlike in Emecheta's novels where all the characters that are mothers are referred to by their name, in *Everything Good Will Come* this is not the case: ‘...they called my mother Mama Enitan, after me, though her real name was Arin’ (Atta 2005:10). Atta presents here an image of how motherhood can often replace a woman's identity, both in name and purpose. This is quite a common practice amongst the Yoruba people in Nigeria. Enitan's mother allows this tradition and others to continue, regardless of how they perpetuate an image of women and the role of the mother:

“Do you remember, when you used to come to church with me, that some of the sisters would miss church for a week?”
“Yes, mummy.”

¹⁷ Ayòbámi Adébáyò's novel *Stay with Me* (2017) focuses on the theme of motherhood and the pressures placed on both husbands and wives by their families to have children; especially a male child. Similarly to Enitan's father in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, Adébáyò's novel depicts the husband as also being a victim of these familial pressures to give birth to sons.

“Do you know why they missed church?”

“No.”

“Because they were unclean,” she said” (Atta 2005:23)

Here Atta engages not only with the religious belief that women are “unclean” during a period of menstruation, but also Enitan’s mother’s decision to continue imparting this knowledge to her daughter as a point of fact. This dialogue between Enitan and her mother is evidence not only of the influence that mothers have over the education of their children’s sense of self, but also the responsibility that they have to instil in them certain values. In this instance, Enitan’s mother has chosen to continue supporting the narrative of menstruation being viewed as “unclean”, suggesting that the ownership of women’s bodies still does not fully belong to them.

Further examples of, Enitan’s mother’s perpetuation of certain stereotypes is again shown in the novel when she also encourages her daughter to be what her husband terms as a ‘kitchen martyr’ (Atta 2005:40), which is something that Enitan’s father is against:

“You should tell her young girls don’t do this anymore,” he said.

“Who said?” my mother asked.

“And if she asks where you learned such nonsense, tell her from your father and he’s for the liberation of women” (Atta 2005:21)

The counter narrative presented to the reader here asks for a re-examination of who is actually perpetuating the masculine traditional norms in Nigeria. Whilst it can be argued that Atta is not suggesting that women are solely to blame for this, the author does imply through the relationship between Enitan and her family that both men and women are responsible for bringing about changes in relation to ideals surrounding gender spaces in Nigeria.

When Enitan’s parents finally separate, her mother becomes increasingly vocal, not only about her feelings towards Enitan’s father, but also about her feelings towards men in general. The advice that her mother imparts on Enitan then affects her own relationships with men:

‘Never make sacrifices for a man. By the time you say, ‘Look what

I've done for you.' It's too late. They never remember. And the day you begin to retaliate, they never forget. Pray you never know what it means to have a sick child, either. You don't know whether to love them too much, or too little. Then as they become sicker, you love them the only way you can, as though they are part of you' (Atta 2005:173-174)

For Enitan's mother, the loss of a child means the loss of part of herself, which is a sentiment echoed in Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Kehinde*. In the same way that Kehinde, in Emecheta's novel, has an abortion because of her husband Albert, it is she, the mother, who is left to bear the scars of the loss. Similarly, Atta's novel also presents the loss that Enitan's mother experiences as being more significant to the female and her experience of motherhood. In the case of Enitan's mother, she is left with only the memory of suffering from a child she begged her husband not to pursue. This is a clear example of the unique experience of motherhood in relation to one's children versus that of fatherhood. Regardless of her mother's advice, Enitan does experience a string of difficult relationships with men, from her father through to her husband Niyi (Ojaide 2006:61-62). Her mother is unable to guide Enitan away from such experiences in life and much of this is due to the weakened position of her mother in Enitan's eyes.

In Enitan's mother, Atta creates a flawed character but one that is clearly a victim of her surroundings. Whilst she protests against the patriarchal expectations of her society she does in fact validate them by participating in and perpetuating those very ideals in her actions. As a result, Atta presents the reader with an image of motherhood that is not utopian or perfect. However, Enitan's mother still poses the power and position to affect the national space in her connection to her children and the community at large. However, her decision to maintain patriarchal narratives demonstrates a restriction on many women in Nigeria, proving that some are often prisoners of their own masculine influenced ideals of women. The image of Enitan's father being in opposition to maintaining these ideas presents the reader with a counter narrative on the theme of patriarchy in Nigeria. Consequently, Atta acknowledges the power and influence of motherhood on the national space, but suggests that

fatherhood also has as valid a role to play in building the nation through progressive ideas of gender equality.

Atta goes on further to chart the experience of motherhood in the novel when Enitan marries Niyi and looks to have her own child. At first the couple struggle to conceive and through this Atta juxtaposes a more contemporary response with that of the more cultural and religious response to the experience of childlessness of her parent's generation. As previously mentioned, historically in Nigeria there has been an element of shame and humiliation that has often been felt in relation to childlessness or even the prospect of being barren. Childlessness is quite a common theme in the works of both Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, but has not been such a common focus in the works of more contemporary female authors. This shift in focus has arguably been as a result of contemporary female authors trying to encompass the relevant concerns of young female readers. This of course would not suggest that the possibility of women not being able to bear children has been eradicated, but instead that some women in Nigeria have not associated this with a sense of shame as they may have once done. In contrast to the treatment of this theme in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Atta frames the experience in a society that still retains some of its historic negativity towards the subject, but that also demonstrates a more empathetic and arguably pragmatic perspective on the issue. The actions of Enitan's mother represent the more unorthodox and mythical response to the prospect of childlessness: 'the first time I spoke to Niyi about marriage, I'd discovered my mother was scavenging our trash bags for my used sanitary towels and taking them to church for prayers. Her priest had said I would remain childless otherwise' (Atta 2005:179). Throughout the novel, Atta continues to present Enitan and her mother as being polarised in their responses to varying situations and this instance is certainly no different.

Atta's treatment of this theme differs from Emecheta's in that it looks to present the change in societies response to the issue, however, there is little difference in the emotional response to both the difficulty of

conceiving and the loss of a child. Enitan's first experience of being pregnant is unfortunately not one that results in the birth of a child:

'I got pregnant and shortly after had a miscarriage. I was at work when I felt the first contraction. By the time I arrived home, it was too late...I cried until I soaked my pillow. Nothing is worse than the loss of a child, even if the child is never born' (Atta 2005:187)

Whilst Atta does not describe Enitan's emotional ordeal in as much detail as Emecheta's character Nnu Ego, she does however acknowledge the extent to which that loss of a child is felt, even one that is unborn. Where they differ again is in Enitan's constant belief that she would one day experience motherhood: 'I never once doubted that I would become a mother. Not once. I just didn't know when it would happen...' (Atta 2005:188). This is a counter narrative to the previously published works by female authors and becomes symbolic of hope in the thematic portrayal of motherhood in the canon of Nigerian novels. Hope not only for women, but also the for the nation as a whole.

When Enitan eventually becomes pregnant again she begins her journey of motherhood right away. After her father is imprisoned by the corrupt military regime that rules Nigeria at the time, Enitan desperately fights for his release and becomes an advocate for freedom in the country as a whole. Despite being heavily pregnant, Enitan places herself and her unborn child in dangerous situations in her pursuit for justice; something that her husband Niyi vehemently opposes. Atta's writing style often includes in the dialogue social commentary in her novels, which is vocalised through the voice of the protagonists. In this instance, it is suggested within the narrative that Enitan's pursuit of justice and freedom is motivated by a desire to create a better future for her daughter. As a result, Enitan's experience of motherhood is placed in opposition to her mothers. Despite the difficult relationship that Enitan has with her own mother and her mother's failure to break the cycle of imparting on her daughter masculine ideals of women, Enitan is not unaware that her mother raised her with the best of intentions:

‘One morning I found an old picture of my mother and me. She was carrying me and I was about six months old wearing a dress with puffy sleeves. She was wearing a mini dress and her legs were as skinny as mine. My mother once said she whispered words of guidance into my ear, when I was born. She never told me what she said. She said that I had remembered. I whispered into my daughter’s ear like that, in my mother’s house. I told her, “I love you. You have nothing to do but remember”’ (Atta 2005:331)

As a result, Atta creates in Enitan a character that is again symbolic of the power, control and influence that women have through the pursuit and experience of motherhood. Her decision to continue pursuing justice for the nation as a whole—even at the expense of her own marriage—also further illustrates the influence of motherhood on the process of nation building.

The Mother as a Pillar of Strength in Sefi Atta’s A Bit of Difference

In her most recent novel (at the time of writing conducting this research) *A Bit of Difference* Sefi Atta further develops her portrayal of strong-minded and influential women through their experience of motherhood. In this novel, it is the mother of the protagonist, Deola, that presents the reader with an image of strength in both womanhood and motherhood. The novel also shows the relationship between mother and daughter in this novel as being more progressive toward new generations of women, which is in opposition to that of Enitan and her mother in Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*. Deola describes her mother’s journey from studying to be a nurse in London, meeting her husband to be, all the way through to her assuming the position of board member after the death of Deola’s father: ‘her mother stayed home and raised children. Now, she controls shares. She dresses up for meetings at Trust Bank, walks into the boardroom and everyone stands up and calls her ‘Madam”’ (Atta 2013:117). What Atta presents in Deola’s mother is a character that demonstrates that there is life before children, life whilst raising children and life after those children have grown and begun their own lives. This is a counter narrative to previous depictions of female characters and their

experience of motherhood, meaning that their entire focus once they have given birth to their children is simply only about their children. Another such example would be Kehinde from Emecheta's *Kehinde*, who (as discussed) initially remains in an unhappy marriage because of her children, but in the end finds joy and happiness by beginning a new life and relationship after leaving her husband.

In all three of Sefi Atta's novels—*Everything Good Will Come*, *A Bit of Difference* and *Swallow* (2008)—the author places great importance on the relationships between the protagonists and their mothers. Even when those same relationships are somewhat strained, the protagonist acknowledges the positive influence that their mothers have on them and consequently, the national space. In *A Bit of Difference*, it is clear that Deola finds her mother to be a more inspirational figure in her life than her father:

'Deola was not in awe of his job as she was of her mother's. Her mother's job seemed like an impossible feat: to have food on the table, to be well groomed at all times and ready to play hostess. Her mother never had untidy hair, never burped or gave off any unpleasant smells – not once – nor would she tolerate unpleasant smells. How was that possible for a young girl to live up to?' (Atta 2013:261)

Through the framing of motherhood—and in fact womanhood—that Atta presents here, Deola's mother as a character becomes almost superhuman. Describing a '...mother's job...[as] an impossible feat...' (Atta 2013:261), acknowledges the somewhat oppressive expectations that masculine ideals in many societies place on women as mothers. Atta goes on further to cement this dilemma that Deola has of witnessing what her mother is capable of whilst still trying to view these as human feats:

'Even when her mother drank too much, she became more graceful. Only in rare moments – for instance, when Deola noticed her mother's sanitary towels – did she regard her mother as a woman. How her mother met her father, why her mother did not get along with Brother Dotun's wife, all that remained unexamined because coming to terms with her mother's humanity would have been as cataclysmic as the earth losing gravity' (Atta 2013:261)

Here Atta uses a hyperbole to further express to the reader the extent to which the actions carried out through motherhood can be viewed as superhuman. One of the key aspects of Deola's relationship with her mother is the high regard in which she holds her mother, which then offers readers a further example of the strength and power of motherhood. Arguably then, Atta's novels all suggest that the importance of the mother figure in the lives of their children is vital, not only in helping to change the lives of their children as individuals, but also helping to change the national landscape for both their daughters and their sons.

In summary, the portrayals of motherhood discussed in this section demonstrate several things. Whilst the depictions of motherhood in these novels bear some similarities, they all suggest that the position of the mother in Nigerian society plays a vital role in the process of nation building as a whole. The experience of those in the diaspora differs greatly to those who remain in Nigeria. They present the emotional and physical hardships that women may at times experience not only in their pursuit of becoming a mother, but also the relationship that they have with their children once they are born and ensuring that these children are encouraged to have a positive sense of cultural and national identity whilst living in the diaspora. The authors also present images of strength and power in the form of their mother characters, often placing them in positions of opposition to patriarchal expectations of them, thus becoming symbols of resistance within the narratives. The female authors of all generations from Flora Nwapa to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie do not seek to place men in opposition to women in a negative light. Instead they look to bring to the fore the everyday experience of the mother, the daughter, the sister as the kinds of women that they are, have known or would like to see in Nigeria. This is something that male authors have often taken for granted, presenting superficial portrayals of women in their writing. There

is no doubt that the portrayal of the mother and motherhood in Nigerian novels will evolve over time, but what will arguably remain constant is the power and importance that the mother figure possess in creating and developing the nation.

It is clear then from the examples discussed in this chapter that female authors, both past and present, have contributed important images of women as mothers, wives and individuals to the Nigerian literary canon. Through their female characters, these authors demonstrate how women command authority and power in the spaces that they occupy, but also, how some women are complicit in their own imprisonment in the form of motherhood. What is shown in novels written by male authors is that the wives do not leave their husbands and passively accept whatever position the male authors place them in. This is exactly what all those female authors were writing back to and did so in an effort to re-write the narratives of women and wives in Nigerian literature. Some novels by male authors, such as Chinua Achebe, should perhaps be subjected to further reinterpretation in order to reconsider how far silence has been misinterpreted as a critical presentation of women in the novels. There are also more contemporary male authors, such as Jude Dibia, who in novels such as *Unbridled* (2007) have arguably looked to present experiences of women in Nigeria through a new type of male centred gaze. One in which there is a level of empathy for the difficulties that women can face whilst trying to navigate their way through restrictive masculine favoured societies. Even in those instances where women decide to leave their husbands of their own volition, the reader is then presented with images of strong women who negotiate their way through life, with or without men. What appears to be of greater importance to them is whether they can be strong without children or whether the children can be strong without them. The next chapter will explore the experiences of such characters; examining the influence or absence of the maternal figure of young characters based in the diaspora.

**Chapter 2 - The Nigerian Diaspora:
Narratives of 'Unbelonging' and
Return in Buchi Emecheta's *The
New Tribe*, Sefi Atta's *A Bit of
Difference* and Chimamanda Ngozi
Adichie's *Americanah***

The theme of 'unbelonging' (Emecheta 2000:9) in contemporary Nigerian novels is especially common in the diaspora novel. The protagonists in these novels commonly experience a series of events in their lives that can lead them to feel unwelcome in the country of their birth. In some instances, this can also apply to characters who leave Nigeria for Europe or America. There have been numerous examples of this thematic construction in the Nigerian literary canon, with the work of Buchi Emecheta emerging as one of the key authors on the subject. A greater part of her work has examined the lives of those in the diaspora and the difficulties in which some of these characters face in affirming a sense of belonging to both a Nigerian and British identity. An example of which is Emecheta's novel *The New Tribe* (2000), which tells the story of Chester, from when he was a baby to a young adult. Chester is raised in a small fictional town in Britain by his adopted family and is the only black person living in that community. Throughout the novel, Emecheta examines the relationship between culture, locality and a sense of national identity for those who have been raised in the diaspora. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has also addressed this theme in her novel *Americanah* (2013). The novel tells the story of Ifemelu and Obinze, who are childhood sweethearts that would find fate separate them for some time. Ifemelu moves to America to finish her university studies and Obinze finds himself in Britain, desperately trying to build a life for himself. Adichie presents the contrasting experiences of those living in the British and American diaspora, through the political dichotomy of legal and illegal citizenship. Inclusive in this narrative is the experience of minor characters in the novel who are also living in the diaspora, such as Dike and his mother Aunty Uju.

In both Adichie's *Americanah* and Emecheta's *The New Tribe* there are evident similarities between the identity dilemmas that Dike's character experiences, with that of Chester's respectively. Whilst Bandele from Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* does not experience a similar journey to that of Dike or Chester, his character does represent quite a significant experience of a Nigerian character living in the diaspora. Bandele's difficulty in engaging with a Nigerian and African identity is very much

connected to his sexuality, a subject that has become more prominent in Nigerian novels in recent years¹⁸. Despite all three novels being published within the last fifteen years, identity conflict in the diaspora is not a new theme in Nigerian novels. Many other authors have included this thematic focus into their narratives over the years, especially when addressing the experiences of the 'been-to' character¹⁹. This feeling of 'unbelonging' that characters are depicted as experiencing is born of a hybrid sense of identity. In an attempt to be a part of both their new and old cultural surroundings, these characters find themselves caught in some sort of limbo; a space between the two, not quite feeling like they fully belong to any one single identity.

The application of W.E.B Du Bois'²⁰ idea of "double-consciousness" (Du Bois 1994:2) provides important insights into the experiences of Dike in Adichie's *Americanah*, Chester in Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and Bandele in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*. Du Bois philosophised about the concept of double-consciousness in his book *The Souls of Black Folks* (first published in 1903). In the first chapter of the book Du Bois discusses at length the psychological effects of feeling like "a problem" (Ibid.1):

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 1994:2)

Owens Moore further defines double-consciousness as "...the thought process of being a Negro (i.e., Black) or an American (i.e., non-Black). To

¹⁸ See also, Jude Dibia's *Walking With Shadows* (first published in 2005) and Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (first published in 2015)

¹⁹ Examples of other diaspora literatures are Ama Ata Aidoo *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1970) and *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Ike Oguine *A Squatter's Tale* (2000) and more recently Teju Cole *Open City* (2011) and Taiye Selasi *Ghana Must Go* (2013)

²⁰ "W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was one of the major American intellectuals of the 20th century. His lifelong concern was improvement in the lives of African Americans, but by the early part of the century, he was becoming convinced that progress in African America would not be possible without progress in Africa and the African diaspora as a whole" (Quirin 2010-2011:1)

be a Negro is to be colored, Black, African American, or to be associated with the cultural heritage that stems from Africa” (Owens Moore 2005:752). For the purposes of this analysis the term will also be applied to those who are of African descent but are living in Britain. However, when applying Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness to these characters it is important to also examine their sense of locality in relation to their identity, as solely taking into consideration the idea of double-consciousness becomes problematic. Locality relates in this instance to a character’s experience and sense of identity through what Taiye Selasi suggest in her 2014 TED Talk titled ‘*Don’t ask where I’m from, ask where I’m a local*’ “...the three “R’s”: rituals, relationships, restrictions” (Selasi 2014). Selasi’s concept of locality will be used in my analysis to better understand the unique experiences of Dike, Chester and Bandele, all of whom end their respective narrative journeys by coming to very different definitions on their sense of locality and nationality.

This chapter will examine several characters from the diaspora novels previously mentioned and the experiences that they have with understanding their identity and locality whilst living in the diaspora. In the first two sections of the chapter I will examine the idea of Selasi’s locality and its relation to the sense of ‘unbelonging’ that Dike from *Americanah*, Chester from *The New Tribe* and Bandele from *A Bit of Difference* all experience in their respective narratives. In conjunction with Selasi’s concept of locality I will also explore Du Bois’ theory of double-consciousness and its application to the experiences of Dike, Chester and Bandele. In the final part of this chapter I will look at the relationship of the community in the diaspora and the portrayal of unity in the novels. It will also look at the difference in experience between the African-American and the African in America, questioning how this affects the sense of belonging that those in the African diaspora feel. Is there a resolution for those from the African-American community who feel a sense of exclusion from a full African identity and if so, how would this look? This section will focus on the experience of Ifemelu from *Americanah* and Deola from *A Bit of Difference*.

Locality, Double-Consciousness and Cultural Dislocation in the Diaspora

Themes surrounding identity, culture and belonging are common narratives within the Nigerian literary canon, the portrayal of which differs depending on whether the novel is set inside or outside of Nigeria. This is certainly the case for a number of novels from authors originating from other African countries and not solely those from Nigeria. One of the legacies of colonialism is the sense of dislocation that many from former colonised countries feel, both from within and without their ancestral homes. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that “diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation and regeneration...” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007:66). It becomes apparent from both fictional and non-fictional texts that those from the diaspora commonly negotiate their way through life with multi-layered identities and in some instances, find that defining one singular place of belonging can be somewhat problematic, if not impossible. These characters are known in Nigerian novels as ‘been-tos’ (see footnote 10) and would include a person who was raised abroad and returns to Nigeria as an adult, but also to those who are permanent residents in Nigeria but frequently visit countries in Europe and North America. The experience of such characters has been framed in various forms over the years, in an effort to focus on the contemporary and produce narratives that reflect the changes that have taken place both in Nigeria and globally (Egbunike 2014). The ‘been-to’ narratives that have been published in recent years have predominantly focused on the experience of such characters in a world that sees some entertaining more post-national ideals as globalisation looks to connect the world in its various forms. Presented with easier access to information about other cultures around the world at the click of a button, characters such as Dike from *Americanah*, Chester from *The New Tribe* and Bandele from *A Bit of Difference* offer readers an insight into some of the challenges these characters face whilst trying to understand their identity and sense of belonging in such an era.

Dike

In Adichie's novel, Dike is the cousin of Ifemelu, one of the stories protagonists. He is the son of Aunty Uju, who is the sister of Ifemelu's father. Aunty Uju is the mistress of a Nigerian governor and after his death, finds his extended family on her doorstep in an attempt to claim the property of their deceased relative. With no real claim to those material possessions and a one-year-old Dike to worry about, Aunty Uju flees Nigeria and moves to America. This is a pivotal moment in the lives of both Dike and his mother, who is not without her own battles with identity whilst living in America. The first time the reader is introduced to the narrative voice of Dike's character is when Ifemelu (Dike's cousin) moves to America and goes to stay with Dike and his mother (Aunty Uju) in New York. As Dike is so young when he leaves Nigeria, his only real connection with an Igbo and Nigerian identity is through his mother. Sackeyfio argues that "much of the complexity and success of *Americanah* lies in the scope of Adichie's presentation of ambiguous identities in multi-local spaces" (Sackeyfio 2017:221 italics in original). Thus, Ifemelu's arrival in Dike's life signals a positive change and re-establishes an oral connection for him with an Igbo and Nigerian identity. Throughout the novel, Adichie often places Ifemelu and Aunty Uju in opposition to each other, juxtaposing both the silencing and vocalising of Igbo cultural in the diaspora. In this way, Ifemelu's character can be read as symbolic of youth and the changing perspective of the current generation towards being more accepting and prouder of their ethnic identities in a Western space and a shift away from the image of the self-abasing immigrant.

Adichie's decision to show Ifemelu's recognition of Dike's unique perspective on his Igbo and Nigerian identity becomes an important part of how the characters develop and throughout the novel. This is first exemplified when Dike says to Ifemelu, 'Mommy says I have to call you Aunty Ifem. But you're not my aunt. You're my cousin' and understanding Dike's own unique perspective on the situation, Ifemelu responds 'so call me Cousin' (Adichie 2013:107). It is clear from this example that Dike's

conceptualisation of family structures comes from a Western point of departure and illustrates that as a child, this is a cultural space that he feels more comfortable in. What manifests itself out of Aunt Uju's inability to empathise with Dike in a similar manner to that of Ifemelu is a frustrated attempt to try to control her son's experience of being raised in America. As discussed in chapter one, this framing of motherhood in the diaspora and the desire to be able to have some kind of control over a child's upbringing in a foreign space can also be read as a further example of resistance in Adichie's novel. The author demonstrates in her novel that with the best of intentions Aunt Uju tries to keep Dike from growing up in a way that she doesn't understand, whilst at the same time wanting him to embrace an American identity. The significance of this becomes clear part way through the novel when Dike is a teenager and begins to explore a sense of belonging and where he fits into American society. During this period Dike embodies exactly what it means to experience double-consciousness when he deals with the "...struggle to be both an African American as well as an American" (Owens Moore 2005:752), or potentially in Dike's case, an African in America. As a result, it is Ifemelu, not his mother, who is always depicted to be more empathetic of Dike's attempt to balance his sense of Igbo and Nigerian identity with that of an American identity.

There is a significant discourse surrounding language in relation to identity, which takes on an important interdisciplinary analysis and dialogue. In African literary studies the subject of language and identity brings to the fore critical questions regarding the adoption of European languages as the primary tool of the contemporary novel. In his critically acclaimed book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (first published in 1986) Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o questions "...how best to make the borrowed tongues carry the weight of our African experience..." (wa Thiong'o 2006:7). Whilst the "borrowed" European languages may struggle to fully communicate African experiences in contemporary literature, it has continued to be used not only to reach a wider audience, but also because the colonial legacy has meant that these

languages now belong to African people as much as they do European²¹. The significance of this discourse in relation to Adichie's novel is Dike's inability to speak Igbo, which, as a result, represents a "restriction" in his sense of locality and identity. Both Aunt Uju and Ifemelu speak Igbo, consequently leaving Dike feeling like he is left on the fringes of what it means to be Igbo. However, this is intentional as Dike's mother does not want him to learn to speak Igbo:

'Please don't speak Igbo to him,' Aunt Uju said. 'Two languages will confuse him.'
'What are you talking about, Aunt? We spoke two languages growing up.'
'This is America. It's different' (Adichie 2013:109)

Here, Aunt Uju deflects her own fears and difficulties of surviving in America onto both Dike and Ifemelu. Consequently, Aunt Uju's feelings of difference leave Dike with a sense of "Otherness" (Said 1994; Said 2003; Bhabha 2004; Kapuściński 2008) that he is unable to trace to back any one particular source. The ownership of both Igbo and English is made clear here by Ifemelu, who again is placed in opposition to Aunt Uju. Mazrui suggests that "...language is sometimes regarded as a reservoir of culture which controls human thought and behaviour and sets the boundaries of the worldview of its users" (Mazrui 1993:351). Consequently, Ifemelu is conscious of Dike's exclusion from that aspect of an Igbo identity, acknowledging the relationship between language and culture. Through this aspect of the narrative Adichie looks to bring to the fore the importance of knowledge production and challenge the colonial constructs that persist amongst African peoples both at home and abroad.

Language in this context certainly takes on a symbolic representation of culture and Dike's inability to speak Igbo acts as a barrier to his full understanding of an Igbo identity. Whilst Agbiboa posits that "...language remains the most important factor in national identity" (Agbiboa 2013:6), Lauer challenges the idea that language in isolation and

²¹ Despite contemporary generations in Africa taking ownership of former colonial languages, Irele questions the "...possibility of the European languages – English and French – ever taking root in Africa firmly enough to become native to us in some for or the other" (Irele 1990:48).

the ability or inability to speak a language, can be used as an "...indicator of identity..." (Lauer 2012:107). In the latter parts of the novel Dike returns to Nigeria and is unable to speak with Ifemelu's parents in Igbo. Despite feeling a sense of belonging in Nigeria, not being able to converse in Igbo then feels somewhat on the peripheries of his Igbo and Nigerian identity:

'I wish I spoke Igbo,' he told her after they had spent an evening with her parents.

'But you understand perfectly,' she said.

'I just wish I spoke' (Adichie 2013:424)

As a result of Auntie Uju's decision not to teach Dike Igbo in his formative years, he is denied the opportunity to fully relate to an Igbo identity because, as discussed, learning about his Igbo and Nigerian cultural identity solely through English becomes problematic and restrictive. Consequently, as Anderson suggests, through language Dike finds both the Igbo and Nigerian nation "...as simultaneously open and closed" (Anderson 2006:146) to him.

The reasoning behind Auntie Uju's method of raising Dike comes not only from a fear of losing control of her son, but also a fear of difference; for both herself and Dike. As mentioned at the beginning of Dike's section of the chapter, Auntie Uju is not without her own identity issues whilst living in America and often has to compromise on that identity in order to feel like she can easily blend in to American society:

'Dike, put it back,' Auntie Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back*. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing' (Adichie 2013:108)

Here, again, Auntie Uju fulfils the stereotype of the self-abasing immigrant character, ashamed and reluctant to be who they are in a foreign space. It could be argued that Auntie Uju's attempt here to reduce the visibility of her Otherness whilst around white Americans is a cause of Dike's own negative association with an Igbo and Nigerian identity. This would again link to the "relationship" factor of Selasi's concept of locality. If Dike is

witness to his mother's attempts to minimise that aspect of her own identity, then it is possible for the reader to associate several negative perspectives of Dike's perception of himself to be a consequence of the relationship that he has with his mother.

Aunty Uju is, however, not alone in her efforts to maintain a sense of order and authority over her child. Aunty Uju's neighbour Jane (who is from the Caribbean diaspora) expresses her own concerns about the way in which America can ensure that '...your children become what you don't know. It's different back home because you can control them. Here, no' (Adichie 2013:112). A further example of this can be seen when Aunty Uju, Dike and Ifemelu leave the supermarket and Aunty Uju continues to discuss the troubles that her neighbour Jane has with her own daughter:

'Aunty Uju turned to Ifemelu. 'This is how children like to misbehave in this country. Jane was even telling me that her daughter threatens to call the police when she beats her. Imagine. I don't blame the girl, she has come to America and learned about calling the police' (Adichie 2013:109)

The ways in which both Aunty Uju and Jane were raised is now being called into question by their own children, which is something that neither character can understand or relate to. In Aunty Uju's case, losing control of Dike represents a further loss of control of her own identity and this is why she tries to raise him in the only way she knows how. What is clear here is that through their migration to America these characters feel a sense of dislocation from elements of their cultural identity and subsequently their home, which is something that Toivanen argues has been a common focus of postcolonial texts in recent years (Toivanen 2013:432).

The significance of these character's desire to 'control' their children, is twofold. Firstly, as discussed in chapter one, the experience of motherhood in the diaspora has commonly been portrayed as being symbolic of resistance, not only against patriarchal expectations of women in society, but also against the perceptions and marginalisation of African peoples. Secondly, it is an attempt to retain some control over the identity of the parent (in this instance the mother), who is also left vulnerable to a tendency to silence one's cultural and national identity in order to reduce

the possibility of being seen as the Other. Migration to America from Nigeria is often portrayed in Nigerian novels as affording character's countless opportunities to thrive and prosper, which is very much connected to the concept of the American Dream²². In his award-winning book *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates postulates that he does not feel as though that same concept was conceived with all races in mind: "I tell you now that the question of how one should live within a black body, within a country lost in the Dream, is the question of my life, and the pursuit of this question, I have found, ultimately answers itself" (Coates 2015:12). Thus, Aunty Uju's experience of the American Dream can be read as a counter narrative to the more popularised portrayal of European immigrants in America. The more commonly constructed narrative in Nigerian novels suggests that in order for characters of African descent to take advantage of opportunities associated with *the Dream*, it is often necessary for them to cede various elements of their principle beliefs and identities in order to survive in their host country.

²² The concept of the American Dream comes from the book *The Epic of America* (first published in 1931) written by James Truslow Adams. "While it's not clear whether he actually coined the term or appropriated it from someone else...Adams invoked it over thirty times in *The Epic of America*, and the phrase rapidly entered common parlance as a byword for what he thought his country was all about, not only in the United States but in the rest of the world" (Cullen 2002:12)

Chester

The protagonist of Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* is a young man called Chester. The novel tells the story of his life, beginning with him being put up for adoption by his biological mother. This is not because his biological mother does not want Chester, but instead because her new boyfriend does not want to raise another man's child. This is an important detail that Emecheta includes in the novel for several reasons, but especially because it once again highlights the pressures that many Nigerian women who moved to London during that era were under regarding the feasibility of being able to financially support and raise their own children (see chapter one for further discourse on this subject). Similarly, to Auntie Uju and Dike, the actions of Chester's biological mother exemplifies once again that potential for loss of control and the need for some form of resistance that many of these women may have been confronted with when moving abroad. When the reader is introduced to Chester, it is because Ginny Arlington (Chester's adoptive mother) and her husband have been approached about adopting Chester²³. The Arlington's do not hesitate to take on the responsibility, despite the fact that they are forewarned: 'Chester's mother is Nigerian. You need to be aware he is a black child' (Emecheta 2000:7). They jump at the chance to adopt Chester, regardless of the fact that they are white and he is black: 'the fact that he was black only added to their feelings of having been specially chosen' (Ibid.7). This is also a key detail in the novel because it shows that a sense of 'unbelonging' can manifest itself from any circumstance, even when coming from the most loving of families and situations. In Chester's case, as we will come to discuss, it manifests itself from exposure to unconscious bias and misconceptions about other cultures.

Whilst not a biological relation, Chester, finds that his relationship

²³ Chester is not the only child that the Arlington's have adopted as they also have a daughter called Julia. Unlike Chester, Julia was abandoned in a phone box by her biological mother and brought to the Arlington's not long before they adopt Chester, also be the social services. Julia, however, is white and whilst the family are very loving and Julia is very protective of Chester, it is important to note this difference as it results in their experience of growing up in the same family and small town as being very different.

and understanding of an Igbo and Nigerian identity is strengthened when he meets Mr Ugwu; also known as Enoch. This would tie in to Selasi's concept of locality as a "relationship", because Chester's engagement with Enoch comes to define part of Chester's identity. Chester is introduced to Enoch during his time working at a chalet park one summer holiday, not far from a small fictional English town called St Simon, where Chester is raised. As it is not a city or larger town it is not depicted as being particularly cosmopolitan or multicultural. In fact, the reader is led to believe that Chester is the only non-white person in the village. The significance of this is that it symbolises a "restriction" on Chester, which affects his locality and thus, his sense of belonging in St Simon. For this reason, the significance Enoch's introduction into Chester's life cannot be impressed upon enough, because he is the first black person that Chester ever sees in person and for Chester, this is life changing: 'he was about to start towards the visitors, when a black man descended the coach steps. Chester stopped dead in his tracks' (Emecheta 2000:33). It is the shocked reaction of Chester that alludes to the idea that Enoch is the first black person he has ever seen in person. Arguably Emecheta chooses to place this interaction between the two characters at a point in the novel when Chester is at a crossroads in his life, trying to decide whom he is and what he wants to do with his life. Up until this point in Chester's life he has seen no reflection of himself in anyone else in his community. This is one of the ways in which Emecheta presents the idea of 'unbelonging' in the novel and the introduction of Enoch's character means that Chester is finally able to see somewhat of a reflection of himself in another person: 'Chester had the strangest sensation that he was looking at himself' (Ibid.34). The significance of this statement in the novel is that it demonstrates a need for one to see a reflection of themselves in some of the people around them. As Chester has grown up in a predominantly white area this has not been the case for him and has exacerbated further that feeling of 'unbelonging' in him.

This first meeting with Enoch sparks a desire in Chester to find out more about his ethnic origins, as he is aware that the Arlington's are not his biological parents. Emecheta offers the reader the opportunity to see

that even at this early point in their interaction in the novel, that Enoch's introduction into Chester's life gives him a positive association to both a Nigerian and Igbo culture in the same way that Ifemelu does for Dike in Adichie's *Americanah*. The intertextuality of the two novels reimagines relationships of characters in the diaspora not only with African identities but also with oral traditions. As a result, both Ifemelu and Enoch become what one could label, cultural mentors—cultural pedagogues even—who look to reinforce a positive connection to both an Igbo and Nigerian identity, using the Nigerian novel as tool of dissemination. Within the narratives they represent the positive, the pride, the pragmatism and the realism that both Dike and Chester need in their lives. Chester's education of both cultures continues outside of his interaction with Enoch when during the following summer, Chester goes to a museum to listen in on a lecture about Olaudah Equiano²⁴:

‘This morning; Mrs Miller called the Ugwu family my people. Then I went to the seaside to see John about a job, and I was just killing time when I found out about the exhibition and the lecture. Now I have discovered Equiano, and he reminds me of my dream’
(Emecheta 2000:53)

It can be argued that the inclusion of the historical memoirist Olaudah Equiano in the novel offers the reader an insight into the history of colonialism and the effects of being physically and culturally uprooted. This further contextualises Chester's experience of cultural dislocation, suggesting that whilst the narrative focuses on Chester's story, that in many ways this is not entirely unique. Emecheta also looks here to be drawing some comparison between the feelings of Chester and those expressed in Olaudah Equiano's memoir.

Furthermore, Mrs Miller's comment regarding Chester having 'people' becomes both a positive and negative statement. For Chester, it is positive in one way because it reinforces the idea that he does belong to a group, which up until this point in the novel is a feeling that he has been

²⁴ Olaudah Equiano wrote the autobiographical book *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* which was first published in 1789 and narrated his journey from a child taken from Western Africa to the day that he died in the United Kingdom.

somewhat bereft of. However, the negative aspect of the comment also confirms that his sense of 'unbelonging' is in actual fact vindicated by Mrs Miller's statement. It can be argued that through Mrs Miller's comment Emecheta highlights not only the ignorance of some white British people, but also demonstrates that the legacy of colonialism requires the reimagining of European history and identity, as much as it does African. Balfour suggests that in the work of James Baldwin²⁵ there is a similar call for white identities to undergo the same deconstruction process as that of black identities:

"Baldwin demands of his white readers not only that they accept the equal humanity of blacks but also that they admit the racial construction of their own identities and ask how that construction affects their commitments" (Balfour 1998:363)

Mrs Miller's comment and the subsequent exclusion of Chester from the society in which he was raised becomes one of the main catalysts for why he runs away from home in order to find Enoch and his sons in Liverpool. When he is living with the Ugwu's in Liverpool, he is more at ease with himself and feels like he has found his 'people' and consequently, a sense of belonging.

Enoch's influence on Chester really begins to flower whilst he is living with the Ugwu family. Liverpool is not a small fictional village like St Simon, it is a city, but it is still a city in Britain and so whilst it is portrayed as being more diverse and multicultural than St Simon, it is still a predominantly white English place to reside in. Inclusive in this is the fact that Liverpool is also a port city that has a long history with the importation of African slaves to Britain. When Chester leaves St Simon, despite the fact that he feels like he doesn't belong there, part of him understandably wants to feel wanted by the people who live there and know him:

'He didn't look back, and nobody challenged him. He knew then that

²⁵ James Baldwin was an American author who wrote books such as *Go Tell It on The Mountain Top* (1953), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and many more. His works, both fictional and non-fictional, predominantly engage with race, class, sexual orientation.

the time for him to leave had really arrived. It made him feel like a visitor who had overstayed his welcome. The pain of this realization turned his feet to lead. He wanted to be stopped and asked where he was going. He wanted someone to care enough to beg him to come back' (Emecheta 2000:68)

In stark contrast to his departure from St Simon, his arrival in Liverpool is a positive one. When Chester arrives at Enoch's garage he is welcomed with open arms when Rufus (one of Enoch's sons) rushes over to him and embraces Chester as though he were some long lost relative, thus justifying his reasons for leaving St Simon (Emecheta 2000:77). It is at the point when Chester is actually living with Enoch and his sons that he begins to learn more about Igbo and Nigerian culture through a more oral tradition of dissemination. Consequently, the feelings of 'unbelonging' shift, causing Chester to re-engage and re-interpret his sense of double-consciousness. Gilroy argues that, "striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness" (Gilroy 2002:1). The experience Gilroy describes does not always align with the African American experience because the history of the Atlantic Slave Trade to the Americas has made their experience quite unique²⁶.

Returning to Selasi's concept of locality, it is clear that Chester's main "restriction" is not knowing anything about his ethnic or cultural identity. A further "restriction"—which is almost an extension of the first—comes in the form of him being black and living in Britain, but not truly understanding how that has set him at a disadvantage. It is in fact Enoch that begins to help Chester understand the obstacles and difficulties that he will face as a black African man, not just an Igbo or Nigerian, whilst living in Britain:

'I passed GCSE in Mathematics and Woodwork,' Chester suddenly informed Mr Ugwu.
'Maths and Woodwork? An African in the UK, you'll end up sweeping the streets with those qualifications!'
'You call me an African.'

²⁶ The recent publications of David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) and Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017) look to re-engage with the history of Africans in Britain and dispel the myths that America's racial issues are worse than Britain's.

'Yes, you are a Nigerian!' (Emecheta 2000:80)

Enoch's candid response to Chester's admission of his skills and qualification level can be read as the author's own voice and perspective being inserted into the novel. In her autobiography *Head Above Water* (first published in 1986) Emecheta makes clear her understanding of the difficulties that young black women and men faced when growing up in Britain in the 70s and 80s:

"How then could they compete with an English person of the same age, who by then had got through secondary school and perhaps university? These colonials helped to perpetuate the myth that blacks are low in intelligence while they themselves made sure that the myth held true" (Emecheta 1994c:137)

I posit that Emecheta uses Chester as a sort of conduit to write the experience of black youths in Britain into the novel. This would also support the suggestion that within the novel, Chester's skin colour does in fact place a "restriction" on him and his ability to thrive in a predominately white society. This is a common narrative in Nigerian and other African novels and has seen little change in any of the literary canons emerging from Africa literature. Another important aspect of this "restriction" in the novel is Enoch's recognition of Chester as an African and a Nigerian, which for him is extremely powerful. It is the second time in the novel that the myth of his Otherness has been dispelled; with a name and a reflection through which he can start to recognise himself. However, his sense of belonging is still somewhat fraught with issues because he admits that '...when people talked of home, his mind went back consistently to St Simon' (Emecheta 2000:88). Chester's experience is of course intentionally difficult for him to unpack and allows the reader to tie the novel back to its title in suggesting that Chester now has a *New Tribe*; that of Britain and Nigeria.

Another important element of Emecheta's *The New Tribe* that relates to Selasi's idea of locality is the "relationship" between Chester and his adoptive mother Ginny. Their interaction brings to the reader's attention, once again, the importance of the mother figure and the

development of one's national identity (as discussed in chapter one). In an effort to '...keep alive for Chester some memory of where he came from' (Emecheta 2000:8), Ginny makes a storybook for Chester based on what resources that she has available to her in the local library (Ibid.8). This is clearly intended as a loving gesture from a mother to a son, however as an action in the novel, it is evidence of the way in which knowledge production is still driven by Eurocentric ideals and positions of power, causing the construction of the Other and the dissemination of these as believed truths to still remain pertinent even today (Said 2003; Said 1994). In this case it is not completely to the detriment of Chester as it gives him an unconscious desire to pursue what he believes to be his unrealised reality of self: 'Slowly and painstakingly, she made Chester a storybook based on an African folktale she had read. She illustrated it herself using details she had read about' (Emecheta 2000:8). As discussed, this is an unintentional type of 'othering' by Ginny, because she presents Chester with an image of Africa that is still somewhat exotic and different; this is despite the fact that she based the storybook on an African folktale. It is not clear as to whether or not the folktale comes from Igbo culture or even somewhere close to Nigeria, which again only adds to the unintended 'othering' by Ginny. Admittedly her knowledge of Africa (more specifically Nigeria) is basic and in some ways baseless because it is created solely on what she has read, heard in the news and from others: 'as far as Ginny was concerned, Nigeria was one of those dreadful African countries where soldiers kept overthrowing the democratic government, and chaos, poverty and violence reigned' (Ibid.8). With this in mind, it would be difficult for Ginny to pass on an accurate representation of that aspect of Chester's identity and as a result, a void is created in which only the knowledge of his ancestral identity can fill. It brings to the fore further questions surrounding the role of the mother in teaching and affirming one's sense of cultural and national identity.

This storybook that Ginny creates for Chester would spark a further desire in him to understand where his ancestral home is. Whilst Chester may have been curious to know why he didn't look like everyone else in his family, it is the confirmation from his parents that he was in fact

adopted that triggers the dreams that he has about what he believes to be his ancestral home:

‘Some time after the revelation about his mother, Chester started to have a recurring dream. Though it usually came at night, it sometimes came during the day as well, and nothing he could do would dispel it. It came to him in fragments at first, but after a while, it acquired concrete images and a definite theme’ (Emecheta 2000:16)

It is very likely that any child, who had just been told that they are adopted, would begin to consider their sense of identity and wonder where they came from. This is something that his sister Julia confirms when both she and Chester are discussing their adoption (Emecheta 2000:54). However, what is significant about this experience for Chester is that it leads him on a journey of discovery that results in him knowing where his home is and more importantly, where he feels he belongs. Bhabha suggests that, “...the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting” (Bhabha 2004:63). It is clear from Chester’s actions that there is certainly a conflict between who he wants to be and who he eventually accepts that he is.

Chester begins to get lost in the fantasy of this compound in Africa that he sees in his dreams, driving him to what he believes to be his true home and identity. In his dreams—both during the day and night—this place that he imagines becomes less of a dream and more of a sign or a calling:

‘Chester started identifying this compound as his very own. He didn’t doubt its existence, but felt sure it was somewhere waiting for him to come and claim it. He did not however trust himself to tell anyone about it’ (Emecheta 2000:17)

Chester’s belief that this vision of his home in waiting should be kept private can be read as a response to his sense of difference from those around him. It can be argued that his belief that those around him may not believe in its existence or understand its significance to Chester because they are white. As Balfour has argued, double-consciousness can also be described as a sort of “...second-sight, a way of seeing that which

escapes notice by the White majority” (Balfour 1998:349). Thus, Chester’s dream can be read as a symptom of his experience of double-consciousness and he is right to keep his dream private from his family. This belief also manifests itself from his feelings of ‘unbelonging’. Reading Chester’s actions in this way can be supported in the text by the fact that he eventually shares this vision with Jimoh (a colleague of Chester’s) in the second part of the novel. When he shares his vision with Jimoh, he is encouraged by Jimoh’s response and the explanation he provides Chester with regarding the significance of his vision:

‘Na your spirit wey dey tell you something. Igbo people dey call am your *chi*, and Yoruba people say your *ori* dey strong. *Ori* a destiny, you for choose your own before you fit enter this world. You are lucky. Your spirit dey watch over you. Make you no ignore am. Some people fit pay plenty money to see the vision you’re seeing free of charge’ (Emecheta 2000:109)

Jimoh’s interpretation of Chester’s vision offers him a perspective on his dream that he had at times considered himself but never felt like there was anyone else who would understand. Jimoh’s interaction with Chester in the novel is a “relationship” that furthers Chester’s sense of locality away from St Simon and his adoptive parents, and closer to a Nigerian identity and Enoch. Jimoh’s character, similar to Enoch and Ifemelu in Adichie’s *Americanah*, also acts as a reinforcement of the value of oral traditions and their role in knowledge production in African cultures. In her attempts to help Chester maintain some sort of connection to an African identity—however generic she devised it to be—his adoptive mother Ginny’s decision to create the storybook only adds to the dilemma of Chester’s double-consciousness and sense of locality.

Bandele

Bandele, from Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*, offers readers an alternative narrative on the themes of locality and 'unbelonging' in the diaspora novel. In sharp contrast to the experiences of Dike and Chester, Bandele, despite being born in Nigeria, has no desire to embrace a Nigerian or in fact any form of an African identity. As a result, his sense of 'unbelonging' is the reverse of Dike and Chester, directed more toward Nigerian culture and communities, as opposed to British culture. The novel is written in the narrative voice of the protagonist, Deola, who herself is a Nigerian expatriate living as part of the London based diaspora. When the reader is introduced to Deola she has spent a number of years studying and working in London. However, she begins to miss her family and the sense of community that she feels when she is in Nigeria, causing her to consider a permanent return to Nigeria. Bandele is a friend of Deola's from Nigeria but who also now lives in London. Whilst Deola has maintained a connection to her family and Nigerian culture, Bandele flatly rejects both a Yoruba and Nigerian identity, instead choosing to embrace what it means to him to be British. Deola says of Bandele: 'his voice is hopelessly public school' (Atta 2013:40), consequently suggesting to the reader that Bandele comes from a more affluent and privileged echelon of society. Atta's choice to highlight this can be read as Bandele's character trying to remove himself further still from the image of the working-class African immigrant.

Whilst Bandele's character does appear to be a critical representation of a self-abasing immigrant in the diaspora, his example is somewhat different to that of Aunty Uju in Adichie's *Americanah*. There is, in fact, a more complex reason behind Bandele's desire to disassociate himself from a Nigerian identity. These rejections and attempts at disassociation are illustrated throughout the novel in varying ways. This ranges from his deliberate Anglo-mispronunciation of Nigerian names (Atta 2013:43) to forgetting who Deola is the day after he meets her '...the same way some expats couldn't tell one Nigerian from another' (Ibid.44). His rejection of any kind of Nigerian identity affects his relationship with his

family to the extent that they consider him 'lost' and someone to be 'ashamed of' (Ibid.44). Bandele never returns to Nigeria and in fact does not even consider it to be his home anymore: 'where is home?' Bandele asks. 'Where else?' He rubs his chin. 'Nigeria is not my home' (Ibid.50). Deola goes on to describe the way in which 'he sounded completely English and all she knew about Nigerians who spoke that way was that they looked down on Nigerians who didn't' (Ibid.43). Subsequently, his rejection of his Nigerian identity and culture leads him to also distance himself from African or Afro-Caribbean cultural associations for those living both in Britain and elsewhere. He becomes known by some of Deola's friends as 'the bobo who went mad because he couldn't accept the fact that he was black' (Ibid.54). However, the reason for Bandele's rejection of a Nigerian identity becomes apparent toward the end of the novel.

It is important here to note that in relation to Selasi's concept of locality, the "relationship" that Bandele has with his family and what he sees as collective African ex-patriot community in Britain, also represents a "restriction" on his character. This is because Bandele is homosexual, which is something that his family in Nigeria find very hard to accept. In January 2014 the Nigerian government passed a law on the prohibition of same-sex marriages "...more commonly and honestly called simply the Anti-Gay Law" (Sogunro 2014:47). Furthermore, Sogunro also suggests that "...law is not about preventing same sex marriage, instead it is about preventing—or more accurately, punishing—same-sex intercourse and, more broadly, homosexual *identity*" (Ibid.50 italics in original). The suggest that homosexual identities are being censored is supported by Msibi, who argues that "one of the reasons for the oppression of individuals who engage in same-sex relations in Africa is that of silencing same-sex sexualities" (Msibi 2011:57). In a news article published on the 31st of July 2017 by the BBC online titled *Mass Nigerian arrests for 'homosexual acts' in Lagos State* the article suggests that "homosexual acts are punishable by up to 14 years in jail in Nigeria, while gay marriage and displays of same-sex affection are also banned" (BBC 2017). Atta's decision to include this topic in her novel raises serious questions not only surrounding how one's personal identity can supersede that of a sense of

nationalism, but also because it brings into question the response of the Nigerian government to the rights of LGBTQ²⁷ citizens residing within the country. Tamale argues that the hostility towards the LGBTQ community in some African countries "...reflects a greater fear" (Tamale 2007:19) in those societies to that of simply a political or religious rejection of such relationships. Moreover, Tamale further posits that "homosexuality presents a challenge to the deep-seated masculine power within African sexual relations and disrupts the core of the heterosexist social order" (Ibid.19). Such hostilities and rejection are of course the key reasons why Bandele does not feel a sense of belonging to a Nigerian identity.

Within the narrative there are many hints and suggestions of Bandele's sexuality, something which he confirms to the reader in the second part of the novel. One such hint that Deola's character acknowledges is Bandele's love for James Baldwin, who he often compares himself to as a writer and philosopher, but in choosing Baldwin there is also the comparison of their sexuality. Sackeyfio posits that "Sefi Atta adds credence to the existence of behaviours such as double consciousness and identity conflict in her fiction" (Sackeyfio 2017:213-214). Arguably then, where we can easily apply double-consciousness to one's sense of ethnic and national identity, whilst it may become problematic when trying to apply the same concept to one's sexuality, in the case of Bandele, the concept appears to offer a greater understanding of his experience. Balfour argues that, "Baldwin implies that embracing a "gay" identity requires an unacceptable choice" (Balfour 1998:360). Whilst still living in Nigeria, Bandele is caught being intimate with one of the 'domestic staff' and as a result is sent away to study in Britain. Despite knowing Deola for many years, he chooses not to share with her his sexuality identity in an effort to protect himself from further rejection:

'Why didn't you just tell me you were gay?'
'You're Nigerian.'

²⁷ LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer) is a commonly used acronym that many groups associate with in regards ensuring that the rights of anyone who aligns themselves with one of the above identities are not being infringed.

'Helen is Nigerian!
'She's not Nigerian like you!
'I'm not Nigerian like that!
'I wasn't taking any chances. Nigeria...it was such an emotionally
brutal place to grow up in' (Atta 2013:235-236)

Subsequently, his association with a Yoruba and Nigerian identity remains one of rejection. Thus, Bandele's sense of locality is first and foremost related to his sexuality and because experience has taught him that Nigerians will not accept that side of him, he is unable to feel a connection to any kind of Nigerian identity. As a result, Bandele's own sense of 'unbelonging' means that his locality appears to be firmly in Britain. Taking into consideration his sexuality as a factor for his repudiations of Nigerian and other cultures of African peoples, it can be argued that his feeling of 'unbelonging' and his "restrictions" would have been the same regardless of whether he lived in Britain or Nigeria. Atta's decision to engage with the subject of same-sex-relationships in her novel is evidence of what Epprecht argues is a period when "more and more Africans are accepting the need actively to engage the debates and come out from behind the veils of secrecy or denial" (Epprecht 2013:149). Bandele's character serves as an important example in the Nigerian literary canon not only of the experience of those from the LGBTQ community in Nigeria and the diaspora, but also of the way that national identities can be accepted or rejected, based on whether the individual feels a sense of belonging and loyalty from their nation.

Whilst their characters and narratives are all unique, it is possible to see how the three characters from the three novels discussed in this section experience a sense of cultural dislocation whilst living in the diaspora through varying degrees of 'unbelonging'. Their sense of locality and identity is consequently affected by this and leads them to engage with those feelings of 'unbelonging' in order to better understand where it is they feel like they belong. In the first instance, a Nigerian identity does not appear to be their main concern. For both Dike and Chester, it is the Igbo nation that they engage with first and only come to understand the existence of a Nigerian identity as an extension of an Igbo identity. This

exemplifies how Nigerian literature has been able to change the sources of knowledge production and place as much importance on the ethno-national identities in Nigeria, as they do the Nigerian national identity. For Bandele, he too finds his way to a Nigerian identity through the Yoruba nation, but neither a Yoruba nor a Nigerian identity is compatible with Bandele's sexuality. Understood in this way, an individual's relationship with a national identity becomes transactional, with the requirement for the relationship to be mutually beneficial for it to succeed.

Where there is a maternal figure present in these novels the reader is able to see how a mother can have both a positive and negative influence on the way in which their child engages with their identity. The concept of double-consciousness and locality, as a way of understanding one's identity only stands to highlight how problematic it can be for those in the diaspora to make sense of their surroundings and the way in which they relate to a personal identity. Whilst the mothers of Dike and Chester are very influential in the lives of their children, in Ifemelu and Enoch can be found a representation of the extended family and community, both of whom underline the importance of oral forms of cultural dissemination. In this role, both Ifemelu and Enoch tackle some of the issues of 'unbelonging', double-consciousness and locality by helping to dispel the myths of Otherness that both Dike and Chester experience. Gilroy argues that:

“Double consciousness emerges from the unhappy symbiosis between three modes of thinking, being and seeing. The first is racially particularistic, the second nationalistic in that it derives from the nation state in which the ex-slaves but not-yet-citizens find themselves, rather than from their aspirations towards a nation state of their own. The third is diasporic or hemispheric, sometimes global and occasionally universalities” (Gilroy 2002:127)

In this definition Gilroy takes into consideration some of the key dilemmas that Dike, Chester and Bandele confront in regards to double-consciousness. The absence of Bandele's parents in Atta's novel does have a negative effect on the character, despite his strained relationship with them. Within the framing of double-consciousness in this context, it is only a concern with a cultural and ethnic identity that seem to affect both

Dike and Chester. Both characters show that being labelled as black is an external concern for them; even in the case of Dike, despite Ifemelu's protests against her aunt telling him he is not black (Adichie 2013:380). However, the cultural mentor characters are only able to do so much to assuage the feelings of 'unbelonging' for Dike and Chester in the novels. The result of which will be examined further in the preceding section.

Narratives of Unity: The Experience of the African-American and the African in America

The African-American experience is unequivocally unique. It is not possible to do the subject justice in a single book, let alone an introduction to a section in a chapter. However, through this brief introduction into the subject I look to provide some context to my analysis of the experiences of Adichie's characters from *Americanah*. The term African-American came into being as a result of the Atlantic Slave Trade, resulting in centuries of slavery, brutality and the permanent displacement of African peoples from their places of birth. Plantation owners would ban the practice of all cultural interactions amongst slaves, especially speaking in a language other than English. Often, it was not possible for those who were enslaved to converse with each other because they did not all come from the same ethnic group in Africa. Many of them maintained oral traditions of passing on their language, culture and knowledge through songs and story-telling. An example of which can be seen in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (first published in 1987), in the character Baby Suggs, who in many ways represents those African women who fulfil the role of Big Mother (see footnote 2). In her recent book *The Origin of Others* (2017), Toni Morrison examines the constructions of 'othering' and "black" identities in literature:

"The definitions of "black" and descriptions of what blackness means are so varied and loaded with slippery science and invention that it may be interesting, if not definitively clarifying, to examine the terms' configurations and the literary uses to which they are put as well as the activity they inspire—both violent and constructive" (Morrison 2017:55)

There are several authors who have written many of their novels with the thematic focus of the African-American experience such as James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright. The displacement of these African peoples and centuries of systematic processes designed to undermine the psyche of these mentally and physically enslaved peoples, has resulted in the generations of peoples of African descent in America battling with their identity and sense of belonging, even today. It is this contemporary reality for millions of American citizens that I look to examine in Adichie's *Americanah*.

Thus far, the chapter has explored the portrayal in contemporary Nigerian novels of adolescent males living in the diaspora; all of whom face their own unique battle with their identity. Equally important to this analysis is the experience of adolescent women in the diaspora—more specifically in America—and their engagement with Nigerian nationalism whilst living abroad. Characters that leave Nigeria are forced to confront pre-conceived ideas that those in Europe and America have constructed; ideas that inform the polarised identities of the Oriental and the Occidental (Said 2003; Said 1994). These master narratives on black and African identities can be found in almost all contemporary Nigerian novels, because even as authors look to challenge them through their work, they must in the first instance acknowledge their existence. When these confrontations with the 'other' take place, characters are often forced to reconsider the way in which they define, not only themselves, but also those they are placed in opposition to. These encounters cause a reordering of identity and locality, which for characters who originate from African countries, the order of identity is commonly defined as follows; continent (Africa) and country (Nigeria), leaving one's sense of ethnic nationalism—in Ifemelu and Auntie Uju's case, Igbo—to remain an elusive concept, thus highlighting the ignorance of the host country ideas of identity outside of the colonial constructions of black and white. Whilst this robs the characters of the ownership over their identity, it can on occasion allow the characters from African countries to use this to their advantage.

They encounter several labels, social rules of engagement in these new societies and instructions on what they should and should not be offended by, as exemplified in *Americanah*: ‘when you watch television and hear that a “racist slur” was used, you must immediately become offended’ (Adichie 2013:220). This particular example is connected to the difference in experience of the African-American and the African in America. The differences in the experience of the two groups is something that Adichie acknowledges in the narrative of *Americanah*, using both Dike and Ifemelu to engage in the discourse throughout the novel.

It is only when Ifemelu arrives in America that she begins to become conscious of race and how she is perceived within those Eurocentric frameworks of racial identity. This is not to say that she knew nothing about it before, however, in Nigeria there would be little to no emphasis placed on the constructions of racial identities in relation demarcating different peoples based on the colour of their skin. When she arrives in America, Ifemelu realises that this is not the case and Adichie highlights this through the narrative engagement of Ifemelu’s blogposts: ‘in America, tribalism is alive and well. There are four kinds—class, ideology, region, and race’ (Adichie 2013:184). Consequently, America unmasks itself to Ifemelu as a society that places a greater importance on race than Nigerian society. Much of this is related to the history of America as a country, which developed as a nation from the voluntary and forced immigration of groups of peoples from around the world. Effectively what Adichie brings to the fore here is that when Ifemelu moves to America, she becomes, black. In itself, this becomes an important counter narrative and challenge to the construction of black and white identities²⁸. Ifemelu describes her first encounter with being seen first and foremost as black in one of her blogposts: ‘mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked

²⁸ “The Atlantic slave trade had taken Africans from numerous and widely differing culture and ethnic groups and defined them en masse as ‘negroes’. Now the pioneers of English plantation slavery, driven by their desperate desire for security, ushered all Europeans, irrespective of their ethnic or social backgrounds, into the new category of ‘white’; a term that had to be explained to newly arriving Europeans who were unfamiliar with the workings of the new slave society” (Olusoga 2016:71).

to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was' (Ibid.220). Ifemelu's reaction brings two points to the fore; firstly, the idea of a collective grouping of 'blackness', as though regardless of where someone is geographically and culturally from, the perspective will remain the same, robbing the individual of agency. This is clearly also a type of 'othering', denying the nuances of an identity if they are not white European—inclusive in this term is white Americans, the decedents of those European immigrants that migrated (voluntarily and involuntarily) to America in the 1600s—and consequently, their humanity. Secondly, it presents the difference between the African-American experience and the experience of the African in America. In this respect, the reader comes to understand that the "black perspective" is intended to mean the African-American perspective, which in itself is unique and is certainly not something that Ifemelu as an Igbo, Nigerian and African woman, can relate to in its entirety.

Adichie uses Ifemelu's blogposts as a space and a tool to analyse the subject of race consciousness²⁹ in America and to critically engage with the differences that Ifemelu witnesses between all races in America; most significantly between African-Americans and Africans in America. Ifemelu's analysis of the race dynamic in America offers the reader an important insight into the perspective of an outsider. The blog also allows Adichie to further unpack and deconstruct those perceived differences between the African-American experience and the African in America within her novel: something that directly involves Ifemelu as a character. In a blogpost titled *To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby*, Ifemelu posits that one of the unifying factors between African-Americans and Africans in America is that—as far as white American society is concerned—there is little difference between them: 'Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care' (Adichie 2013:220). As a result of the stigma associated with being black in America, Ifemelu also brings to the

²⁹ "As a descriptive term, race consciousness conveys the ways in which "whiteness" and "blackness" are noticed (or not noticed)" (Balfour 1998:347).

fore the issues around the rejection of a complete black identity and heritage by some in America: ‘many American blacks proudly say they have some “Indian.” Which means Thank God We Are Not Full-Blooded Negroes’ (Ibid.213). This attempt to separate themselves from an African-American identity comes from a desire to move away from feeling like “...a problem?” (Du Bois 1994:1).

In contrast to earlier narratives in Nigerian novels where the image of the self-abasing immigrant has at times been common, Ifemelu’s blog observations and experiences encourage her to challenge that reordering of identity and instead embrace her Igbo, Nigerian and African identity (in that order) whilst living in America. Consequently, she begins to feel like an outsider and also experiences her own sense of ‘unbelonging’, as a result of the distance from her family and friends who are still living in Nigeria. Ifemelu’s feelings of ‘unbelonging’ also manifest themselves in an overbearing sense of loneliness and isolation, which is quite a common narrative in Nigerian novels with a thematic focus on characters living in the diaspora. This is because Nigerians—as well as many African countries—are used to being part of a community, which they do not always feel a part of when outside of their home country. This is especially the case if the destination of their new home does not have an established community of expats from their country of birth. Despite their being differences in the way that African expats and African-Americans experience life in America, there is still often an unspoken kinship felt amongst Africans and between Africans and African-Americans. This narrative is present not only in Adichie’s *Americanah* but also many other contemporary African novels such as Ike Oguine’s *A Squatters Tale* (first published in 2000). Ifemelu is further witness to this complex dynamic when she begins her university life in America and those similarities and differences between the African-American experience is better explained to her:

‘Try and make friends with our African American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your

perspective. Always attend African Students Association meetings, but if you must, you can also try the Black Student Union. Please note that in general, African Americans go to the Black Student Union and Africans go to the African Students Association. Sometimes it overlaps but not a lot. The Africans who go to BSU are those with no confidence who are quick to tell you 'I am originally from Kenya' even though Kenya just pops out the minute they open their mouths. The African Americans who come to our meetings are the ones who write poems about Mother Africa and think every African is a Nubian queen. If an African American calls you a Mandingo or a booty scratcher, he is insulting you for being African. Some will ask you annoying questions about Africa, but others will connect with you. You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals, Koreans, Indians, Brazilians, whatever, than with Americans both black and white. Many of the internationals understand the trauma of trying to get an American visa and that is a good place to start a friendship' (Adichie 2013:140-141)

This example comes from a university induction that Ifemelu attends and what is significant to take from this example is the knowledge that in much the same way that African-Americans can choose to distance themselves from a black identity, they also have the choice to embrace or deny their connections to an African identity (this is of course not true in all cases). It can be argued that the decision of some African-Americans to distance themselves also comes from a place of 'unbelonging'. This struggle with a sense of belonging that many African-American characters are depicted as contending with, often presents itself as deriving from the absence of "...an awareness of Africa..." or a history to engage with (Harris 2008:168). Consequently, connecting to an African identity becoming problematic. This would represent a "restriction" on their part and would also raise debates surrounding Du Bois' work on double-consciousness and as to whether there is ever a resolution to this.

The relationship and connection between Africans ex-patriots living in America is more often than not depicted Adichie's novel as being different to the connection between Africans and African-Americans. Ifemelu's third love interest in the novel, Blaine, is an African-American lecturer, who is also not blind to the differences between the two. He experiences feelings of jealousy towards a visiting professor from Africa

when he witnesses the professor and Ifemelu sharing a special bond that Blaine feels he can never have with Ifemelu (Adichie 2013:339). This, at times, places a barrier between the two characters; one that is arguably created more by Blaine than Ifemelu. This can be read as a feeling of resentment that is directed towards an experience that Blaine may feel is unattainable as a result of being an African-American. A further example of this in the novel takes place very early on in the story when Ifemelu goes to the hair salon before her return to Nigeria:

‘You from Nigeria?’ Mariama asked.
‘Yes’ Ifemelu said. ‘Where are you from?’
‘Me and my sister Halima are from Mali. Aisha is from Senegal,’
Mariama said.
Aisha did not look up, but Halima smiled at Ifemelu, a smile that, in its warm knowingness, said welcome to a fellow African; she would not smile at an American in the same way’ (Adichie 2013:10-11)

This further exemplifies that bond between the two people from two different African countries. The final statement in the above example confirms the idea that this action in the novel portrays a shared bond between Africans living in the diaspora. For Ifemelu, even Dike’s identity becomes a point of interest to her as she considers whether he sees himself as Igbo, Nigerian, American, African-American, an African in America or all of these identities:

‘Later, as Ifemelu left the meeting, she thought of Dike, wondered which he would go to in college, ASA or BSU, and what he would be considered, American African or African American. He would have to choose what he was, or rather, what he was would be chosen for him’ (Adichie 2013:141)

In all of this it is possible to see how those living in the diaspora develop their own form of an African identity and sense of unity with others of African descent. Inevitably this does affect how Ifemelu views her own sense of identity and locality, not only whilst she is in America, but also when she returns to Nigeria. She accepts her status as a visitor, as well as the fluidity of her identity as an Igbo, a Nigerian, an African and black woman.

Whilst Ifemelu's relationship with American society affords her a unique perspective on white America's engagement with black America, Dike, despite being born in Nigeria, does find himself able to occupy the same position on the fringes of American society. It appears as though, as a character, Dike is used by Adichie to question that categorisation of the African-American and the African in America, knowing that although Dike is raised in America, he maintains a direct link to an African identity, meaning that labelling him as African-American becomes problematic. An example of Dike's engagement with white America's relationship with black identities in the country can be seen when he goes away to camp with his school and returns home somewhat despondent and quiet. When asked what is upsetting him, Dike tells Ifemelu: 'my group leader, Haley? She gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn't give me any. She said I didn't need it' (Adichie 2013:183). The actions of the group leader become a symbolic representation of American society as a whole; embodying those misconceptions born of 'othering' that subsequently become widely held truths. Consequently, the camp leader's actions become a microcosm of the control that white America still has over 'black bodies', bringing about the subsequent distortion of Dike's sense of locality and belonging to an American identity (Coates 2015).

This example, as well as many others in Adichie's novel, also link back to Aunt Uju's desire to control Dike's experience of growing up in America. Dike's experience of the camp leader's ignorance further demonstrates to the reader why Dike's mother would carry such a fear with her in relation to her son's engagement with American society. James Baldwin argues that:

"Those Negro parents who spend their days trembling for their children and the rest of their time praying that their children have not been too badly damaged inside, are not doing this out of 'ideals' or 'convictions' or because they are in the grip of a perverse desire to send their children where 'they are not wanted'" (Baldwin 1991:91-92)

Here Baldwin highlights the reality of the fear that the parents of "black" children growing up in America have about the long-term effects on their

children, living in a space where they are unwanted. It can be argued that it is somewhat irrelevant at this point as to whether or not Dike believes that he needs the sunscreen. However, what is important is his desire to be 'normal', which is evidenced in the novel when he states: 'I just want to be regular' (Adichie 2013:184). The use of the adjective 'regular', whilst relative only to one's own definition of what is 'regular', demonstrates how in his current space Dike's sense of locality and belonging has been determined to be anything but 'regular'. This again illustrates the concept of double-consciousness and how this fuels a sense of 'unbelonging' for Dike. It is also similar to Chester's experience of locality in Britain, because in both cases their skin colour becomes a "restriction" on their ability to feel a sense of belonging where they live.

Dike's experience at camp is unfortunately not the only occasion in the novel where he is subject to racial stereotyping. He is accused by his school of hacking into the computer systems, despite the fact that he is with his mother on the day the event takes place and states that he lacks the knowledge or ability carry out such a task. This is arguably as a result of his mother's decision to relocate the family to the suburbs, causing Dike to be placed in an environment that has little to not exposure to non-white Americans:

'I don't even know *how* to hack,' Dike said drily.
'Why would they do this sort of rubbish?' Ifemelu asked.
Later, he told her how his friends would say. 'Hey, Dike, got some weed?' and how funny it was. He told her about the pastor at church, a white woman, who had said hello to all the other kids but when she came to him, she said, 'What's up, bro?' 'I feel like I have vegetables instead of ears, like large broccoli sticking out of my head,' he said, laughing. 'So of course it had to be me that hacked into the school network' (Adichie 2013:349)

Dike's experience in the example above with the female priest echoes similar instances of ignorance and racial stereotyping to that of the camp leader. Here again Adichie frames the experience of living in a society driven by a knowledge system based on misconceptions, further evidencing those extensively fabricated differences between the Oriental and the Occidental (Said 2003; Said 1994). In the context of Dike's sense

of locality, his “relationships” with those around him continues a process of ‘othering’ him and consequently, perpetuates his feeling of ‘unbelonging’. The dissemination of such narratives has increased through social media tools and literary texts, both fictional and non-fictional³⁰. Such increases in the visibility of these narratives, further highlights the importance of Adichie’s engagement with the experience of the African-American and the African in America; her portrayal of the legacy of slavery and the control of black bodies by white America.

Dike’s interaction with his identity is two-fold in the novel. This is because he has to contend with the way that the society in which he lives in views him, versus the way that his mother wants him to view himself:

‘Do you remember when Dike was telling you something and he said ‘we black folk’ and you told him ‘you are not black?’” she asked Auntu Uju...’ ‘Yes, I remember.’
‘You should not have done that.’
‘You know what I meant. I didn’t want him to start behaving like those people and thinking that everything that happens to him is because he’s black.’
‘You told him what he wasn’t but you didn’t tell him what he was’
(Adichie 2013:380)

Here we see, once again, that Auntu Uju’s attempts to separate Dike as an African rather than an African-American. Not only does this give Dike an additional dynamic to his identity that only results in fuelling his sense of ‘unbelonging’, but it does not shield him from the experience of being racialized in America as black.

After Ifemelu makes a permanent return to Nigeria, Dike’s desire to visit the country of his birth grows. His intention, clearly, is to better understand his identity. Upon arrival in Nigeria, one of Dike’s first reactions is quite significant:

‘But Auntu Uju bought Dike’s ticket and now here they were, she and Dike in her car, crawling through the crush of traffic in Oshodi, Dike looking wide-eyed out of the window. ‘Oh my God, Coz, I’ve never seen so many black people in the same place!’ he said’
(Adichie 2013:420)

³⁰ See Ta-Nehisi Coates *Between the World and Me* (2015).

Dike's statement can be read as an instant feeling of belonging. Read in this way it could be argued that I have omitted to acknowledge the cultural factors and assumed that Dike's only concern is being around other people who appear to be "black". Instead this can be recognised as a superficial sense of belonging. Although his later interactions with the cultural practices in Nigeria initially mark Dike out as slightly different from all around him, the superficial sense of belonging that he feels allows him to blend in, to experience a feeling of security and a connection to a community. This is clearly not something that he feels when he is in America; especially in the suburbs and more secluded areas that he lives in. However, his adjustment to life in Nigeria is swift, which is exemplified by his reaction to the lack of stable electricity: '*That's crazy,*' Dike said, but only days later he was going to the back of the flat to turn on the generator himself when the power went off' (Adichie 2013:423). By the end of his stay in Nigeria he says to Ifemelu, 'I kind of like it here...' (Ibid.425). This final admission of contentment from Dike demonstrates how his experience of return fills the void of 'unbelonging' and allows him to better understand his sense of locality, be that in America or Nigeria.

Black and British: Images of Afro-Unity and Belonging

The history of the African and Afro-Caribbean communities in Britain has carried with it any number of misconceptions surrounding the prevalence of racial inequality in Britain. Government led policies have encouraged multiculturalism across the country and have gone a long way towards trying to mask many of the systemic issues of poor race relations in Britain. There is an extensive body of work on Britain's colonial engagement with Africa, however, there is still a need for further research that focuses on what it means to be black and British³¹. Reni Eddo-Lodge suggests that "the history of blackness in Britain has been a piecemeal one" (Eddo-Lodge 2017:9). She further posits that as a result of African-American history being so "globalised" there is a misconception "...that Britain has never had a problem with race" (Ibid.55). It can be argued that much of the misrepresentations on race and racism in Britain has been as a consequence of race and class struggles becoming somewhat intertwined (Gilroy 2002; Sivanandan 2008; Sivanandan 1990). With the landscape of British history silencing or doctoring the presence of African peoples in the country, fictional narratives that engage with such histories take on an even greater importance. Although Buchi Emecheta is considered a Nigerian author, the longevity of her residency in Britain places her in a unique position and many would consider her to also be part of the British Nigerian ex-patriot community as well. In many of Emecheta's novels can be found a thematic focus on "...the identity construction of Black British children growing up in Britain..." (Cuder-Domínguez 2009:277).

In Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* we see that Chester's experience of growing up in St Simon becomes symbolic of that absence of black British histories in Britain. Consequently, Chester, like Dike,

³¹ Professor Paul Gilroy is arguably the leading authority on the subject of being black in post-empire Britain with texts such as *Black Britain* (2007), *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), *There Ain't No Black in The Union Jack* (first published in 1987) and *Small Acts* (1993) to name a few.

experiences similar feelings of difference and irregularity, which is something that unintentionally begins at home with his adopted mother Ginny. One of the first times that the reader sees this is when his mother explains to his sister Julia that Chester must be taken care of: 'Chester was different and Mummy had told her to look after him. No-one was going to pick on him' (Emecheta 2000:11). Again, the language used within the novel sets Chester's character apart from all others, highlighting the Otherness and distorting his sense of locality and belonging. His mother and sister are there to protect him, but in so doing they present Chester as 'different' from everyone else, thus setting the parameters through which other people will relate to Chester. However, these characters are not entirely assigned the blame for the way in which Chester identifies as a person: 'Chester could not remember the exact moment when he knew he was adopted...However, even at the age of four or five, he felt a sense of unbelonging' (Ibid.9). The older Chester becomes, the stronger the need is for clarity on both a sense of self- and national identity:

"It has long been recognised that a person's identification with nation begins to take root in childhood. Childhood experience is commonly taken to be the bedrock upon which self-identity is built, and national consciousness is regarded by many as a key foundation of a modern person's identity" (Drakeford, Dicks and Scourfield 2006:1)

In the case of Chester, his relationship with a national identity is problematic. On one hand, there is a British identity that he wishes to belong to but one that may never fully be his. On the other hand, a Nigerian identity, which presents itself in a similar form to that of a British identity, familiar yet somewhat alien to him. In the latter part of the novel when Chester is transitioning into adulthood, it is this long felt sense of 'unbelonging' that drives Chester to want to see for himself, his origins and ancestral home. He does so not because he believes that the Arlingtons do not love him, but simply because he feels it imperative in order to better understand himself. Emecheta frames the necessity of this action in the novel in such a way that the reader is able to see why someone like Chester's character would need to pursue the idea of a 'return'. Emecheta

places the focus on a need to be surrounded by other people who he feels are similar to him, who may share his perspective on life and in so doing help him understand who he is.

In Emecheta's novel the reader is presented with an alternative framing of a return to Nigeria than can be seen in Adichie's *Americanah*. One of the main differences between the experience of Dike and Chester is that whilst Dike returns to Nigeria and is greeted by family members, Chester has no known family members in Nigeria. Thus, when Chester arrives in Nigeria, he has to rely on the kindness of Jimoh's family during his stay. As a result, Dike is able to explore Nigeria with somewhat of a safety net, which allows him to be guided through this cultural experience with relatively more ease than Chester. Similarly, to Dike, Chester also finds it somewhat comforting that 'in the bars and markets he visited, people took it for granted he was African' (Emecheta 2000:115), but also that 'culturally, he had to admit, he was more English than anything' (Ibid.115). Perhaps one of the more significant differences between Chester and Dike's experiences, is that Chester goes to Nigeria in search of something specific. He blindly follows what he believes to be a calling back to his Kingdom, because at this point in the novel he still does not associate that place in his dreams with the storybook that his mother Ginny made for him: 'maybe the reality of Africa would wake him up and make him accept his life as it was. Why, for example, did he find it so painful to accept the fact that he was raised by white adoptive parents?' (Ibid.115). Chester's journey back to Nigeria helps him to redefine his sense of locality. Chester is unable to find the Kingdom of his dreams and after falling ill with a bout of malaria, finds himself in a hospital in Nigeria. He is saved by the kindness of Jimoh's family and wakes up in the hospital to find Esther³² sitting there with him. It is Esther who eventually helps Chester to realise that for now, Nigeria is not a place he can feel at home and that in actual fact he should recognise England as home; something

³² Esther is a character from the novel who Chester meets when he finds a job at the local leisure centre. She is of mixed heritage and lives in Liverpool where she was born and raised. Esther is Chester's love interest in the novel but can also be read as the antagonist to his search for an identity outside of Britain.

that Chester himself concedes to be the truth (Emecheta 2000:145). As a result, it can be argued that belonging has a strained relationship with both familiarity and choice, or lack thereof. Edwards postulates that:

“Belonging to locality is comparable to belonging, for instance, to a particular family or a particular past. It is through the expression of an inclination either to belong or not that pasts, places and significant social relationships are conceptualised” (Edwards 2003:148)

Regarding Edwards assertion surrounding locality and family, Chester arguably connects his locality to both his British family in the form of the Arlingtons and his Nigerian family in the form of the Ugwus (both of whom are adoptive families). Whilst their respective returns to Nigeria are very different, both Chester and Dike are afforded the opportunity to define their sense of locality and nationality. These returns answer some of the questions relating to their encounters with double-consciousness and in so doing, alleviate some of those feelings of ‘unbelonging’. Thus, Chester’s character is an important representation of the experience of being black and British in contemporary Nigerian novels. The significance of which, becomes for many readers of African descent, a transnational encounter with this character.

In Sefi Atta’s *A Bit of Difference*, Deola experiences similar instances of loneliness and alienation in London to that of Ifemelu in Adichie’s *Americanah*. Unlike with Ifemelu, the reader is introduced to Deola’s character at a point in her life when she has British citizenship and the privilege to leave or remain in Britain as she pleases. She arrives in Britain to study and then when she returns to Britain again as an adult to work, she eventually chooses to stay. Her lifestyle in London, however, does not on the surface suggest one of loneliness in the sense that she lives in isolation from other people. In fact, she has very close friends that the reader is introduced to at different stages throughout the narrative, some of whom are also Nigerian and some whom are not. Despite this, her loneliness comes from a sense of distance from the Nigerian community and people who she feels understand her identity and her

cultural nuances. This is arguably connected to her sense of locality and dislocation, meaning that one of Deola's "restrictions" is that of isolation not from other African people, but from Nigeria itself and what it means to her as a character.

It can be argued that the isolation that those in the diaspora feel is partially derived from the history of 'othering' in Western societies, causing them to be pushed to the fringes of those societies. As a result, those in the diaspora can at times look toward other African ex-patriots to form communities and nurture those unspoken bonds born of a shared history of being marginalised and oppressed. Deola's sense of distance is exemplified in Atta's novel when she finds that 'occasionally, she sees other Nigerians at the minicab office and the African textile shops, which can be comforting' (Atta 2013:18). The key word in this example from the novel is 'comforting', which again finds a relationship with a sense of belonging, community and one's locality. As a result, although Deola may not be considered black and British in the same way as Chester, she still experiences similar needs to feel a sense of belonging whilst living in the diaspora.

The two separate occasions when Deola lives in London are presented to the reader as being very different experiences for the character. In the novel, Atta continues her trend of giving a voice to the middle-class experience of Nigerians, both in Nigeria and those in the diaspora. As a result of Deola coming from a more affluent upbringing, her experience of living in London is in sharp contrast to a character like Obinze from Adichie's *Americanah* (whose experience will be examined in more detail in the following chapter). The description of Deola's life in Britain paints a picture of a more privileged experience of a Nigerian expat living in London than the more common tropes that can be found in Nigerian novels:

'When she was a student at LSE, she went out every weekend and how ridiculously young she and her friends were, living in their parents' flats, running up their parents' phone bills and driving cars their parents had bought them. They spent their pocket money on membership at nightclubs like Stringfellows and L'Equipe Anglaise

so they could get past bouncers, and threw raucous parties after midnight until their neighbours called the police' (Atta 2013:37)

This experience for Deola is one where she is part of a community, with a feeling of unity with those around her. This is not only because she is part of a student community, but also the Nigerian community in London as a whole; living through an experience together where they could understand each other culturally, both past, present and to some degree, the future. Deola's relationship with others in the African and Afro-Caribbean communities, demonstrates further the existence of and the need for an unspoken bond of community amongst people coming from these various countries as it does in Adichie's *Americanah*.

When Deola returns to London as an adult the reader is able to see how her experience in Britain is very different. Whilst some of her old friends from university still live in London and some have returned to their home countries. As a result, Deola begins to really feel that sense of isolation and loneliness; something that she did not feel when living in Britain as a student. Though there are still many Nigerians in London when Deola returns, they are portrayed as being a community that she cannot easily connect to:

'There is a Nigerian crowd in London that Deola is not part of. People who came in the nineties when the naira-to-pound exchange rate plunged. They came to work, not to study or to get professional training. They settled in Lewisham, Peckham, Balham and any other '-ham' they could transform into a mini-Lagos' (Atta 2013:32)

What is evidenced here is that whilst ideals of unity can be argued to bring African peoples together, it would be difficult to negate the existence of class differences amongst many communities, but especially ones that have established themselves in Britain. In the same way that physical distance presents Deola with a sense of loneliness, so to do the relationships that she has with her work colleagues and friends who are not Nigerian. She tries to accept and adapt to the social norms of her workplace, but it is often at odds with her Nigerian and black identity. She

recalls a time when ‘a partner in her accountancy firm commented that her braids were unprofessional’ (Atta 2013:63). Comments such as these only add to her sense of loneliness and reinforce the feeling that those around her in London—whether white European or of African descent—do not understand her. In her own words Deola explains to her friend that ‘it’s about...having a shared history’ (Ibid.60). This is in fact the key reason as to why she feels a sense of loneliness whilst residing in Britain.

Equally important to this sense of isolation that Deola feels in London is the cultural alienation from her Nigerian friends in the diaspora. Whilst Bandele’s contentious relationship with his Nigerian identity has already been explored, it is important to highlight that he is not the only friend of Deola’s in the novel who she perceives to represent the image of the self-abasing immigrant. Her friend Subu—whom she meets whilst at university—also creates in her mind this idea that Nigeria is a place to be avoided, almost taking on the Western perspective on African countries: ‘Naija is too tough. No water, no light. Armed robbers all over the place and people demanding money’ (Atta 2013:34). Nigeria is a place where Subu was raised and now that she has the safety net of choice with a British passport, she is able to put distance between herself and her Nigerian identity:

‘Subu, too, has a British passport. She refers to Nigeria as home, but she never goes back. She sends money home to her family and her mother stays with her whenever she is in London, sometimes for months. Nigeria, for her, is a place to escape from’
(Atta 2013:34)

Subu’s character, like Bandele’s, also appears to battle with her Nigerian identity. Where Bandele rejects it in its entirety—not even trying to claim only certain aspects of it—Subu appears to still want to claim her Nigerian identity in one hand but at the same time keep the reality of its existence at a distance with the other. These are Deola’s closest friends in London and the result of their apparent rejection of a Nigerian identity causes Deola to feel more and more alienated from them. In the end, Deola plans a return to Nigeria and in so doing she can try to reduce any further feeling of being

'broken' (Atta 2013:53) herself and look to mend her sense of locality and national identity.

As all the characters discussed in this chapter have different associations to their Nigerian identity, it is clear that there is no single narrative on the subject of the diaspora and their relationship to home (wherever they deem that to be). Whilst Dike and Chester both decide to return to Nigeria, Bandele does not. This again comes back to his tense relationship with a Nigerian and African identity, as well as the "restriction" that his sexuality places on him and a possible return to Nigeria. In her novel Atta continues with her didactic narrative style when Deola suggests that, 'every Nigerian she knows abroad is to some degree broken' (Atta 2013:53). It is an acknowledgement of the difficulties that some in the diaspora face when trying to negotiate their way through life whilst still trying to address questions of identity and locality.

For Chester, his relationship with a Nigerian identity is somewhat different. His sense of dislocation from Nigeria comes from having no understanding of what it means to be either Nigerian or Igbo, due to the absence of a Nigerian mother and father figure in his formative years. However, whilst he accepts that England is now his home because it is what he knows, Emecheta's decision to write into the narrative the return of Chester's biological mother can be read as a possibility to reclaim Nigeria as a home. Consequently, this becomes symbolic of the possibility of return for anyone of African descent living in the diaspora, suggesting that the cultural dislocation from those ethno-national African identities can be repaired and restored.

The example of Dike offers the reader an important insight into the experience of a second-generation (or even arguably a first-generation) expat living in America. His story brings to the fore many questions surrounding the construction of 'blackness' in American society. As a character, Dike becomes caught in a tug of war between the old and the new in the form of his mother and his cousin. Whilst Adichie charges Ifemelu with the task of arguing for the case of accepting the label 'black'

whilst living in America, she intentionally places Dike's mother in opposition to this argument in order to question the inclusion of African peoples within that same construction of a black identity, having not experienced that same sense of cultural dislocation as African-Americans. Through his engagement with Nigeria as a national identity, Dike's pursuit of an Igbo identity changes the narrative on homogenous national identities and places the African experience of ethno-national and supra-national (Bereketeab 2002) identities at the centre of the novel's exploration of this theme.

In *Ifemelu* and *Deola*, readers are able to see examples of successful returns to Nigeria, which is becoming an increasingly popular theme in contemporary Nigerian novels. Both *Ifemelu* and *Deola* do not leave America and Britain (respectively) because life in the diaspora is hard. Instead they both give up very good careers, apartments that they own and the life they have created abroad, all so that they can return to Nigeria and begin their lives there. Consequently, these novels frame not only a positive portrayal of the diaspora experience, but also a positive tale of return. The decision of these female characters to return to Nigeria can be read as a further example of women being symbolic of the nurture and stability required in the process of nation building. Their return suggests hope and promise for the future in Nigeria. The next chapter will explore the way in which those from the diaspora are able to ensure a successful return to Nigeria through their ability to secure a job and stable income, often at the expense of those who remain in Nigeria. In particular, the chapter focuses on the Nigerian youth, who recognise the necessity to carve out their own futures in an ever-competitive job market.

**Chapter 3 - The Arrested
Development of Nigerian Youth in
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's
Americanah and Adaobi Tricia
Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You
by Chance***

With the youth population increasing globally each year it is little wonder that adolescence³³ is an important subject matter in contemporary Nigerian novels. Since the advent of the Nigerian novel in English, the youth have continually been a present feature and topical subject matter in the narratives of both female and male authors. The storylines that authors have confronted through these characters has ranged from love, education, marriage, all the way through to ambitions of emigration, modern career choices and the questioning of identity in an era of globalisation. Whilst all of these themes would have brought about certain challenges for the protagonists of these novels, in recent years these youth narratives have changed. They now include characters who struggle to overcome obstacles and challenges in life that were not as prevalent for the previous generations. Traditional expectations of the progression of young people from youth to adulthood globally has been stunted by this modern development, leaving younger generations to find other means through which to allow that evolution into adulthood to take place. Whilst this has affected young people the world over, its impact has been felt differently depending on the continent in which they live; with Africa, Asia and South America being the most affected by this lack of development. In African countries, it has often hindered some of the long-standing cultural expectations of both male and female adolescents. It is this recurring theme of obstacles to the development of the youth in Africa that has become one of the new popular narratives in contemporary Nigerian novels.

There are several factors that have brought the world to this point; global population growth, higher numbers of university graduates, a shortage of salaried employment opportunities and more frequent shocks to the global political economy. In African countries one of the key factors that has exacerbated this issue is the varying, often unattainable, cultural ideals of adulthood (Sommers 2012:30). Sommers discusses in his book *Stuck: Rwandan Youth and the Struggle for Adulthood* (2012), what Mats Utas describes as “youthmen”, from which Sommers defines an

³³ For the purposes of this research, the definition of youth is inclusive of the age range of the early to mid-twenties.

adolescent male in West Africa, as “...a young man who is too old to be a youth but culturally still cannot be considered an adult man. This situation affects young women, as well” (Ibid.32). This period, which has been labelled “waithood”, has become an important topic of research in the academic community (Honwana 2012; Sommers 2012; Hansen 2015; Branch and Mampilly 2015). This transition is not necessarily linked to age as it often is in Europe or North America. Whilst the youth in those countries also sometimes suffer from a sense of arrested development toward adulthood, the expectations and time scales are different to that of their peers in Africa. There are also more state facilitated programs in place to help aid career progression and financial assistance in the form of unemployment allowances. In many African countries, a young male often measures his sense of adulthood—arguably also a sense of manhood—by his ability to support his family, begin married life and start a family of his own (Sommers 2012:33-34). An inability to fulfil this role is unfortunately a reality for many of these young men across Africa and as women’s transition into adulthood is usually connected to that of men’s, their evolution into womanhood is also hindered (Ibid.33). However, Honwana argues that, “...waithood does not affect every young African man or woman in the same way” (Honwana 2012:5).

In this chapter I will endeavour to discuss what I consider to be the arrested development of the Nigerian youth through the concepts of “waithood” and “choiceness” (Adichie 2013: 276). The concept of “choiceness” comes from Adichie’s *Americanah*, where the author posits the idea that this is actually a more relevant and representative issue in contemporary African countries than previous narratives of war, starvation and underdevelopment (Ibid.276). The conciseness of the description of the issue at hand makes clear its relationship to the idea of the arrested development of the African youth. I will focus on the way in which this subject matter is framed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009). The chapter will be structured as follows: I will first examine the way in which the cultural expectations of that transition from adolescence to adulthood have been framed in the literature. Following

which will be an analysis of how the novels have presented the experience of “choicelessness” and “waithood” through the journeys of the protagonists from these novels. The final section will examine the role of the Internet in allowing the Nigerian youth to carve out a career and a space—where traditional means will not suffice—for that transition into adulthood to take place. Contemporary Nigerian novels present both the male and female experience of this period of “waithood” and “choicelessness” through the lives of the protagonists. Two examples of which are Obinze and Ifemelu from Adichie’s *Americanah* and Kingsley and Ola from Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*.

Coming of Age: The Portrayal of “waithood” and “choicelessness” in Nigerian Novels

Kingsley

The first example that I will examine is Kingsley from Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, whose experience of “waithood” frustrates his passage to becoming an adult and his role as provider for his family. On the very first page of chapter one in Nwaubani’s novel Kingsley introduces himself as the *opara*³⁴ of his family: ‘Being the *opara* of the family, I was entitled to certain privileges’ (Nwaubani 2009:13 italics in original). As the story progresses, it becomes evident that Kingsley takes his role as *opara* very seriously. His sense of identity is almost intrinsically linked with that of the responsibility of being an *opara* and for that reason Kingsley’s actions and decisions throughout the novel are very much linked to this title. Throughout the novel Kingsley intermittently narrates the responsibilities and expectations associated with being an *opara*:

‘As first son, as soon as I started earning an income, I would automatically inherit the responsibility of training my younger ones

³⁴ In Igbo culture, an *Opara*—also written as *Okpara*—is the eldest male child of the family. The female equivalent is an *Ada*. The *opara* assumes the responsibility of providing for his family and his younger siblings, relieving his parents of this responsibility.

and ensuring that my parents spent the rest of their retirement years in financial peace. My family were looking up to me. I was their light, their messiah, their only hope' (Nwaubani 2009:28)

In this statement alone, the reader is able to gain an understanding of how much pressure Kingsley feels in relation to becoming the provider for his family. The use of the word 'inherit' here lends itself to the idea that this was always to be part of Kingsley's destiny. Arguably the most important element of this example from the novel—which explains why this is what he believes—is the latter part where Kingsley states that he is '...their light, their messiah, their only hope' (Ibid.28). Here Nwaubani frames very early on in the novel the experience of Kingsley's character, as a young Nigerian male, and how he responds to this pressure and perceived responsibility of becoming the head of the family. This added pressure would only stand to make his whole experience of "waithood" that much worse.

At the same point in the story the reader is also introduced to the difficulties that Kingsley experiences—despite being a university graduate—in trying to find some form of stable employment. It is his lack of employment that leaves Kingsley in a state of "youthhood" and when finding a job becomes increasingly difficult for Kingsley, he feels not only the pressure of needing to help his family financially, but also the shame and embarrassment at not already being in a position to do so at his age:

'Disgraceful that a twenty-five-year-old was still depending on his parents, but she smiled and looked tremendously pleased when I took the notes. Right there and then, I decided that the first thing I would do when I got a job was to buy my mother a brand new car' (Nwaubani 2009:29)

The pressure that Kingsley feels in relation to his role as opara is evident in the example above. The use of the word 'disgraceful' in this example can be read as both a scathing self-criticism by Kingsley himself, as well as the symbolic voice of Nigerian society, carrying with it the perceived perspective on Kingsley's inability to take on the expected responsibilities of someone his age. Read in this way, Nwaubani creates an image of a country that is unsympathetic to the difficulties that many of its young

citizens are going through. For some, this period goes far beyond the twenties age bracket, to which Hansen argues that "...the term 'forever youth'..." (Hansen 2015:68), is perhaps a more accurate description of this experience. For Kingsley, it is his mother's empathetic response towards her son's predicament that provides a counter narrative to the suggestion of an unsympathetic society in Nigeria. Once again, this brings to the fore the importance of the mother and female bodies in providing the youth—arguably the future of the nation—with a sense of stability and hope for the future. This theme of returning to the mother during periods difficulty is exemplified here as it is throughout Nwaubani's novel.

Under colonial rule, Nigerians were encouraged to enrol in academic institutions either in Nigeria or in Britain. Consequently, becoming university educated soon became a long-standing and important part of Nigerian culture. Nigerian authors dating as far back as Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Cyprian Ekwensi and Buchi Emecheta have all included this topic within the fictional narratives of their novels. Many of the ethnic groups in Nigeria have a history—which existed long before the advent of colonial rule and the era of the Atlantic Slave Trade—in which they placed great importance on the dissemination knowledge; most commonly through oral mediums of communication. These oral traditions have been an essential tool through which the youth are educated, as a way of maintaining the longevity of the numerous cultural histories and identities in Nigeria. It must be noted however that traditional modes of educating the youth have not been completely abandoned and is still prevalent across Nigeria today; especially in rural areas. During and after the colonial era it became apparent that those who were educated in European institutions were able to secure jobs in the civil service with greater ease, affording them the opportunity to secure a regular income and the ability to provide for themselves and their extended family in their community

In contemporary Nigeria, an increasing youth population with greater access to universities within the country and abroad has resulted in the unemployment situation in Nigeria hitting a critical point. Coupled not

only with a limited amount of jobs for the sheer numbers of graduates, the youth population in Nigeria are also faced with a corrupted process of obtaining salaried employment through conventional means. This is evidenced in an article titled *Rapid expansion but big challenges for African universities*, published in the *New African* magazine, where Ford discusses the death of 16 young people who “...were killed in stampedes outside recruitment centres in Nigeria among crowds applying for jobs with the Immigration Service” (Ford 2016:50). It is not an uncommon belief in Nigeria, that it helps to know someone on the inside, in order to secure employment. Examples of which can be found in Nigerian novels dating as far back as Chinua Achebe’s novel *A Man of the People* (first published in 1966): ‘A common saying in the country after independence was that it didn’t matter *what* you knew but *who* you knew’ (Achebe 2001:15). Through its narratives, the Nigerian literary canon continues to give life to this idea of partiality, which is evidenced in both Adichie’s *Americanah* and Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*.

Contemporary Nigerian novels have presented this narrative over the years in various ways. What is clear in more contemporary published novels is that the protagonists who are educated to a university degree level now, are not always guaranteed to find that their life will be made any easier because of it. This is intrinsically linked with the experience of “waithood” and the idea that for both male and female youths, the process of going from school to stable employment has lengthened and become “...more complicated” (Guest 2016:4). Within Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, Kingsley’s demoralising struggle to find a job post-graduation becomes an important subject matter within the narrative. Consequently, the author provides an insight into what those frustrations of the youth may sound like through the voice of Kingsley, who despite following legitimate channels to find salaried employment is continually rejected and disheartened by the whole experience:

‘There was no need to read further. I crumpled the offensive letter in my hand and shut my eyes tight. The wind ignored my grief and continued sucking the moisture from my skin as she hurried past on her journey from the Sahara to the Gulf of Guinea. I am not sure

how long I stood there. Eventually, I regained consciousness and locked the box. I wanted to weep, to run, to hide away somewhere, never to see anyone again' (Nwaubani 2009:22)

For Kingsley, this whole experience and the feelings that he expresses in the example above link back to his sense of failure as an *opara*. He makes clear later on in the first chapter that being educated and having a qualification is only half of what is required in order to find a job in Nigeria:

'But the way things worked in our society these days, besides paper qualifications and a high intelligence quotient, you usually needed to have 'long-leg'. You needed to know someone, or someone who knew someone, before you could access the most basic things' (Nwaubani 2009:28)

This idea of needing to know someone in order to find employment in Nigeria would not only links back to the example from Achebe's *A Man of the People*, but it also calls into question how anyone could be expected to find a job through conventional means of corporate recruitment. A city like Lagos, for example, is likely to be more attractive to younger generations of Nigerians because there are more salaried positions available (Mberu 2007). However, the increasing migration of people seeking this type of employment has resulted in fierce competition and extended periods of job searching that more often than not end in disappointment (Fox 2016). As a result, it could be argued that this problem has arisen in Nigeria through the advent of modernity and its effects on the construction of city life. Whether this is the sole reason or part of a composite of several factors, it presents itself as a national crisis and fuels division and disillusionment among the citizens of Nigeria.

Throughout the novel Nwaubani allows the reader continual access to Kingsley's inner monologue and through this literary technique the author frames the protagonists' perspective on his experience of "waithood". His mother's empathy with her son's predicament allows him to be quite open with her about his feelings on the matter: 'Honestly, Mummy, I'm just tired. What is it I'm doing wrong? I always pass the tests and then they don't want me. I'm really perplexed' (Nwaubani 2009:28). Whilst his mother does display empathy for the frustrations that her son

feels, Kingsley's father's responses at times demonstrate a disconnect between his generation and his parents'. Kingsley's parents are unable to relate to the difficulties that their son faces in finding employment, simply because they come from an era when a university degree could guarantee you stable salaried employment: 'It's probably just a formality,' my father said. 'The first three interviews were the most important' (Ibid.17). There is also, arguably, a limited effort from the older generations to actually understand what is happening and changing their expectations of their children's development into adulthood. Even the words and advice of his mother, offers him no solace or hope:

'She spoke with so much conviction that I almost believed her. In the past, these words would have been tonic enough to brighten my face, push out my chest, and lift my gaze to a more auspicious future. But I had heard this same speech, on this same spot, in this same snug proximity, at least three times in the past year. It was like some sort of *déjà vu*' (Nwaubani 2009:28-29)

This further exemplifies a shift in the value of university degrees and the ability that graduates have in finding work post-graduation. It also emphasises the repetitiveness of the experience, suggesting that this sometimes-temporal stage in a young person's life could be extended further should they choose to follow traditional routes of seeking employment. A change that, unfortunately, the state has not been able to keep pace with and consequently it is the youth that are suffering the most from this seemingly inactive and un-empathetic response. As Ford argues, the Nigerian government can take the first steps in reducing the possibility of young people experiencing "waithood" by "...helping to ensure that there are enough jobs for those who graduate" (Ford 2016:50).

As the story progresses, Kingsley's world continues to fall apart around him; the newest development of which is the knowledge that Ola (his long-time girlfriend) has ended their relationship and found someone else. Ola ends their relationship after growing tired of waiting for Kingsley to find a job, believing that he may not be reliable enough to start a family with. This is evidenced in the novel when Ola decides to find a new

boyfriend who is older than she is, already has a job and is able to financially support both Ola, her mother and her sisters. It can be seen here then that Ola represents a certain type of female character—which has often been depicted in Nigerian novels over the years—who takes a more non-idealistic approach to love and marriage. Her choice to marry someone who can provide her with some kind of financial security is evidence of Acholonu's arguments from her book *Family Love in Nigerian Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (1995), in which she argues that love in the African novel is a more realistic, practical and less mythical depiction of love than can be found in European novels (Acholonu 1995:23).

Ola's actions also affirm Sommers' suggestion that the experience of "waithood" is not exclusively depicted as being an androcentric challenge (Sommers 2012:32). Ola is not a passive character and despite breaking the heart of the novel's protagonist, her actions become symbolic of strength. When the reader is introduced to her she is still at university and makes no concessions on her future for Kingsley. As a character, her strength is demonstrated in the first part of the novel by her not only knowing what she wants, but by her taking steps to secure the future she desires. When Kingsley meets Ola again at a later stage in the novel, she is married to the same man that she left Kingsley for and perhaps somewhat bitter about not being able to find a job because her husband does not want her to (Nwaubani 2009:258). Had Ola been able to easily find employment once she had left university, she would perhaps have been able to maintain that position of strength and independence. Fox argues that "...efforts to prevent early marriage and childbirth, and to widen opportunities for adolescent females would have large social benefits..." (Fox 2016:34). Whilst Nwaubani's novel presents several characters that exemplify the importance of educating women in Nigeria, the author still presents women as being very much connected to the idea of marriage and conventional family units.

Ola's decision to end hers and Kingsley's relationship only stands to exacerbate the feelings of shame and embarrassment that Kingsley feels. To be an *opara* is to become a provider, and without a stable income Kingsley is unable to fulfil this role. This initiating action in the novel of Ola

leaving Kingsley becomes a symbolic omen of a bleak and frustrated future for Kingsley. In an attempt to reverse Ola's decision, Kingsley visits her mother to beg her to convince her daughter to reconsider their relationship, only for her to refer to him as '...a complete disappointment' (Nwaubani 2009:42). This blunt and candid response that Kingsley receives from Ola's mother becomes a sobering reflection of the possible perspective of those around him: 'for the first time, I wondered what my family – what Ola – really thought of me. Did they also feel that, I, Kingsley Onyeaghalanwanneya Ibe, was a disappointment?' (Ibid.42). Nwaubani shows through Kingsley's reaction the damaging effect to the male character's sense of self-worth when labelled in such a way. This is not uncommon in Nigerian novels, with the power of terms similar to 'useless' and 'disappointment' also being used to describe Runner G in Chibundu Onuzo's *The Spider King's Daughter* (2012) (this novel will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). In Onuzo's novel we again see the eldest male child of the family, Runner G, trying to assume the role of provider but failing to do so because of forces outside of his control. In both cases, the utterance of such terms towards these male characters is quite a damning and hurtful verbal assault and a challenge on their masculinity. The reactions of the two characters, in both novels, are symptomatic of the cultural and self-inflicted pressures that their role as eldest male child has placed on them. It also exhibits a lack of empathy and acknowledgement of the contemporary difficulties that young men face in assuming the role as provider, but also the need to rethink the expectation that only masculine forces can lead and provide for the family. Furthermore, it also exhibits once again how the mother figure is shown to be a point of authority, someone influential and a pillar of stability during a period which feels somewhat hopeless. Consequently, these interactions with the mother figures in the novel act as a national allegory, demonstrating that where hope for a solution or future is lacking, the mother is a point of safety from which to build from.

Despite the lack of a clear end to his troubles, Kingsley continues to remain hopeful about his future. Again, with his role as *opara* always at the

forefront of his mind, he comforts his mother to abate any fears that she may have about the future for the family: 'Don't worry about Godfrey's school fees,' I said after she left. 'I know the money will come somehow. I know I'm going to start work very soon. It shouldn't be difficult once I move to Port Harcourt' (Nwaubani 2009:107). On the contrary, despite his optimism, his fortunes do not take a turn for the better, with the situation seemingly worsening when Kingsley's father suddenly falls seriously ill and has to be rushed to the hospital for treatment. Paulinus, Kingsley's father, suffers from diabetes and whilst Nwaubani does not go into great detail on the experience of living with diabetes in Nigeria, she does bring to the fore issues surrounding access to basic services in the country. Essentially, what is portrayed in the novel is an image of a working-class family and their difficulties in dealing with what should be a treatable and manageable health condition:

'The expenditure on his tablets and insulin alone was enough for the upkeep of another grown child. And since his special diet banned him from large quantities of high-carbohydrate staple foods in our part of the world, he was now constrained to healthier, less affordable alternatives' (Nwaubani 2009:14)

Paulinus' medication is not easily obtainable or affordable, thus the pressure on Kingsley to assume the role of head of the family becomes even more imperative. Even Paulinus' diet has to be supported by imported and expensive foods, demonstrating a clear issue in the institutional capacity of the health care system in Nigeria; something that Paulinus' journey in the novel as a whole becomes symbolic of.

Shortly after being admitted to the hospital, Paulinus' illness worsens and he falls seriously ill, requiring immediate medical assistance, so Kingsley and his mother take him to the hospital. Paulinus' condition is critical and had it not been for the assistance of a neighbour, Mr Nwude, Kingsley and his mother may not have been able to get Paulinus to the hospital on time. Kingsley is also, of course, unable to deal with the ongoing costs of his father's treatment, resulting in him requiring further assistance. With no other options available to him, Kingsley seeks out the help of his mother's half-brother, uncle Boniface (also known in the novel

as CASH Daddy) who is by far the wealthiest family member that they know. Regardless of the outcome, Kingsley's inability to support his family can again be read as a symbolic failure on his part and subsequently a failure on the part of Nigeria as a country. This has resulted in an inability to afford young men and women, like Kingsley and Ola, more opportunities to build a life for themselves and transition into what they deem to be adulthood. Nwaubani's depiction of "waithood" and "choicelessness" in her novel focuses on the pressure which Kingsley is made to feel and the potential consequences of this on the national space, which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Obinze

In Adichie's *Americanah* the reader is presented with a similar experience of "waithood" when Obinze is also unable to find stable employment after graduating from university. Through his experience of "waithood" it also becomes clear that Obinze is an example of someone who is a victim of "choicelessness". Adichie presents Obinze's troubles in both Nigeria and Britain in a more condensed version than Kingsley's, as it only takes place across the space of one chapter in Adichie's novel. Arguably, what is most significant about Obinze's character is that his experience of "waithood" begins when he is in Nigeria and continues when he moves to London. Obinze tries to start a life in London only because he is unable to do so in Nigeria. What becomes clear is that although Obinze has a desire to live in America at some point, similarly to Kingsley, he is not opposed to making a life for himself in Nigeria. These characters consequently represent the future of the country and are a counter narrative to the brain drain in the country.

Whilst Obinze's inability to find a job in Nigeria is one of the main reasons for him leaving, it is important to note that even as a small child he had always dreamed of leaving Nigeria and moving to America and 'it had always been America, only America' (Adichie 2013:232). The reader is introduced to Obinze's love for America early in his story. However, it is

only when Obinze is living in London and reflecting back on his childhood dreams of going to America, that the significance of his dream represented actually becomes clear:

‘While Andrew was checking out, General Buhari’s soldiers were flogging adults in the streets, lecturers were striking for better pay, and his mother had decided that he could no longer have Fanta whenever he wanted but only on Sunday, with permission. And so, America became a place where bottles and bottles of Fanta were to be had, without permission’ (Adichie 2013:232-233)

The significance of this example from the novel is that it is evidence of the fact that to Obinze, America has always represented choice. A place where there are no limits to what he can have or achieve when he has the power of choice. Here Adichie demonstrates the strength of the concept of the American Dream (see footnote 22) to still present America as a place of hope and possibilities. Furthermore, Adichie sets the scene by framing the Nigerian socio-political climate and external family factors that show a wider perspective on the deprivation of choice, thus helping the reader to understand that the Fanta that Obinze desires so much as a child, is also symbolic of choice. Unfortunately for Obinze, his dream does not come true—well at least not when he wants it to—and he is denied the opportunity to go to America.

Obinze’s attempts to find employment are fruitless and he is met with the same frustrations as Kingsley, which arguably, causes him to lose his sense of purpose in a similar vain to that of Kingsley. This experience of feeling like he is drowning in this environment of “choicelessness” soon becomes the primary reason for him needing to leave Nigeria, regardless of where he will end up. Adichie sums up Obinze’s experience below:

‘She told him to find a job and try again in a year. His job applications yielded nothing. He travelled to Lagos and to Port Harcourt and to Abuja to take assessment tests, which he found easy, and he attended interviews, answering questions fluidly, but then a long empty silence would follow. Some friends were getting jobs, people who did not have his second-class upper degree and did not speak as well as he did. He wondered whether employers could smell his America-pining on his breath, or sense how obsessively he still looked at the websites of American universities’ (Adichie 2013:233)

This example from *Americanah* is very similar to the descriptions given of Kingsley's experience in Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. Obinze's confusion and frustration at not finding a job is made worse by the knowledge that friends of his have either found a job or been able to emigrate to another country. As a result, Obinze is witness to those around him being able to progress when he is not. Similarly, to Kingsley, Obinze also feels a sense of shame and embarrassment from his situation. This is something that causes Obinze to become more and more disillusioned, resigning himself to the eventuality that this is his future: 'He was living with his mother, driving her car, sleeping with impressionable young students...and sometimes spending days in his room reading and avoiding his mother' (Adichie 2013:233). Avoiding his mother is further evidence in the novels I have surveyed of the shame that male characters feel at not being able to succeed in the world post-university, without parental assistance. This again also demonstrates the connecting experience of both Obinze and Kingsley—in many ways Runner G can also be included in this definition of "waithood"—as young adult males in Nigeria, unable to progress out of this period of "waithood".

Whilst Obinze initially avoids his mother because he is embarrassed about his situation, in the end she becomes the person who helps him to eventually "escape" Nigeria and the perils of "choicelessness". She does so by assisting him in making his way to Britain as a research assistant on her own visa. Again, the intervention of the mother becomes symbolic of national progression, hope for a future and the idea of women making sacrifices and taking risks to continually nurturing the world around them. His mother is herself witness to those around her, from her own generation, needing to leave Nigeria in order to find stable employment, thus realising that this may be her son's only chance of starting a life of his own:

'...and here she was, behaving as though truth-telling had become a luxury that they could no longer afford. It went against everything she had taught him, yet he knew that truth had indeed, in their circumstances, become a luxury. She lied for him' (Adichie 2013:234)

The example above demonstrates how “choicelessness” can force someone to sacrifice his or her principles in order to survive. In the case of Obinze’s mother, the reader witnesses her own loss of choice in relation to how to help her son. Sacrificing her principles, if only momentarily out of necessity, provides further evidence to the reader the theme of “choicelessness” within the novel and how it is not exclusive to the youth in Nigeria. Obinze does not come from a poor family and during this whole period of unemployment there is no urgent financial requirement for him to find a job. Traditional narratives about citizens from African countries have been, and still are in some cases, that poverty and war are the main reasons that people would feel the need to leave their home for a new life in Europe or North America. The framing of Obinze’s experience in Adichie’s novel affords the reader the opportunity to reconsider that narrative.

Whilst I have already introduced and discussed Adichie’s term of “choicelessness” in this chapter, I feel it is important to discuss and engage further with the reasons that there is a need for the use of this crucial term. There are numerous reasons as to why so many characters in Nigerian novels leave their country of birth for a European or North American country. Often those reasons are linked to the belief that outside of Nigeria, there are more opportunities on offer. Included in this is the dream factor, where characters develop and nurture a dream to leave for certain destinations from a young age and this is often linked to the colonial legacy, which promote European aesthetics as something to be aspired to. Whether the intention is a permanent or temporary departure, the characters often leave by any possible means available to them. At the time of conducting this research there was in fact a rise in migration to Europe, where migrants have chosen to pursue dangerous and informal routes across Africa and the Mediterranean, in order to reach their destination. Many migrants come from Asian and African countries are considered to be “economic migrants” by European countries have who have failed to recognise that there are factors causing these migrations

other than war and conflict (Semmelroggen 2015; Rollins 2016; Rankin 2016). Consequently, they are either stranded in detention camps or vulnerable to human trafficking, often resulting in them being forced into modern day slavery, with few efforts by their national governments to repatriate them to their home country. In an article published in the *African Business* magazine in July 2017 Taku Dzimwasha believes that "...with the youth population set to continue to explode...migration will play vital role in giving young Africans opportunities that are not available at home" (Dzimwasha 2017:19).

During his time in London Obinze loses himself somewhat in the milieu of what comes to represent his life there. Part of this is due to a feeling he has that without the legal status, he is invisible. Obinze is one of two characters I have encountered in my research of contemporary Nigerian novels who is representative of the struggles that some Nigerians go through when living abroad without legal citizenship³⁵. Consequently, he is forced to live on the fringes of society, using other people's identities and doing whatever jobs he can in order to make money. Thus, re-enforcing the idea that he is living in a sort of limbo that could certainly be argued to be a form of "waithood". This has a powerful effect on Obinze: 'His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think: You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't even know how fortunate you are' (Adichie 2013:227). The image that Adichie portrays here of Obinze as an onlooker to a scene that he should be a part of, shows his unspoken desire to have choice. It acknowledges the absence of this and builds up the reader's relationship with Obinze's experience before describing in more explicit detail the meaning of living in a state of "choicelessness". Obinze knows that he will never be able to feel a sense of ownership over his life in London until he can be himself and pursue his ambitions, rather than having to choose more out of necessities for

³⁵ Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale* (first published in 2000) tells the story of Obi, who moves to America from Nigeria. Similar to Obinze, Obi has to rely on the support of friends and family living in the diaspora to survive. Due to his illegal status in America, he too has to take on jobs that he may not have considered worthy of his skills had he still been living in Nigeria. It provides an important contribution to the Nigerian literary canon on the subject of those living in the diaspora.

survival. This does not necessarily mean that he yearns for a life in the Britain, but instead one in which he is not suspended in a suffocating reality of “waithood” and extended “youthhood”. This is because—similar to Kingsley—without having the chance to start a career, a family and a life that he desires, there is no sense of that graduation into what is considered to be adulthood.

The reality of this is represented in Adichie’s *Americanah*, where several characters leave Nigeria, all in different ways and for various reasons, with the root cause for many of them being the issue of “choicelessness”. Whilst this can be seen in both Nwaubani and Adichie’s novel, only in Adichie’s *Americanah* has the situation labelled in such a way as “choicelessness”. Adichie outlines the substance of the issue in her novel in a scene set in London, where Obinze is having dinner with his friend Emenike and guests at Emenike’s house:

‘Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty’ (Adichie 2013:276)

The image that Adichie paints of a modern Nigerian (man or woman) who is escaping the perils of “choicelessness” rather than war or disease is contrary to how many Western media sources still depict Nigerians and indeed citizens of other African, Asian and South American countries who are trying to make their way to Europe or North America. It is unclear as to whom Adichie’s intended audience is for her novel *Americanah*, however the significance of a character like Obinze is that he offers Western readers a counter narrative to that of the master narratives that are a legacy of the colonial era.

There is quite a common narrative and perception in Nigerian novels that those who travel abroad to live and work must be living a better life than those back home in Nigeria; the reality of which is not always the case. With this in mind, for Obinze, there is a certain sense of failure of expectation in knowing that back home in Nigeria, people would be waiting for him to return as a triumphant and established 'been-to'³⁶. There is also an understanding by other characters in the novel that perhaps not everything is as perfect as it may seem; 'Everyone joked about people who went abroad to clean toilets, and so Obinze approached his first job with irony...' (Adichie 2013:236). This demonstrates that there is some recognition that this period in limbo can be part of the reality whilst living abroad without documented permission to remain in that country. This is evidenced in *Americanah* when Obinze is taken by his cousin Nicholas to see a Nigerian lawyer, who explains to him that he '...can still get married even though your visa is expired. In fact, getting married is now your only choice' (Ibid.230-231). Nevertheless, his stealthy existence throughout daily life in London would have to continue whilst all this could be arranged. In that sense, his illegal status forces him to take on a vulnerable and somewhat anonymous existence in order to start a life for himself, which Nicholas explains to him, having gone through the same process himself:

'If you come to England with a visa that does not allow you to work,' Nicholas told him, 'the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an NI number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin' (Adichie 2013:238-239)

What is important to note in this example is the acknowledgment and perception that life has not yet begun for Obinze, consequently also acknowledging the existence of "waitthood" in the novel. Nicholas is fortunate enough to marry his university sweetheart and as she already has her British citizenship it was easier for him to apply for his legal status

³⁶ Whilst the term 'been-to' is not explicitly used, Maryse Condé's novel *Segu* (first published in 1984) set in 1797, discusses similar themes of ex-patriots returning home to their places of birth enjoying "...considerable prestige..." as a result of their "...travels abroad..." (Condé 2017:148).

in Britain. However, even with this fortunate outcome his wife Ojiugo explains to Obinze that Nicholas ‘...only got his papers two years ago and so for so long he was living in fear, working under other people’s names. That thing can do wonders to your head...’ (Ibid.240). Adichie’s decision to frame Nicholas’ experience in this way allows the reader to further empathise with Obinze’s character and his experience of “waithood” and “choicelessness”. Even after Nicholas is able to eventually gain his citizenship, it would appear that he, similarly to Obinze, lost a part of himself during that struggle just for British citizenship and to escape a period of “waithood”.

Returning to Obinze’s experience of “waithood”, there are countless examples of him feeling invisible, scared and unsafe during this transitional period in London. I refer to this period as transitional because more often than not, there is no sense of permanence about his life without legal citizenship, however this is not always the case. In his quest to make this a reality, he meets with some Angolan men, who intend to help him arrange a marriage with an EU citizen. Whilst Obinze does not like the men, he realises that ‘...his fate was, after all, in their hands’ (Adichie 2013:227). These types of relationships require a certain element of faith within the quite evident distrust that they feel for each other. The Angolans are helping him to achieve legal status, but as this is done through illegal means, Obinze is held to ransom by their financial demands, once again, demonstrating the vulnerability of such periods of “waithood”. These characters provide the reader with a sinister and dramatic encounter within the narrative. Whilst this adds an element of excitement and suspense to the novel, it also represents a type of recognition of the severity of the situation that Obinze finds himself in. This is done through their decision to capitalise on the needs of people like Obinze and facilitate a faster route out of limbo. This is not to say that all those who have sought legal citizenship abroad are young or have done so out of a feeling of “choicelessness”. However, the novel looks to represent those young people who are trying to achieve legal status abroad in order to combat this period of “waithood” that they often go through back in their country of birth.

During the three years that Obinze spends in London he is constantly on edge, looking over his shoulder and suspicious of every action that other people take. Even when he finds a job that he doesn't hate and befriends his colleagues, the fear and edginess remains and is arguably heightened by him having to maintain the charade of someone else's identity:

'Nigel asked him to come into the coffee room, where all the men were trooping in, and as Obinze sat with them, all of them white except for Patrick from Jamaica, passing around the muffins and Coke they had bought with their own money in honour of a birthday they believed was his, a realization brought tears to his eyes: he felt safe'

(Adichie 2013:260-261)

It is for these reasons that I believe that Obinze's character is depicted as losing a sense of his identity in London. Furthermore, I argue that those who find themselves living in Western countries without official identification documents, experience an extended period of "waithood". This is because, whilst they may be able to source sporadic employment and provide for themselves, there is no stability or guarantees in their lives; most importantly in relation to their identity. In addition to the experience of "waithood", Sackeyfio suggests that Obinze also feels a sense of double-consciousness, which "...takes on concrete dimensions when he actually assumes a false identity as a route to legal employment" (Sackeyfio 2017:223). As a result, the reader could understand why he does not contest his forced repatriation to Nigeria, despite all that he has previously done to stay in London. He returns to Nigeria in exactly the same situation as he was in three years before, still transitioning through to adulthood. Obinze's character is depicted as understanding that it will take a different approach in order to make that final progression into adulthood and in many other respects manhood. Adichie's decision to frame Obinze's experience in such a way lends itself to the suggestion that whilst it is important that such narratives are told, there is no easy solution to situations such as this.

After living in London for three years Obinze is eventually caught by the British authorities and his return to Nigeria further demonstrates the lack of choice he has in controlling his destiny:

‘Are you Obinze Maduewesi?’ the red-cheeked man asked. In his hands was a sheaf of papers and Obinze could see a photocopy of his passport page.

‘Yes,’ Obinze said quietly, and that word, yes, was an acknowledgement to the red-cheeked immigration officer, to Iloba and to Cleotilde, and to himself that it was over’ (Adichie 2013:278)

Till now, the subject of forced repatriation has not been explored in such detail in contemporary Nigerian novels. Obinze’s whole experience in London is not portrayed in a positive light at all, but for some people it offers at least the perspective of one side of a story. There are many other characters in Nigerian novels that experience something very different to this. As discussed in the previous chapter, Deola from Sefi Atta’s *A Bit of Difference* would be the counter narrative to Obinze’s experience. Adichie depicts the indignity of his treatment from when he is taken to a holding cell, through to his arrival back in Lagos. The language used to describe the process of forced repatriation only adds to the indignity and idea of ‘otherness’ that still pertains in the West; “‘Removed.’ That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing’ (Ibid.279).

It has been shown in this section of the chapter that many contemporary Nigerian novels have a thematic focus that is pertinent to the experience of many young people in Nigeria and globally. The significance of discussing the themes of “waithood” and “choicelessness” in Nigerian literature is that it shows how Nigerian authors continue to add to the literary canon, works of literature that acknowledge some of the realities of contemporary Nigerian life. Characters such as Obinze and Kingsley represent the reality of the issue of “waithood” and “choicelessness”, giving life to what may seem in an everyday setting like a hidden phenomenon. It is also shown in these novels that women and mothers are yet again seen to be a point of stability and hope for these

characters. The adolescent characters return to their mothers for guidance when they have lost their way, highlighting the necessity of the mother figure and the need for nurturing even when on the precipice of youthhood. Consequently, the future of the nation is very much connected to women and more specifically, mothers. I feel it is important at this point to explore further how some of the consequences of these themes are framed in the literature; with both positive and negative out comes.

419ers and Internet Entrepreneurs: Carving out a Future

419ers in Nwaubani's I Do Not Come to You by Chance

The Internet has allowed people around the world to access information about new cultures, consumers, businesses and so much more, with greater ease. The increasing accessibility of the Internet across Africa has meant that there are more and more opportunities for African entrepreneurs and businesses to reach a wider audience. It has also meant that 419ers have been gifted with a new way of plying their trade and reaching more people to defraud (Olopade 2015). A complete definition of the term 419er can be found in the Nigerian Criminal Code, but Tive also offers a concise definition: “today, the axiom “419” generally refers to a complex list of offences which in ordinary parlance are related to stealing, cheating, falsification, impersonation, counterfeiting, forgery and fraudulent representation of facts” (Tive 2006:3). Over the years they have found new and inventive ways of defrauding people of their money, always managing to stay relevant and maintain a source of income. They have been identified by various different names across the years such as “guy men”, “OBT men”, “yahoo-boys” and “419” (Tive 2006; Olopade 2015). It is fair to say that there is no one that is not vulnerable to their scams because they target people all over the world, including those living in Africa (Tive 2006:4). Tive argues that there are logical causes to why these kinds of con men—increasingly now women as well—are still around

in Nigeria:

“By the mid eighties inflation began to rise uncontrollably. The Nigerian currency began to depreciate rapidly. Unemployment and other social problems began to increase. The OBT local scam began to attract more educated and proficient youths. This set of more sophisticated “OBT” men targeted Europe and America in their scam agenda” (Tive 2006:4)

The key factor that instigated this in the eighties was unemployment, which, as can be seen with the examples of Obinze and Kingsley, is still unfortunately a very contemporary issue in Nigeria and remains the most common determinate in the youth becoming 419ers (Tive 2006; Olopade 2015; Nwaubani 2010). Nwaubani represents this issue in her novel, structuring it in such a way that the reader is able to view this problem through the lens of a character that becomes a 419er out of a feeling of “choicelessness” and to escape a period of “waithood”. The image of the 419er is fairly consistent in most Nigerian novels, apart from what Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani portrays in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. The common construction of 419ers in Nigerian novels is that they are depicted as always there amongst the community but never really discussed or associated with, unless someone is related to one of them. Even when the topic of 419ers does make its way into the narratives, it is discussed with an air of disgust and a shared embarrassment for the people of Nigeria. This in itself highlights the importance of a novel like *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, which provides a counter narrative on the subject.

If we accept that Kingsley’s character represents a young male in Nigerian society looking to take on the role of provider for his family, then it is possible to also interpret his character as one that puts the wants and needs of others before his own. This certainly appears to be the case when his father is alive and a clear example of this is the lack of choice that Kingsley has when it comes to choosing his career path, as this is something that his father has already decided for him (Nwaubani 2009:15). I argue that Kingsley’s decision to become a 419er is also connected to this characteristic, as his intention from the beginning of the novel, as

previously argued, is always to be the best opara he can be to his family. As unemployment is the main obstacle to making this a reality, Kingsley eventually accepts an offer from his uncle to work with him as a 419er. Despite knowing that there are moral and ethical issues with this type of work, he does so in the knowledge that at least it will allow him to provide him with some form of income to support his family: something he has been unable to do by searching for employment through conventional means.

The significance of Kingsley's decision to work for his uncle is that it presents the reader with the dangers that "choicelessness" can cause and the consequences of finding ways to escape this, by any means necessary. However, the actuality of making that decision is not as simple as that. His uncle's initial attempts to recruit Kingsley into his business—which takes place whilst his father is still alive—are somewhat unsuccessful:

'Uncle Boniface, my father might be poor,' I said with rising anger, 'but at least he will always be remembered for his honesty.'
'Is honesty an achievement? Personality is one thing, achievement is another thing altogether. So what has your father achieved? How much money is he leaving for you when he dies? Or is it his textbooks that you'll collect and pass on to your own children?' (Nwaubani 2009:129)

In this dialogue between Kingsley and his uncle, Nwaubani frames the debate of morals versus necessity. Both in this dialogue and throughout the novel, the importance of financial security and survival becomes central to the argument between the characters. One of the most vocal characters who is in opposition to Kingsley's line of work, is his mother.

Nwaubani presents the dilemma of Kingsley's choice through the characters own assessment of the situation. Comparing the fortunes and lifestyles of both his parents and his uncle, Kingsley questions the choices of his parents as a result of the evident lack of fruits for their labours:

'My father was learned and honest. Yet he could neither feed his family nor clothe his children. My mother was also learned, and her life had not been particularly improved much by education. I thought about my father's pals, most of whom were riding rickety cars...about most of my university lecturers with their boogie-

woogie clothes and desperate attempts to fight off hunger by selling overpriced handouts to students. Yet Uncle Boniface—our saviour in this time of crisis—had not even completed his secondary school education’ (Nwaubani 2009:127-128)

Attention is once again drawn to the subject of education, when it is evident to see that Kingsley’s uncle has managed to make a life for himself—albeit through ill-gotten means—and yet Kingsley could not do the same despite his highly certified qualification.

Nwaubani goes further still in the debate, ensuring that Kingsley’s decision to become a 419er is not portrayed as being a facile decision to arrive at. Kingsley is still not swayed during this scene with his uncle and much of this is due to the knowledge that this is not a way of earning a living that his parent’s or society would applaud him for. This again is evidence of the importance of how the moral fight in the novel is framed and why it is key to understanding the role of “choicelessness” in all this, as well as the image of Nigerian society not being accepting of such behaviour:

‘Uncle Boniface, I’m sorry,’ I replied, bolder than any man had the right to be in the presence of his benefactor. ‘I’m not cut out for this sort of business. I’m a graduate, and I intend to get a good job and later further my education. I’ve always wanted to study as far as PhD level and that’s what I’m—’ (Nwaubani 2009:126)

Although Nwaubani is careful not to fully demonise any of the characters in this novel, for the purposes of this debate she does portray Uncle Boniface as the voice of immorality in the dialogue between himself and Kingsley. In the example above, again, that image of resistance by Kingsley becomes clear, demonstrating that the temptation would not cause someone to omit to consider the moral considerations associated with this, despite coming from a place of “choicelessness”. When Kingsley’s father dies, leaving his mother as the only one bringing home a secure income, Kingsley decides to take his uncle up on his offer of employment.

In the first section of this chapter I discussed examples from the novel where characters representing the youth (Kingsley and Ola) would return to their mothers for guidance. This continues throughout the novel,

with Kingsley's mother eventually becoming the voice of moral reason, constantly in opposition to the actions of her son once he becomes a 419er. Whilst the image of the mother figure as the moral compass could be seen as a regressive interpretation of women in the national space, it is still a relevant reading in the Nigerian literary canon. Ogunyemi argues that "though the portrait of men as impotent and irresponsible, dependent on women for nurturing and support, might be unacceptable to a masculinist, it is necessarily diagnostic" (Ogunyemi 1996:4). In relation to Nwaubani's novel, it is evident, as a result of Kingsley's actions as a 419er, that there is a need for a point of moral return in the novel. With the death of his father, the character that so happens to assume that role, is his mother. However, given the history of the mother figure in the Nigerian novel, it is important to recognise the dangers that come with "the romanticizing of motherhood..." through the "...symbolic equation of mother with earth and Africa" (Boyce-Davies 1986b:244). That said, although the reproduction of the singular image of motherhood as necessary conformity and enslavement (Boyce-Davies 1986b; Ogunyemi 1996; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Minh-ha 1997) is a harmful representation of women in Nigerian novels, there is also a danger posed by becoming too restrictive on what the interpretation of motherhood should look like.

Despite initially feeling some satisfaction from the fact that her son was finally happy at being able to provide for his family, Kingsley's mother soon begins to show her concern over the way in which this money is being earned (Nwaubani 2009:165). The more that Kingsley thinks he is pleasing his mother, the more he discovers that he is not:

'Kingsley, the only thing that can make me happy is if you get a proper job. You know I'm very uncomfortable with whatever work it is you say you're doing for Boniface.'
'Mummy, I'm working and I'm doing this for all of you.'
'Kings, if you really want to make me happy, you'll stop it'
(Nwaubani 2009:191)

Here, Kingsley mother can be read as symbolic of the national consciousness. Whilst there is an air of understanding in the way that his mother relates to him on the matter, she continually brings the morality

and ethics of his actions to the forefront of their engagements. Her position does not change on the matter and suggests to the audience that although the country is aware of illegal organisations, such as 419ers, it knows that the future stability of the nation can never be built on such foundations.

It becomes clear toward the end of the novel that the pressure of being a good *opara* and providing for one's family drives Kingsley towards his uncle's line of work, against his desires or better judgement. He begins to dread his visits back to his home town, knowing that he would have to face his mother and her disapproval of his line of work (Nwaubani 2009:189). Faced with the constant disapproval from his mother, Kingsley begins to question whether or not his sacrifice was all in vain:

'Was the sacrifice I was making in 419 worth it?
Did it make sense to set my dreams aside in keen pursuit of cash?
I could do without the eight-bedroom house and the driver and the
gardener and the cook, but how about the welfare of my family? My
sister could do without McVities biscuits and Gucci shoes, but how
about a good education?' (Nwaubani 2009:263)

Kingsley's dilemma here once again presents the pressure that many young men in Nigeria feel in order to provide for their families. Kingsley concludes that the blame for his current situation belongs as much with him as it does the pressure that he feels from his parents (Nwaubani 2009:325). Nwaubani's depiction of this experience offers readers not only a critical assessment of the expectations of men in Nigerian society over females, but it also demonstrates how female authors look to be inclusive in their portrayal of both female and male characters in Nigerian society. Furthermore, the mother character can again be seen as a point of guidance for the youth generation and subsequently, the nation as a whole.

In Charles Tive's book titled *419 Scam: Exploits of the Nigerian Con Man*, he goes into great detail on the subject of different types of 419 activities. Whilst the book appears to be written and marketed as a warning to unsuspecting people who may be confronted with such situations, it does provide quite a comprehensive study of the subject and useful descriptions of the types of scams that could be carried out. In the

book Tive claims that:

“The ‘Advance fee fraud’ is the most common type of transnational “419” scam. It simply denotes the demand for and payment of an advance fee in form of tax, levy, brokerage, bribe, etc. under the fallacy that such is needed to consummate the transfer of stolen money or money from an over-invoiced contract, the purchase of crude oil from Nigeria at a relatively cheap rate, and transfer of money left by a deceased person (will scam) or to effect payment relating to a non-existing contract” (Tive 2006:27)

This is evidenced within Nwaubani’s novel as the majority of the scams that take place are conducted in Uncle Boniface’s office, where they employ many of these tactics as a way of luring people into parting with their money. An example of which is Kingsley and Boniface’s involvement with Mr Winterbottom. With this scam Nwaubani depicts the lengths to which scammers can go to, when Kingsley and Cash Daddy travel to London to meet with Mr Winterbottom, posing as members of the Nigerian government. When Mr Winterbottom visits Nigeria for a second meeting with the two, they are actually able to use an official government building in order to maintain the believability of the charade. This is made possible because ‘World Bank’s wife number two’s cousin had risen to the level of having a somewhat fancy office in the building, and for a fee...’ (Nwaubani 2009:211) the two are allowed to make use of the building. As a result, the novel demonstrates that while the level of involvement might be small in comparison to the overall population, the opportunities for 419ers to perfect any intricate detail are made easier by access and assistance from knowing people in important places. This also ties into the idea in the novel of needing a ‘long-leg’ to get anywhere in Nigeria.

What then is the attraction of the 419er lifestyle? Given that the greater part of the population in Nigeria views 419ers and their activities as immoral, the attraction, Tive has argued, is that:

“These men are easily adored in the society due to the hardship experienced by the common man. The illegally acquired wealth makes them live a life of affluence in a society where prices of basic items have risen above the reach of the wage earner” (Tive 2006:16)

In actual fact, it is not the activities of these men and women that attracts others, but the lifestyle. This lifestyle could arguably be achieved through more legitimate means of working and earning a living. Unfortunately, those opportunities do not present themselves often enough to those young people in Nigeria who are tempted by that lifestyle. However, it must be made clear that I do not believe Nwaubani's intent in her novel is to present a simplified lens of choosing legitimate or illegitimate work in Nigeria. Instead, a lack of opportunities—especially for the growing youth population of Nigeria—presents the possibility of people trying to carve out a career or means of earning a living, by any means available to them. As Olopade argues:

“The scams are really about connection. It is no accident that the globalization of 419 has coincided with the spread of Internet connectivity. The late 1990s explosion of Internet cafés in sub-Saharan Africa created shared and slow but cheap connections to the World Wide Web. The most common offenders of the code remain young men who exploit this novel connectivity to make a profit” (Olopade 2015:18)

On the other hand, that connection to the rest of the world has also opened up possibilities for legitimate businesses to be developed and to flourish. In the city of Lagos “...the area now designated as Yabacon Valley (after Silicon Valley)...” (Egbejule 2016:74) is looking to rival its American counterpart and become the next digital hub of the world. Areas like Yabacon Valley can be found in other African countries too, such as Rwanda, where grass roots businesses are finding ways to take advantage of the digital revolution. Knowing that there are increasing numbers of legitimate opportunities being created in order to take advantage of the digital landscape and carve out careers for people, young and old, it begs a further line of questioning as to what other factors could be involved that would cause someone to choose one path over the other.

As discussed, Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* goes some way toward examining these questions. Within the novel, she presents the real dangers that are posed from high unemployment, a lack

of opportunities post-university, as well as initial access to basic and higher education. As shown, Kingsley is led to this line of work through circumstance and the pressure he feels to fulfil his role as opara. However, once initiated into that lifestyle, he marvels at the next generation of 419ers that have pursued this lifestyle not out of necessity, but because they saw what kind of a life they could have and made a conscious choice to pursue such activities:

‘There was a youthful passion they brought to the work that was almost beautiful to watch, a pure zeal that was not tinged by desperation. Unlike for most of us, who were nudged into this business by circumstances, 419 was a choice they had made simply by aspiring to be like their role models’ (Nwaubani 2009:297)

Trying to convince people that there is another way other than fraudulent activity is hard enough when those people are coming from more deprived backgrounds. In an article written for CCN.com titled *Reforming Nigeria’s ‘419’ email scammers*, Nwaubani suggests that there is little incentive to turn away from a life of 419 activity: “No wonder the many 419 scammers – for whom the [spectre] of a destitute and unfulfilled future is a daily terror – don’t appear ready to budge from their fraudulent ways” (Nwaubani 2010). Trying to convince someone with that same line of reasoning—when they are already in a position to choose an alternative way—that is already drawn to that lifestyle is an extremely difficult task for Nigerian society and the government. There is, however, a need for the government to be more introspective and proactive on the matter; perhaps questioning as to why people are feeling forced to make a living by such means.

Another essential point made in the novel, which also provides an alternative narrative on the subject of 419, is that of the work that they do for others in their country. As 419ers are rarely written about in as much detail as Nwaubani goes into in her novel, the narrative on 419ers positive involvement in Nigerian society is seldom told. Within the novel, it is Kingsley who draws the reader’s attention to the honest aspects of his uncle’s personality and actions, believing that, ‘In his own special way, my uncle was an honest man’ (Nwaubani 2009:203). This is because even though Uncle Boniface makes no secret of his love of money and desire to

be rich, he never forgets those around him that need his help:

'I knew, for example, that Cash Daddy was personally responsible for the upkeep of the 221 orphans in the Daughters of St Jacinta Orphanage, Aba. He tarred all the roads in my mother's local community. He dug boreholes, installed streetlights, built a primary health care centre. Just two days ago, I received a letter from the Old Boys' Association of my secondary school requesting my contribution towards a new classroom block. I replied immediately to say that I would fund the whole project. I knew what it felt like to endure classrooms that had no windows, no doors, and no tiles on the floors, just because the complete funds pledged towards the project had not yet been collected' (Nwaubani 2009:226)

Here again, Nwaubani highlights the generosity of some 419ers and their attempts to look after those in their community by, for example, assisting with children's school fees. It is all a part of the cultural similarity, across many of the ethnic groups, which encourages a sense of community. Those who have, are expected to assist those who have-not. What this example above depicts is that—similar to the belief that it is wrong to take from your own people—having first-hand experience of knowing what it is like to suffer in Nigeria as a have-not or to witness this, is another reason why those with money choose to assist others in their community.

Even the idea of having young men and women working for you as a 419er, could be read as a form of assistance to the community. This can be argued by analysing the actions of characters like Uncle Boniface, who offer more people an opportunity to provide for their family and their community:

'They're all working for me.' He thumped his hand on his chest. 'I put food on their tables, I put clothes on their backs, and I make sure that they're well sexed. And guess what? None of them, not one single of them, is related to me in any way... (Nwaubani 2009:124-125)

A further example of this in Chuma Nwokolo JR's *Diaries of a Dead African* (2003), which tells the tale of a succession of family members in a village in Nigeria, whose lives successively end in poverty and disappointment. The second section of the novel tells the story of Calama, who returns to his home village after his father's death so that he can bury

him. Calama is a 419er and he brings his operation back to the village and continues to work there:

‘Then I brought out my telephone directory and started showing my new apprentices how to set the traps. I used four letters, the oil letters, the contract letter, the ammunition letter, and the human rights letter. I shared out the work to all of them. Before the end of the day I had faxed one hundred letters and one hundred and fifty letters were ready for posting’ (Nwokolo JR 2003:89)

What is interesting about Nwokolo JR’s novel is that Calama’s character refers to these young boys who start to work for him as ‘apprentices’. The use of this term gives validation to what they are doing and acknowledges the experience as a way of learning a set of skills. He goes on to portray an image of these young boys plying their trade and learning the works:

Today, I spent the morning watching my money working. The boys were writing letters and faxing them all over the world. The bricklayers and carpenters were building the fastest house in Ikerre-Oti. I sat in the shade eating boiled corn and coconut and drinking wine. (Nwokolo JR 2003:90)

The comparison that is made in this quote to ‘bricklayers’ and ‘carpenters’ can be read as the authors attempt to validate 419 as a profession of sorts. Metaphorically speaking it also lends itself to the idea that from their work they will be able to build infrastructure in their communities with greater speed than the government has done. So once again, the temptations and reasoning as to why one would choose to go down one path over another, when it comes to securing a wage under these conditions.

Returning to Nwaubani’s CCN.com article on 419ers, the author regales the true story of a reformed 419er who returned the money that he had taken from “one of his former victims...” (Nwaubani 2010). The significance of this story is that it presents the 419ers as regular people and removes them from a holistic demonising image they have so often been associated with. Through presenting 419ers as regular people seeking a way to support themselves and their families, Nwaubani’s novel lays bare many open wounds that Nigeria as a country has. Such

narratives frame contemporary concerns in Nigeria as not being related to national unity, but instead state development and equal access employment. Email scammers, however, are only one small part of those who are carving out a living from access to the Internet in Nigeria. There is another side to the story, those of whom could easily be referred to as Internet Entrepreneurs.

Ifemelu's Blog: Carving out Careers via the Internet

As discussed, the Internet has been used for both legitimate and illegitimate reasons, which is a global issue, not just one that is localised to Nigeria. What the advent of the Internet has also presented in Nigerian novels is the theme of 'brain-gain' as opposed to earlier narratives, especially during the years of military rule, when 'brain-drain' was the common narrative. During this period, the thematic focus was on questioning the state of the nation, the government and characters being forced into exile—hence the term 'brain-drain'. The advent of globalisation and social media has allowed for those in exile—forced or voluntary—to keep up to date with current affairs at home in Nigeria, as well as contributing from afar to the narratives of contemporary Nigerian life. Its inclusion in contemporary Nigerian novels has allowed for the creation of characters based in the diaspora who choose to return to Nigeria—or for those born in the diaspora to emigrate—in order to build a life there. Seldom has this focus on social media influencing a return from the diaspora been included in Nigerian novels, however, Adichie's *Americanah* presents the importance of social media and the significance of its influence on Ifemelu's life in the form of blogging. Prior to this period, communication back home would have been done via letter or telephone and now, with the advent of social media, those living in the diaspora are able to have visual contact with relatives back home and they are also able to receive news and information about developments in the country as a whole.

Ifemelu's blog is symbolic of two key factors that support the suggestion of a positive future for Nigeria in the novel: the ability to take control of the discourse on identity and the possibilities of job creation through the Internet. There is no conscious effort on the part of Ifemelu to use her blog as a way of starting a career. Her initial intent is to use the blog to express her thoughts and feelings on what she witnesses as an outsider living in America. It is not until her blog begins to become popular and she starts receiving speaker requests that it occurs to her that this could be something worth investing in:

'Then an e-mail from the director of multicultural life at a prep school in Connecticut, so formal she imagined it typed on hand-cut paper with a silver crest, asking if she would speak to the students on diversity. Another e-mail came from a corporation in Pennsylvania, less formally written, telling her a local professor had identified her as a provocative race blogger and asking if she would lead their annual diversity workshop' (Adichie 2013:304)

What is interesting in this example is the opportunity that is portrayed as being presented through Ifemelu's blog. Adichie also adds to the significance of these requests and the level of demand for Ifemelu's work through the language she uses: 'the director', 'hand-cut paper with a silver crest' and 'another e-mail'. Unfortunately, her experience of actually attending the workshop and being a speaker does not go as successfully as she would have hoped. However, Ifemelu is eventually able to buy a condo and support herself financially on the proceeds from her blog; something that she probably never thought would happen. This is all until she decides to return to Nigeria, which is also a reality that social media plays an important role in bringing to fruition.

The blog is significant within the narrative of the novel and in the thematic intent of the novel. Walker Rettberg identifies the significant contribution that blogs have made to "...the history of literature and writing" (Walker Rettberg 2008:1), something which Ifemelu's blog demonstrates in *Americanah*. What several journalists have dubbed as the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" (Bilen-Onabanjo 2016a; Maina 2016; Adeyeye 2016; Bilen-Onabanjo 2016b) demonstrates the effects that growing Internet access has had globally and how it has changed the way that we view and

engage with journalism. Whilst it is clear that the around the world, blogs have become one of the most popular uses of the Internet by individuals, Kaye argues that:

“...perhaps what sets blogs apart from other Internet resources is their growing power to mobilize citizens behind a cause and to bring about social and political change. Blog users rally around bloggers as self-styled watchdogs of the government and media” (Kaye 2012:128)

Within the novel, the blog represents an opportunity to take back some form of control over the narrative of Nigerian and African identity. What that access to social media does for Ifemelu is allow her to witness others having successful returns to Nigeria; starting their own businesses, finding good jobs and generally establishing a better quality of life back in Nigeria. It also allows her to start a career of her own through the creation of her blog. Seeing other people return home like that would certainly have played a part in her wanting to do the same thing:

‘She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise’ (Adichie 2013:6)

Here Adichie presents an image of rapid growth and development in Nigeria and that portrayal of the ‘brain-gain’ in motion. Ifemelu, however, does not have ‘...a bold epiphany...’ (Ibid.7) after scouring Facebook and all the Internet sites: ‘...it was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her, and formed a mass that now propelled her’ (Ibid.7). These feelings that she has about returning home are important because it means that the image she has of Nigeria is one of hope; imagining that when she returns she will have opportunities and most of all choice. Her feelings also show how many characters feel in the diaspora have unexplainable yearnings to return home to Nigeria. This can be read as a positive image of the Nigerian nation and one that is intended to inspire a sense of pride for those reading the novel that come from one of the many Nigerian ethnic groups.

The portrayal of Ifemelu's preparation for returning to Nigeria is framed in such a way that there is no concrete reason for her decision. She has created a very good life for herself in America and there is no immediate reason for her to leave this behind: 'She had ended a relationship in which she was not unhappy, closed a blog she enjoyed, and now she was chasing something she could not articulate clearly, even to herself' (Adichie 2013:190). Adichie's decision to structure this emotional journey in such a way demonstrates the power of belonging and connection to home. At the same time, moving back to Nigeria is not a decision that Ifemelu is totally convinced of:

'She stared at the words and wished suddenly that she could turn back time and postpone this move back home. Perhaps she had been hasty. She should not have sold her condo. She should have accepted Letterly magazine's offer to buy her blog and keep her on as a paid blogger. What if she got back to Lagos and realized what a mistake it was to move back? Even the thought that she could always return to America did not comfort her as much as she wished it to' (Adichie 2013:188)

Returning to the discussion on "choicelessness", Ifemelu's lack of comfort in Nigeria presents itself as no longer being a problem, because she is conscious of the fact that she is able to leave and return to Nigeria as she wishes. Throughout the novel the comparative experiences of both Obinze and Ifemelu frames the two sides to the story of choice and "choicelessness". Also linked to that experience of privilege and choice for Ifemelu is her decision to decline the purchasing of her blog by a magazine. This is again in stark contrast to Obinze who could not find a job and as a result was in no position to refuse or accept any offers, both within Nigeria and when he is living abroad.

Whilst there are many other possibilities for job creation via the Internet, Ifemelu represents that very real and contemporary example of the youth's attraction to online journalism. With this, as discussed, comes not only the ownership of a voice—the fact that it does not need to be accepted by a news source first—but also the possibility of marking out a career and gaining experience where sourcing employment has become

difficult. Blogging has made huge differences across Africa, not only through giving the youth a voice as a profession, but also politically. An example of which would be the Egyptian protests that took place in 2011 where blogging especially "...can be seen as an evolving phenomenon that can be considered a weapon against the restricted flow of information enforced by the state to control the mass media" (Fahmy 2014:173). What is important in relation to online journalism is to understand when and how this will be developed and accepted as "...an alternative source of news?" (Yusha'u 2014:219).

The two examples of contemporary Nigerian novels discussed in this chapter are evidence of the fact that there is an important thematic trend in portraying the arrested development of the Nigerian youth. In keeping with the style of the Nigerian novel, both Adichie and Nwaubani use the contemplative voices of the protagonists to communicate social commentaries to the reader, which compliments the narrative style of both novels. In many ways, all three characters discussed in this chapter are unable, at least in the initial stages of adulthood, to find employment through conventional means. However, whilst both Kingsley and Obinze experience an unwanted period of "waithood" and "choicelessness" when trying to begin their progression into adulthood, Ifemelu is able to carve out a future for herself through blogging and her pursuit of critically engaging with identity politics in American society. The significance of this theme is its relevance to contemporary concerns and realities in Nigeria.

Kingsley's experience as a 419er demonstrates a negative but potentially unavoidable consequence of the issue of "waithood" and "choicelessness". Nwaubani's portrayal of the activities and motives of 419ers questions not only the morality of such a life but also the failings of the Nigerian government in helping to provide adequate employment opportunities that could help steer the Nigerian youth towards a better future. It would be an interesting development in the Nigerian literary canon to see this thematic focus explored in greater detail in order to further question such an issue, leading to a better understanding of the

symptoms of 419 activity. The novel provides an important portrayal of the difficulties that both the male and female youth experience in Nigeria where there is a lack of employment opportunities. Kingsley and Ola both seek different resolutions to this period of “waithood” and arguably regret their choices, feeling as though in many ways there was no choice.

The novel also brings to the fore questions surrounding the desire of many young people to seek salaried employment in the corporate sector, rather than explore possibilities in the agricultural sector. It is the role of the Nigerian government to try and help provide those employment opportunities for its citizens, be that in supporting private or state led business ventures that are based in both urban and rural areas.

Diversifying the job market offers not only a future for the youth in Nigeria, but also the country and allows the process of state development and nation building to continue to take place. Thus, Nwaubani’s novel provides an important critique on Nigeria’s inability to support its citizens but at the same time applauds the entrepreneurial spirit of the Nigerian people to find ways of surviving and thriving. It is worth noting however, that in 2017, the Nigerian Vice President Yemi Osinbajo—whilst standing in for the President Muhammadu Buhari during a period of sickness—has directed the Nigerian economy to place a greater focus on the agricultural sector (New African 2017:47).

Obinze, similar to Kingsley, finds that his experience of “waithood” and “choicelessness” leads him to make choices that he would later come to regret. As a character, Obinze provides an important representation of the contemporary economic migrant to Europe or North America. However, Adichie’s portrayal of Obinze’s experience of extended “waithood” whilst living in London—including the lasting psychological effects that it has on his cousin Nicholas—demonstrates the hardships that can also be faced in pursuing a life outside of Nigeria. Adichie resolves the migrant question by demonstrating that there is no one solution or ending to such experiences and that life outside of Nigeria may be just as economically fruitless. Some characters who leave Nigeria begin a successful life abroad and some do not. Obinze is eventually able to find work and begin a lucrative career for himself back in Nigeria, again

demonstrating that the future of the country is dependent on the youth being able to work and progress into adulthood.

In *Ifemelu*, Adichie presents not only a positive portrayal of a Nigerian youth securing a future for themselves, but more importantly, a positive portrayal of a woman achieving these goals. Adichie does not plot out an easy road for Ifemelu's character. Her experience of depression whilst living in America, difficulties in finding employment and general struggle to acclimatise to life in American society in some ways mirrors other narratives in the diaspora novel. Her subsequent insecurities about her Nigerian identity whilst abroad also paints a common image of an African expat trying to silence their identity to some degree. However, where Ifemelu represents a change in the diaspora narrative, is her engagement in identity politics in American society and her subsequent challenges to the master narratives on what society considers as beautiful.

In exploring the challenges of nationalism in Nigeria and the identity politics of the country as a whole, it is easy to miss some of the other significant themes of Nigerian nation building. The functionality of the state and its capacity to provide for its citizens is a very common and significant theme in Nigerian novels, both past and present. The following chapter explores issues surrounding class divisions, inequalities and instabilities that pertain within the Nigerian social strata. After economic hardship has befallen a particular character and he is no longer sure of his personal identity, questions are raised as to the necessity and benefit of defining a national identity.

**Chapter 4 - Memory, Locality and
the Search for Identity in
Chibundu Onuzo's *The Spider
King's Daughter***

Within the canon of Nigerian novels in English, the portrayal of class, has commonly been included as an inescapable subtext to the overall aesthetic intents of the novel. These narratives demonstrate the gap in living standards in certain areas of Nigeria, consequently highlighting those differences in access to basic human necessities such as education and health care. The framings of these divisions in contemporary Nigerian novels presents the reader with the idea of a country that is still somewhat divided. Whilst there are various examples of this within the research undertaken, this chapter focuses on the image presented in Chibundu Onuzo's novel *The Spider King's Daughter* (2012), which is set in the Nigerian city of Lagos. As the intent of this chapter is not define the multiple levels of the Nigerian social strata, for the purposes of this analysis, henceforth I shall use the terms haves and have-nots, to focus on the economic divide that is presented within Onuzo's novel.

The Spider King's Daughter (2012) and Onuzo's most recent novel, *Welcome to Lagos* (2017), both go a long way towards framing the pitfalls and possibilities that can be found in the city of Lagos. As discussed, many Nigerian novels depict a division between the haves and have-nots, but in recent years *The Spider King's Daughter* (2012) has offered readers one of the most insightful framings of the differences between these two groups in Nigeria. The novel tells the story of a young man called Runner G, who feels forced to become a hawker after the death of his father and the subsequent loss of their family income. Having once lived a more middle-class lifestyle as a child, this drastic change in circumstance is of course a difficult transition for him to make. It is whilst hawking one day that Runner G meets Abike, a young woman of a similar age but from an extremely wealthy family. The two characters meet when Abike stops to purchase an ice cream from Runner G on her way home from school. It is worth noting that at the point in the novel when they first meet, whilst Onuzo alludes to the fact that there is more to Runner G than one might think, neither the reader nor Abike is made fully aware of the life that Runner G once lived.

I begin the chapter by giving a short introduction to the history of class in Africa to frame the analysis in the first section, on the relationship

between Runner G and Abikẹ. Within the context of the novel, Runner G represents the have-nots and Abikẹ represents the haves. Their relationship and continual interaction in the text is significant because through the juxtaposition of these two characters, the reader is presented with multiple examples of how the financial status of individuals can fuel a sense of disunity in the Nigerian national space. In the second section of this chapter I will explore the link between memory and identity. I examine the relationship that Runner G has with a national identity versus that of Abikẹ, questioning whether there is a need to affirm one's national identity if there is little chance of moving beyond the state boundaries in which one resides. Inclusive in this section will be an examination of other characters who experience a similar drastic change in lifestyle, comparing the way in which trauma and memory can cloud one's perception of personal and national identity.

Marxism and Class in Nigeria

Given the subject matter of this chapter, I feel it necessary to contextualise the analysis with a brief introduction to Marxism and class in an African setting. Whilst Marxism³⁷ is a political ideology that was brought to life in a European context, it played a significant role in the battles for independence for many African countries. Professor Kehinde Andrews suggests that: “so influential was Marxism on the continent that the first president of Tanzania, Nyerere, created the concept of ‘African Socialism’ to apply the doctrine in the conditions outside of Europe” (Andrews 2018:182). Although Julius Nyerere has been credited as the founder of African Socialism, there were other prominent African leaders who were also followers of socialist ideologies, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Senghor and Sékou Touré. Kwame Nkrumah, first president of independent Ghana and significant figure of pan-Africanism³⁸, produced an extensive body of work on the subject of class and socialism in Africa³⁹. Nkrumah’s belief in Marxist and African Socialist ideologies fuelled his desire for equality both in Ghana and across Africa: “we want to see full employment, good housing and equal opportunity for education and cultural advancement for all the people up to the highest level possible” (Nkrumah 2006:119).

³⁷ Marxism is a political theory that was conceived by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (first published in 1848) and developed further in Karl Marx’s *Capital* (first published in 1867). The key aspects of Marxist theory focus on class relations/frictions and the way in which capitalism widens the gap between classes and encourages unnecessary poverty (Evans and Newnham 1998; McLean and McMillan 2003).

³⁸ “A movement, founded around 1900, to secure equal rights, self-government, independence, and unity for African peoples. Inspired by Marcus Garvey, it encouraged self-awareness on the part of Africans by encouraging the study of their history and culture. Leadership came from the Americas until the Sixth Pan-African Congress, in Manchester, UK, in 1945, which saw the emergence of African nationalist figures, notably Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, with a programme of African ‘autonomy and independence’. With independence, however, the concept of a politically united Africa was soon replaced by the assertion—within colonial frontiers—of competing national interests”(McLean and McMillan 2003:391).

³⁹ Kwame Nkrumah’s body of work contained titles such as *Africa Must Unite* (1963), *Class Struggle in Africa* (1970), *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) and *Consciencism* (1964).

As previously stated, Marxist thought was closely related to the revolutionary movements for African independence. Key figures of the time such as Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire critiqued the social structures of the colonially constructed African state; in particular, decolonisation and the legacy of colonialism in the form of the African petit bourgeois (Cabral 1979; Fanon 2001; Césaire 2000). However, whilst Marxist ideology contributed to radical and anti-colonial sentiments in Africa, at a state level, socialism was unable to dominate the political arena. Whilst there are currently no recognised African socialist states, there are several countries with socialist parties at the helm. Andrews argues that “although Marxism is radical, it is not Black” (Andrews 2018:183). Andrews further clarifies this statement by suggesting that “Marxism’s central problem is its relegation of the question of racism” (Ibid.182). Consequently, the application of Marxism in an African setting is somewhat limited to radical political movements and class related unionist groups.

Whilst Nigeria has never been historically recognised as a socialist state, there is certainly a long-standing history of Marxist and socialist movements within the country. Falola and Heaton suggest that “communism and socialism in their various forms increasingly appealed to Nigerian nationalists, who embraced the ideas of proletariat empowerment and anti-imperialism that leftist ideologies promoted” (Falola and Heaton 2008:145). Workers unions in Nigeria became some of the biggest socialist movements across the country, with the first being “...the Nigerian Union of Teachers...” (Mayer 2016:45) which was created in 1931. Although women often formed collectives across Nigeria that predated colonialism, contemporary groups were often aligned with socialist ideologies during and after the colonial period as they continued to fight for their communities and for national injustices. An example of which would be Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti who “...organised a protest against the water rate, as a representative of the National Women’s Union that she helped establish in 1952” (Ibid. 48). Other prominent political female

activists would be Bene Madunagu, Haijya Gambo Sawaba and Margaret Ekpo (Mayer 2016).

Nnamdi Azikiwe⁴⁰, the first president of independent Nigeria, led one of the most prominent national collective unions in Nigerian history: National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). Falola and Heaton suggests that whilst:

“the NCNC was not a political party as such...it was a conglomeration of many ethnic and social unions, with constituencies throughout Nigeria, that aligned under its banner, although its greatest support was in the south and its center of activity was Lagos. Nevertheless, the NCNC became the mouthpiece for the concerns of a broad swath of the Nigeria population” (Falola and Heaton 2008:145)

Azikiwe used his influence as a journalist and member of the NCNC to support unionist action against the government, most notably of which was The General Strike⁴¹, which took place in 1945. The General Strike was extremely effective because it caught the attention of the colonial government, who promised to take action regarding the worker's demands. The Zikist Movement, born of the powerful influence of Nnamdi Azikiwe's brand of socialist action, has been labelled "...the vanguard of the radical left..." in Nigeria (Falola and Heaton 2008:145) and many of these socialist ideologies still pertain in the country to this day.

⁴⁰ “Born in 1904, Azikiwe became perhaps the most influential of the new generation of Nigerian nationalists that emerged beginning in the 1930s. The son of a Nigerian civil servant, Azikiwe was an Igbo by ethnicity, but he grew up in many different cities throughout Nigeria, experiencing first-hand the cosmopolitan nature of Nigeria's urban areas, which instilled in him a sense of nationalist solidarity that transcended ethnic boundaries” (Falola and Heaton 2008:144).

⁴¹ The General Strike was brought about by “economic hardships” post-World War Two, which meant that the cost of living had risen but the wages in Nigeria were not equally increased (Falola and Heaton 2008:144). Effectively, Nigerian workers united to bring the country to an economic stand still.

Class

The construction of the social strata in any country comes into being as a consequence of the preceding history. In the case of African countries, Bayart posits that “colonisation, independence and national integration are moments in this process of social stratification” (Bayart 2009:62) which “...cannot be separated from the colonial episode” (Ibid.70). In the context of Nigeria, the period of British colonial rule, has certainly influenced the class formations that have taken place across the country. However, the current image of the Nigerian social strata, resembles something similar to Victorian Britain, where the gap between the upper and lower echelons of society were clear, with a smaller and less secure middle class grouping. Lentz has argued that in recent years there has not been a significant enough engagement with class theory, “...particularly with respect to the analysis of the ‘upper’ end of the social scale...” (Lentz 2016:18). The tendency to present the extremes of the social strata both in fictional and non-fictional texts in Nigeria, has been largely due to the post-80’s oil boom years, where the country began to witness a decline in living standards and the continued brain-drain of the country’s educated elites. Bayart highlights that “in Africa as elsewhere, the State is a major manufacturer of inequality” (Bayart 2009:60). Those who remained were those who couldn’t afford to leave and those who could afford to stay, despite to the economic downturn.

Contemporary portrayals of the Nigerian classes still include those disparate images of the upper and lower groupings of the social strata: extreme poverty, to extreme wealth. Mayer presents a common image of those with extreme wealth when he describes “the compounds of the rich [which] are now surrounded by 4-metre walls with barbed wire and electricity running through metallic fences” (Mayer 2016:22). There are also images of those who could be labelled as middle class but are often not explicitly labelled as such. Examples of these characters can be found in the works of Sefi Atta (see *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and *A Bit of Difference* (2012)). Lentz appears to suggest that there are two levels to

middle class, consisting of an upper and a lower, and that often images of the upper middle class are mistakenly described as simply the “elites” (Lentz 2016:19): this group could consist “...of educated professionals, civil servants, military, clergy and politicians...” (Ibid. 19). In the context of Onuzo’s novel, I would argue then that Runner G’s lifestyle, prior to his father’s death, could be considered upper middle class and Abike’s, elite.

The differences between the varying levels of the social strata in Nigeria present themselves in different ways. One such difference is the access to education. Education in Nigeria is very important and so access to schooling is made available from nationally government run schools through to expensive private schools. Härmä argues that whilst there are “low-cost schools” available in Lagos that are targeted at the poorer residences of the city, the level of quality provided reduces as a result of “...qualification levels of teachers, and quality of infrastructure...” (Härmä 2013:552). Consequently, the ability for anyone to elevate themselves beyond their current social level becomes limited from the point of being educated. A further example of the level of distance that can be seen between the classes comes in the form of transport: both public and private. In an interview with Rebecca Fasselt, the Nigerian novelist Yewande Omotoso says that she was an adult the first time that she had used public transport in Lagos, stating: “I had never done this before, coming from a middle/upper class background” (Fasselt 2015:237). These class differences relating to one’s use of transport can also be seen in *The Spider King’s Daughter* (2012) and will be discussed in the next section of the chapter.

One of the key obstacles in allowing for the possibility of social mobility is social security. Orji suggests that “...the economic depression of the 1980s severely upset the growth and stability of the Nigerian middle class” (Orji 2016:131). The absence of institutional measures that would safe guard the Nigerian social strata against economic shocks, places the middle classes most at risk of crumbling. However, whilst it is important to support the financial security of the middle classes, it becomes problematic to believe that the success of this social group is the key to

economic progress. Melber posits that “the role subscribed to the middle class(es) as a source of hope seems to be at least in parts of the literature bordering on wishful thinking, if not being an ideological smokescreen” (Melber 2016:8). There is also a need to understand how class status, middle class and above, is determined. Akinugbe and Wohlmuth suggest that the “size of assets” and “the capacity to save and invest” are currently used as indicators of middle to upper class social status (Akinkugbe and Wohlmuth 2016:71). What becomes clear then—and what is also demonstrated in Onuzo’s novel—is that the consumer centric aspect of capitalism underpins the definitions of the social strata in Nigeria.

The Haves and Have-Nots: ‘Othering’ in the Nigerian Social Strata

The setting for *The Spider King’s Daughter* (2012) is Lagos and throughout the narrative the novel frames an image of city life in Nigeria; juxtaposing the lives of two disparate social groups occupying the same space. Lagos, the former capital city of Nigeria, remains a central hub where many of the multi-ethnic qualities of the country are brought together in one place. It is a “megacity” (Obono 2017:36) like any other, playing host to a plethora of human stories, juxtaposing tales of anguish, melancholy and sorrow, with that of enchantment, hope, prosperity and unimaginable wealth. Onuzo herself has describes Lagos as:

“A mega expression of life, where humanity is condensed into a few square miles and the force and friction of all this jostling generates creativity and destruction in equal measure. Life, death, comedy, tragedy, joy and sorrow are all heightened in megacities” (Onuzo 2017)

Further descriptions support the idea of Lagos as similar “...a vibrant city of many cultures and languages, but also a dystopian space of deprivation, despair and dislocation” (Nnodim 2008:321). It is a city that has been written into the narratives of countless Nigerian novels, a trend that shows no sign of ending any time soon.

In her novel, Onuzo presents the differing perspectives from the two characters when experiencing the same situations by using italics to express Abike's voice and a regular font for Runner G's voice. The significance of this is that it aids the reader in understanding that the aesthetic intention is to experience the contrasting perspectives of the characters. A key element to Runner G's character is that he represents not only the have-nots, but also to some extent that haves. This is because before the death of his father he lived a privileged lifestyle and often revisits this former life in some of his memories (these will be discussed in more detail in the second section of this chapter). In this respect Runner G's character is used to give a voice to those who may once have been in a position of financial privilege, but who have then subsequently lost their income for whatever reason and find themselves in a state of poverty in comparison to what they are accustomed to. At a later stage in the novel, this is an experience that Onuzo highlights as being not uncommon, supporting the idea that there is a lack of social security for the middle classes in Nigeria. Within the narrative this places Runner G's character in a unique position to understand his interactions with Abike from both her perspective and his own. It also allows Onuzo to bring to the fore an example of some of the destabilising elements of the national space in Nigeria. Throughout the novel the way in which both characters engage with each other, is central to the narrative but is also used as a point of comparison with how they interact with other characters in the novel.

Entitlement

The idea of entitlement comes through in the novel in the form of the mistreatment of the have-nots at the hands of the haves. The exploration of this theme in the novel brings to the reader's attention a sense of social disunity in Nigerian society. It presents one group as being lesser than the other and as a result, suggests the unimportance of the have-nots to the nation. The reader is introduced to this idea of entitlement in the opening pages of the novel when, whilst walking his younger sister Jọkẹ to school, Runner G witnesses the mistreatment of a fellow hawker named Wednesday:

‘As she talked, I watched Wednesday, a regular hawker on this route, chase after a black jeep with his sales rack clutched to his chest, his muscular legs pounding down the road. The driver was teasing him. Slowing down and then speeding up, moving towards the highway with Wednesday's money. For a moment, it seemed like Wednesday would make it. The moment passed. Slowing down into a jog and then an amble, he continued walking in the direction of the vehicle, unwilling to believe that the owner of such a fancy car would steal. As the jeep sped on to the highway, naira notes, like crisp manna, floated to the ground. Bastard’ (Onuzo 2012:4)

The treatment of Wednesday by the Jeep driver described above, is a perfect example of that sense of entitlement within the narrative being played out. It sets a precedence for what is to come later in the novel by illustrating the mentality of several other characters: that the have-nots do not deserve the same respect as the haves. This evident separation of the different social classes highlights not only a sense of entitlement and national disunity, but also presents an intentional type of ‘othering’ within the narrative. The have-nots become the ‘other’ and therefore, occupy a position on the fringes of their own society. As a result, a sense of national belonging is not portrayed as being felt by those who could be considered part of the lower echelons of Nigerian society. This can be read as a critique on the need to affirm one's sense of national identity, suggesting that it is perhaps more of a privilege than a necessity.

To truly explore this sense of entitlement in the narrative, Onuzo focuses on Abikẹ Johnson and her interactions with other characters in the

novel. Abikẹ, similar to her father Olumide Johnson, can be argued to be a hyperbole of the wealthy elite in Nigerian society. As a character, Olumide Johnson represents what can only be described as political “Godfatherism” (Esidene and Enanga 2014; Bourne 2015). Throughout the novel his interactions with other characters portrays him as being somewhat cold and calculated. On several occasions in the narrative he is likened to an animal—predominantly predatory animals—allowing his character to become symbolic of the way in which the corrupted elements of the elite prey upon the poor. By creating such characters, Onuzo presents the reader with polarised representations of Nigerian citizens.

In the case of Abikẹ, her distance from other people that are outside of her world becomes apparent very early on in the novel. The first and recurring example is the way in which she treats Hassan, her driver. Even though Hassan is older than Abikẹ, she almost always addresses him in the imperative and often reprimands him like one might a child. It can be argued that Abikẹ behaves in this way because her elevated financial status gives her a sense of entitlement. The first time this appears in the text comes shortly before Abikẹ first meets Runner G, when she demands that Hassan speed up and slow the car down, in order to make Runner G chase the car:

*‘Can’t you follow the simplest instructions?’
...’But—’
‘But what? Don’t you listen? I didn’t tell you to stop.’
‘I no understand.’
‘Idiot! I said slow down’ (Onuzo 2012:8)*

A further example of Abikẹ’s mistreatment of Hassan can be seen a few pages on, when Abikẹ highlights his mispronunciation of certain English words:

*‘Don’t say eh? Say pardon me?’
‘Pah doon mi?’ he repeated, his inflections twisting the words into the vernacular.
‘No, not like that. Say after me: Paaaar-duuuuuhn-meee?’
‘Paaaaah-doooooooooooo-miiii?’
It was hopeless’ (Onuzo 2012:24)*

It becomes clear as the narrative progresses that Abikẹ has no respect for

Hassan and sees him, similarly to other characters in the novel: primarily, as her possessions. As a result, the reader witnesses how the traditional hierarchies of respect through age are affected by the contemporary social strata, fuelled by wealth and consumerism. Consequently, Abike's relationship with Hassan suggests a change in this social structure, and more specifically, the process of nation building in Nigeria.

Further examples of Abike's sense of entitlement and distance from those outside of her social circle are evidence in her use of language. In the latter part of the novel the reader's attention is brought back to Abike and Hassan's interactions. During a fight outside of Runner G's apartment, he draws Abike's attention to the way in which she treats Hassan, asking her: *'Your driver. The man doesn't have a name?'* (Onuzo 2012:169). This important question highlights to the reader the idea of being a *somebody* and a *nobody* in Nigerian society. This is a concept that is interlinked with the idea of the haves and the have-nots, inclusive of which is the use of the possessive in the language of the haves. Runner G is not excluded from this trend by Abike: *'He wasn't just a hawker. He was a hawker I was considering adding to my collection of friends'* (Ibid.25). This image of collecting people and compartmentalising them into specific groups also lends itself to the idea not only of entitlement, but also of 'othering'. Furthermore, it portrays the positions of power that those in the upper echelons of society have over the have-nots.

The theme of entitlement and the mistreatment of the have-nots is not simply reserved for street traders and beggars. The portrayal of the mistreatment of "domestic staff" by their employers is not uncommon in Nigerian novels. In an article published in the *New York Times* online titled *In Nigeria You're Either Somebody or Nobody* Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani highlights the belief that:

"In America, all men are believed to be created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. But Nigerians are brought up to believe that our society consists of higher and lesser beings. Some are born to own and enjoy, while others are born to toil and endure" (Nwaubani 2013)

Here Nwaubani brings to the fore the idea that Nigerian society does carry a belief that you are either somebody or nobody. It is this demarcation of those that matter and those that do not, which creates a space for 'othering' to take place amongst the haves and have-nots. Nwaubani goes on further in her article to pinpoint her belief that this idea of 'othering' begins to take place when faced with "domestic staff" or even "househelps": "the earliest indoctrination many of us have to this mind-set happens at home" (Nwaubani 2013). Thus, whilst in Onuzo's novel we are presented with a fictional interpretation of the mistreatment of "domestic staff", Nwaubani's article brings forth the reality of the situation.

Abike's treatment (or rather, mistreatment) of other characters in the novel highlights the uniqueness of her relationship with Runner G, making clear to the reader that their interaction represents something special. Despite this, their relationship begins in much the same way as Wednesday's experience with the jeep driver. Abike spots Runner G moving towards the car and asks her driver Hassan to '*Drive on*', '*Slow down*' and '*Speed up*' as her initial intent is to amuse herself at Runner G's expense (Onuzo 2012:7). Runner G also has no initial intention of wanting to befriend someone like Abike and in fact wishes to teach her lesson when he finally catches up with her car: 'Something cracked inside me and all I wanted was to spit in the face of the girl in that back seat. Stringy, phlegmy, spit that would run down her shocked face' (Ibid.10). On the contrary, he does no such thing. Instead, he takes her money, gives her the ice cream and then gives her the change, at which point he is pleasantly surprised by her response; 'Thank you,' she said. Words I don't hear often' (Ibid.10). This small gesture, despite her earlier show of entitlement and cruelty, is an immediate acknowledgement of his existence as a human being. Something that, throughout the novel, is not always afforded to other people like Runner G:

'I have grown used to the work. There are days when the rain is so heavy that the water rises to my knees. Other times, peoples' tyres squash my toes and often people call me and then refuse to buy. I have learnt to appreciate the few customers who treat me like a human being' (Onuzo 2012:9)

It can be argued that Onuzo's treatment of this subject in this manner is intentional, using the novel as a way of encouraging the reader to consider why this sense of entitlement and mistreatment of people like Runner G should come naturally to some of these characters. The more time that Runner G spends with Abike, the less tolerant he is of other people not affording him those same dignities and basic human rights: 'Sss!' she hissed again, beckoning. I waited till her lane was about to move before shouting. 'Didn't your mother teach you to say excuse me' (Onuzo 2012:175). Whilst a sense of national disunity is not explicitly discussed in the novel, such examples and interactions lend themselves to suggest that this is indeed a factor. Where other novels suggest allegiances at an ethno-national level, Onuzo's novel frames an image of class unity being in some cases just as important for some to find a sense of belonging in Nigerian society.

The Seen and the Unseen: Symbolism Presenting Difference

Whilst Onuzo uses her two protagonists to address the issue of disunity and inequality in Nigerian society, she also chooses to frame some of these differences in status between the haves and have-nots, through symbolic elements within the narrative. These subtle uses of symbolism throughout the novel not only outline the differences between the two groups, but also bring to the fore further visions of disunity in Nigerian society. Hierarchy, in many instances, is shown quite literally in the form of physical heights and levels. Consequently, this becomes a very important way that Onuzo presents those class distinctions between the haves and have-nots. As previously discussed, modes of transport becomes an important indication of class status and this is also exemplified in Onuzo's novel. Abike's car, for example, is a 4x4 and is therefore more of an elevated vehicle than say, a saloon car, which is lower to the ground. Before his death, Runner G's father drove a saloon car, further supporting the suggestion that Runner G's previous lifestyle would have been considered lower middle-class. Abike, however, is not

the only character in the novel with a 4x4. Returning to the example of the hawker Wednesday and his mistreatment at the hands of a potential customer. The use of a 4x4 vehicle there once again positions those differences in status between the haves and the have-nots through the type, size and elevation of the vehicle in use.

This framing of the class hierarchy in Nigerian society through the symbolic portrayal the higher and the lower levels of life continues throughout the novel. Within the narrative the images of those who live beneath and those who live below apply to those who live in the city and those who work for the rich. There are clear distinctions within the narrative of these people and an example of this is illustrated in Abike's house when Runner G is being shown around the 'servant's' quarters:

'As we walked, I peeped into the lives of these downstairs people. Their rooms were pristine, each one a replica of the last, each occupant dressed in identical uniform. Many came out to greet her. Finally she stopped at a door and knocked' (Onuzo 2012:107)

This description of Abike's house depicts a very powerful image of the social hierarchy in Nigeria. The use of the term 'downstairs people' goes a long way towards cementing that image in the reader's mind of those who are on the lower echelons of the social ladder, once again drawing on the idea of those who matter and those who don't. The image of the domestic staff all wearing the same uniform also illustrates that loss of identity, perpetuating the idea of invisibility of those who are considered to have little social importance. This further exemplifies the disunity in the national space in Nigeria and highlights who are the haves are and who are the have-nots. Moreover, this can be seen much later in the novel when Runner G goes looking for Mr T (a beggar that he befriends when working as a hawker) under the bridge. Runner G's time away from the city, spent with Abike, causes him to look at his surroundings with a fresh sense of hopelessness for both the people around him and himself: 'The same boys were still playing football under the far corner of the bridge. Their talent would never be seen by the scouts from abroad. All this was happening beneath the people who mattered' (Onuzo 2012:244). Once again, the same grouping of those that matter being the ones on top and those that

don't being those that are kept hidden away underneath everyone else.

Onuzo continues to frame the differences between Runner G and Abike's worlds through her descriptions of life in Mile 12. One such example is the personification of the 'trash' in Mile 12, which Runner G uses as a way of illustrating the level of poverty and frustration that those in his neighbourhood, as well as others like them, endure:

'Even the garbage wants to escape from my neighbourhood. At the end of each day, people pile their rubbish on to the side of the road and the next morning, you see the sweet wrappers and banana skins a few metres from where you left them, slowly being carried to their freedom by people's unsuspecting feet. Oh, to be trash'
(Onuzo 2012:53-54)

The personification of the trash here lends itself to the idea that everyone and everything is trying to 'escape' the kind of life of that the have-nots live. It looks to invoke a certain reaction from the reader, asking them to consider how bad things must be for those living there when even the garbage is desperate to leave. Compare this image of life in Nigeria with that of the description of Abike's house and it is easy to see how Onuzo has looked to frame those polarised images of class in contemporary Nigerian society.

These differences are further demarcated in the novel through the character's relationships with food. The first such instance of this in the novel can be seen when Runner G first visits a *buka*⁴²: 'they raised their heads from plates piled with rice and red stew, the cubes of meat almost invisible in the mounds' (Onuzo 2012:14). Within the narrative, food acts as an indication of social status and in this scene the scarcity of meat within the stew is a clear example of this. Runner G's visit to Abike's house prompts further framings of how food is used as a symbol of class status: 'I set my fork aside and let those grains testify to the fact that I was fed at home' (Ibid.75). This event leads Runner G to remember the times when he was on the other side of this separation: 'The *jollof* we eat now is always pale orange colour because tomatoes are expensive, but there in

⁴² A *buka* is a small restaurant that services traditional Nigerian food by the road side.

front of me was food from my childhood' (Ibid.75). Despite the change in Runner G's social circumstances, he still looks to maintain a sense of dignity by leaving some food on his plate as testimony that he is not poor. Arguably, despite his drastic change in circumstance and relegation from a lower middle-class lifestyle to working class, Runner G's sense of identity is still very much connected to his former class grouping. Despite Runner G leaving grains of rice on his own plate, he accuses Abikẹ of being 'wasteful' when she does the same as him: *'I'm not wasteful. My nannies always made me leave food on the plate.'*, *'My mother used to make us do the same. You would have liked her if you met her before. She had your sharp mouth'* (Ibid.98). This type of symbolic use of food and status can also be seen in Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come To You By Chance*, when Kingsley recognises that the amount of meat in his egusi soup is lacking compared to how it was in years gone by (Nwaubani 2009:13). All of these become symbolic of that class divide and emphasise the thematic focus of the haves and have-nots in Nigerian society within Onuzo's novel.

Abikẹ and Runner G's Relationship: Dispelling the Myth of the 'Other'

I have previously discussed the negative aspects of the way in which Abikẹ treats Runner G in the novel, however, there is another important aspect to their interaction that is more positive. As the narrative progresses, so too does Abikẹ and Runner G's relationship and she begins to treat Runner G with more respect than she had previously done so. This is illustrated primarily through her efforts to get to know him by continually returning to the roadside where they first met. Abikẹ's first attempt at this is to ask him a series of inquisitive questions, 'How was hawking today?', 'How old are you?', 'Do you enjoy hawking?', 'Have you been hawking for long?', 'How did you become a hawker?' (Onuzo 2012:33). This is of course in stark contrast to the way that Abikẹ treats other characters in the novel. For Runner G this interaction causes him to feel visible again, recalling *'...I spoke about myself'* (Ibid.34). The significance of this is that it is also in contrast to the kind of mistreatment

that Runner G has grown accustomed to whilst being a hawker in Lagos: not being acknowledged, being rudely summoned to people's cars or even just not being viewed as a human being. Abikẹ therefore represents to Runner G proof that he is still worthy of interest from a 'somebody', even in his new life.

In many ways, their interaction raises questions about a sense of worthiness that comes from both the haves and the have-nots. In this instance, it is Runner G that needs to feel worthy of being noticed by someone like Abikẹ. Whilst Abikẹ's initial interaction with him would certainly be considered to be that of curiosity and nothing more, it is only as their relationship develops and the narrative progresses that she begins to have feelings for Runner G and her interest in him becomes no longer just curiosity. It is the initial impression that Runner G makes on her of being almost 'a diamond in the rough', that leaves her wondering '*how does a hawker speak so well?*' (Ibid.67). This of course allows the reader to question Runner G's character in a similar way, possibly further questioning how someone like Runner G could find himself (or herself) in such a situation. Runner G's character is of course symbolic of the lack of social security in Nigeria and this is brought to light primarily through his interactions with Abikẹ. It is thoughts such as these that drive Abikẹ's continuing interest in Runner G. So much so, that she demands that her driver Hassan stage a fake a car breakdown so that she can return to the street where she met Runner G and question him some more. This initiating action in the novel brings about a constant state of tension between the two characters as they engage in both Runner G and Abikẹ's worlds.

The class polarity of both Runner G and Abikẹ becomes clear as the narrative progresses, consequently framing for the reader their statuses on the Nigerian social strata. Whilst Runner G lives in 'Mile 12', an area just outside of the main part of Lagos, which as discussed, is described as so unpleasant that even garbage wants to leave there (Onuzo 2012:54), Abikẹ lives in a house that Runner G describes as one of those '*...great colossal brutes that swallowed guests...*' (Ibid.71). Throughout the novel Onuzo places these two comparative images of

Lagos alongside each other, illustrating the huge differences between the lives of the haves and have-nots: 'As we drove up to her house, I wondered what type of wealth it would take to make such an oasis, green grass watered by sprinklers while half of Lagos had no running water' (Ibid.71). Throughout the novel Onuzo uses the voices of the characters to bring to the reader's attention social commentaries on Nigerian society. These inner monologues are not an uncommon aesthetic in the narratives of other Nigerian novels and several other Nigerian authors incorporate this style into their work such as Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta, to name a few. The importance of these parts of Onuzo's novel can at times be overlooked, especially if the style of writing is not embraced for its intended aesthetic reception.

The polarity of the two protagonists in some ways begins to diminish as the narrative progresses. Much of this is due to the insights that both characters gain from their engagement and occupation of each other's worlds. Abike, for example, clearly carries with her the knowledge that she gains from her time spent with Runner G, even when moving within her own social space. This is illustrated through her interaction with her party planner Nkem and the limitless budget she is given for a party, which in the end Abike recognises as a display of great extravagance:

*'Abike darling, that's a good price.'
With that you could buy ten years of hawking.
'I can't go any lower.'
'As your planner, I advise you to consider this offer.'
A hundred stalls at Tejuosho' (Onuzo 2012:173)*

Here Onuzo offers the reader an insight into the way in which Abike has observed Runner G's world and how she then equates this to her own standard of living. It can be argued that here Onuzo suggests to the reader that what is needed is a greater level of understanding of the experiences across the social strata in Nigeria. This would arguably go some way towards bridging the gap between the class groupings in Nigeria that make up what could be considered the haves and have-nots. Despite questions surrounding the plausibility of someone like Abike being interested in someone like Runner G, the novel suggests—in the form of Abike's

character—that it is possible for some human understanding to come from the haves towards the have-nots. This is *the* important aspects of Runner G and Abike’s interactions as characters within the narrative.

The idea that the haves and have-nots are occupying the same space but negotiate their way through separate worlds comes through not only in Runner G and Abike’s interactions, but also in their perceptions of each other. An example of this can be seen in the way that Abike talks about Runner G when she is not with him, which often betrays her default characteristics of a sense of entitlement. It again lends itself to the idea that those from a more privileged background take the perspective that most relationships in life are all about playing a game: *‘What does someone like me wear on her first date with a hawker?’* (Onuzo 2012:77). In this example from the text, the distinctions made between a ‘someone’ and a ‘hawker’, are made clear. This once again brings to the fore the intentional form of ‘othering’ by Abike. She goes on further to candidly state the class differences between herself and Runner G: *‘What does someone wear if one’s going out with someone of a lesser social standing?’* (Ibid.78). In her mother’s response, the reader can begin to understand how Abike’s perspective has been formed and where she would get these ideas of entitlement and ‘othering’. This arguably also includes in the text the suggestion that this may be how many other children from the upper echelons of society may be coming to these same conclusions.

This example, whilst only a small part of the novel, supports that argument that the mother and the domestic family setting play a key role in the process of raising the child and by virtue of this, nation building. What it also shows is the quite evident divisions between the two groups, demonstrating that a sense of national unity is the last concern of many of the citizens in Nigeria. There appears to be a very evident conflict between the social strata that makes up the haves and have-nots, where each side appears to demonise the other and is brought up to see each other in this way until they are confronted with the reality of the ‘other’. However, despite Abike’s mother’s comments, as a character Abike still retains that importance in the narrative because she is the only character that is

representative of the haves that engages with spaces outside of her own. In this respect, Onuzo's novel goes a long way toward presenting this separation and showing both sides of this conflict and national disunity.

Whilst there is the argument that in a capitalist system, there will almost always be those who are rich and those who are poor (Stiglitz 2002; Stiglitz 2007; Stiglitz 2013), when the gap between the two groups is so great that it causes de-stabilising factors in the social stratum, then the result is something very similar to what Onuzo's describes in *The Spider King's Daughter* (2012). It not only charts the decline of Runner G's character, but also makes clear to the reader that despite being presented in a fictitious format, it is not an uncommon occurrence in Nigerian society. By presenting the reader with the juxtaposition of the two protagonists, Onuzo invites the reader to engage with two sides of Nigerian society that are clearly worlds apart. Even as Runner G and Abike's relationship grows, it is possible to identify that the separation of the two groups is also very evident to them. When Abike analyses Runner G's characteristics and how unusual it is for someone in his position to speak and behave the way he does, she uses the term 'our kind' (Onuzo 2012:51), which immediately outlines to the reader the criteria of belonging and the differences between them.

From this we can return to Nwaubani's idea of 'somebody's and nobody's', clearly seeing that the characters in Onuzo's novel are evidence of this concept. It is clear to see that what Onuzo's novel highlights is a number of topics that call into question the idea of unity within the Nigerian nation: does it exist and if so, how conditional is it? Whilst these class divisions can almost certainly be connected to the legacy of British colonialism and the development of modern cities across Nigeria, this is not explicitly referenced in the novel. Instead, Onuzo chooses to tackle the domestic difficulties facing Nigeria such as corruption, inequality and tribalism. It is clear throughout the narrative that both Runner G and Abike are used as tools through which Onuzo can communicate the disparity between the rich and the poor, but also how their interaction with each other, causes them to develop a greater sense

of understanding for the 'other'. Both characters, but especially Abike, are forced to re-evaluate their perception of the 'other'.

The novel's critical questioning of the idea of national unity and belonging through the lens of the social strata, also draws attention to the idea of a sense of foreignness that some of the characters feel, despite them still being in their own country. This takes on two critical inquiries because it not only brings to the fore differences through financial status, but also those ethnic differences that still play a huge part in the lack of progression in the Nigerian nation. There is a suggestion within the novel that Onuzo herself makes clear her own stance on "tribalism" when Runner G's mother dismisses a debate on the differences between ethnic groups when speaking with her husband. However, Onuzo's primary focus, is on the class formations and the relationship between the haves and have-nots. Overall, Onuzo's novel looks to present the reader—both those who are familiar with Nigerian society and those who are not—is an image of disunity in Nigeria. It questions whether the real obstacle to national development is the ethnic differences in the country or the huge gap in economic inequality in Nigeria. It also questions whether a greater understanding of the multiple issues facing Nigerian citizens may in fact go some way towards bridging that economic gap. Subsequently, Nigeria would become a stronger state economically and could—if the citizens so desired—develop their sense of national identity and unity.

Memory, Locality and the Importance of National Identity

Exploring any form of identity requires an assessment of multiple factors that may affect the way in which one's identity is constructed. In the context of Onuzo's novel, the focus is placed on identity and its relationship to a person's locality: how a sense of national identity could be embraced by an individual or in other instances ignored, depending on one's locality. Onuzo frames this for the reader through the experience of Runner G and his family, suggesting in some ways that one's social and financial status could determine one's relationship with their national identity. In the case of Runner G and his family, the reader witnesses the severity of the effect by the loss of the family breadwinner. However, Runner G and his family's function in the novel, primarily, is to be representatives of such incidences. In most novels in the Nigerian literary canon, characters that have experienced similar drastic changes in their lifestyle tend to operate in the present out of a sense of survival, whilst at the same time never quite being able to forget their past. So much so, that it can affect how they identify themselves in the present. It is this identity dilemma that can affect the strength and stability of the Nigerian social strata; the weaker the social strata, the harder it is for the country to develop into a robust and competitive capitalist state.

The Voiceless: The Underdevelopment of the Nigerian State

Runner G's character is not only representational of those in Nigeria who experience drastic financial changes, but he's also symbolic of the continued actions by Western countries to undermine the socio-economic development of African countries. Walter Rodney argues that inability to provide economic and financial security in African countries are the result of centuries of "underdevelopment" at the hands of Western states (Rodney 2012: xi). Shocks to the global economy have a negative effect on all countries that are connected to the global marketplace with varying

degrees of severity. Many countries enter a period of economic uncertainty, often resulting in the implementation of national austerity measures to ensure some form of stability. During such times, countries in Europe and North America rely on the principles of the Welfare State⁴³ to ensure the rights of their citizens to financial assistance, if required, is possible. These measures of course remain in place during periods of economic growth as well as decline and when these services are abused by some citizens, it puts great strains on the economy. There are, however, more countries around the world that are not Welfare States and consequently are unable to provide their citizens with financial assistance during economically challenging times.

In the last three decades, successive governments in Nigeria have failed to bring about sustained economic growth and stability to the country. During the oil boom years in the 1980's, Nigeria was economically prosperous despite experiencing years of military rule and a succession of military coups. However, the prosperity of that decade did not last and the inability of the Nigerian leadership to prepare for the inevitable economic slowdown that sent the country into shock. Now in 2018, Nigeria has maintained civilian rule since Olusegun Obasanjo came to power in 1999, however, despite the existence of natural resources aside from crude oil and an abundance of highly skilled and educated citizens, the government has again failed to return Nigeria to the prosperous years of the 1980s. Consequently, many narratives in the Nigerian literary canon are inclusive of experiences of most citizens, depicting the economic prosperity and hardships that is the reality of many citizens in Nigeria. However, none have focused on the experience of that transition from prosperity to hardship like Onuzo's novel *The Spider King's Daughter*.

⁴³ "In the aftermath of the Second World War, the advanced industrial democracies leading the system built significant welfare states in one form or another. In effect, national and local government took responsibility for the security of their citizens, and they defined it more broadly than ever before to include not only physical but also a minimum standard of living" (Pauly 2008:245).

In the same way that Kingsley from Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* assumes the role of financial provider for his family after the death of his father, so too does Runner G in *The Spider King's Daughter*. Runner G's father is killed in a car accident, which it later transpires is the work of Abike's father, Olumide Johnson. Where in Kingsley's case his difficulty in assuming this role is as a direct result of his inability to find permanent salaried employment, Runner G realises that he must provide for his family by any means necessary, which results in him becoming a street hawker. When comparing the two characters, it can be argued that it is in fact Runner G who is in a position of real "choicelessness". Whilst his father's friends were paying for him to attend a government school in order to complete his education, his family's needs for a regular income were immediate and imperative. Thus, as a character he feels he has no choice but to drop out of school and start bringing home some form of income for the household.

His decision to ensure that his sister still remained in education whilst he went out to work acknowledges two significant aspects of society in Nigeria. The first is a depiction, once again, of the pressure that the eldest males in a family feel to live up to masculine and patriarchal expectations of being a provider. Here Onuzo's novel echoes sentiments expressed in Nwaubani's novel in relation to the sacrifice that these young men make for their families, which again illustrates how female authors look to be inclusive in their depiction of Nigerian society. The second is Runner G's determination to see Jọkẹ remain in school and succeed, as he believes that she is the family's future. This is arguably an acknowledgement of the value in supporting the education of women in Nigerian society; the consequence of which would change the expectations of gender roles in Nigeria and reduce the pressure on gender assigned roles within and without of the family.

In the case of Runner G, the more significant aspect of his experience is the fall from financial security to hardship. Throughout the narrative, Onuzo looks to draw the reader's attention towards some of the clues that suggest Runner G is one of these people. It is not until the

middle section of the novel when Abike expresses her knowledge of the commonality of Runner G's experience in Nigeria:

'The label 'used to be rich' hangs from everything that concerns him. Yet, he will not tell me how he ended up a hawker. I'm almost certain his father's death was the key. There's nothing new in that. Every year or so someone drops out of Forest House because their father has died and they can't afford the fees any more. They may not become hawkers but some find their position drastically altered. I just wish he'd trust me enough to tell me that once he was more than a hawker and his father's death changed all that' (Onuzo 2012:113)

Effectively what Onuzo presents the reader with here is a summary of the experience that both Runner G and his family have endured. The fact that Onuzo allows Abike's character to display a sense of awareness of the issue shows that this is in fact a possibility that many in Nigeria could face. What is important then to consider from such an experience is the effect that this could have on the social stratification in Nigeria as a whole and consequently the process of nation building.

In many ways, Runner G's story is one of the forgotten. In her book *Looking for Transwonderland: Travel in Nigeria* (2012) Noo Saro-Wiwa—daughter of the late author Ken Saro-Wiwa—describes some of those other forgotten people in Nigeria:

"One in five of the barefoot toddlers defecating on the roadsides won't live long enough to start primary school. Their births and deaths are not registered in any formal sense. They enter and exit the world unnoticed by government, with few photographs to commemorate their brief existence" (Saro-Wiwa 2012:24)

Whilst Noo Saro-Wiwa paints here a heart wrenching image of some of the street children in Nigeria, it gives a voice to the forgotten and silenced across the whole of Africa and indeed the world. Isichei postulates that "nothing speaks more eloquently of the disappointments of contemporary Africa than its silences" (Isichei 2002:174). When applied to Runner G's experience, it is the voicelessness of characters like him that gives Onuzo's novel great power. Nation building in Nigeria, becomes extremely difficult when so many groups of people are not involved in the

construction of a unified identity that they are intended to be a part of simply because of the class that they belong to.

Even though when the reader is introduced to Runner G he is a hawker, his backstory shows that he does not immediately take on this profession after the death of his father. Runner G explains that when they really needed help ‘no relatives came to our rescue...’ (Onuzo 2012:22). Instead, close friends of his father come to their aid: ‘I didn’t become a hawker straight away. Six months after my father died, we moved to Mile 12 and Uncle Kayode, one of his friends, found me a place at a local school’ (Ibid.37). The school that Runner G attends is a government school, not a private one and is described as ‘...an all-boys school, old, prestigious, some famous Nigerians had been there in its glory days’ (Ibid.37). Whilst this is not quite the standard of schooling that Runner G is accustomed to, it is, nonetheless, an opportunity for him to remain in education. However, as discussed, Runner G feels the weight of his responsibility as provider to such a degree that he leaves formal education and becomes a hawker.

Commonly in Nigeria, after the death of a relative, the extended family of either the father or the mother—depending on the customs of the ethnic group in question—would take on the responsibility of providing for those that have been left behind. In Onuzo’s novel it becomes apparent that this is no longer a guarantee, especially in modern city environments. Isamah and Okunola have argued that:

“The decline of the extended family in urban contexts has led to shifts in investments and returns with respect to children, exacerbated by the impoverishment, marginalization, and fragmentation of the nuclear family under stressful economic conditions” (Isamah and Okunola 2002:65)

It becomes clear then that modernity and contemporary financial constraints place a strain on traditional modes of familial and community support. This break in custom in Nigeria can clearly be traced back to the legacy of colonialism and the systematic underdevelopment of the economic and political development in Nigeria. There are many other

examples of this in the Nigerian literary canon, especially in the work of Buchi Emecheta. However, with the advent of modernity and the pressures of city life, the reality of this has become difficult to fulfil and often becomes more of a burdensome act than anything else.

In Runner G's case, the reader is presented with quite a sad image of abandonment on the part of his father's family: 'And then there were his relatives who were always at our house asking for money' (Onuzo 2012:38). Despite always being in contact when Runner G's father was alive and had money, his father's relatives are nowhere to be seen when Runner G's family are in desperate need of their help. This is experience can also be seen with another character in the novel called Mr T, who is a beggar that Runner G befriends once he becomes a hawker. Mr T tells his own story of woe and how he ended up on the streets, highlighting that he '...offered all the things eighties Nigeria promised, a good job, servants, two cars....' (Ibid.21). Mr T's experience reinforces Onuzo's suggestion in the novel that whilst this is a work of fiction, such experiences are not out of the realms of possibility in reality. Although Runner G was abandoned by his extended family after the death of his father, he still questions how Mr T found himself in his current situation: 'where were his parents? His relatives? His friends? And how had he slid into poverty so easily?' (Ibid.22). This line of inquiry in the novel not only questions the changes in Nigerian society that would cause such incidences to happen, but also the state and the government's response to what appears to be a somewhat common occurrence in Nigeria.

Having accepted the isolation from their family and friends, Runner G often questions the reason why it had all fallen apart and what could have been, had his father not died. He considers Mr T's downfall, concluding that, 'even if there were no family members, did this beggar have no friends that could have tided him over till he found another job?' (Onuzo 2012:23). This again brings to the fore discussions surrounding modernity and the breakdown of the family unit and community structure in Nigeria. Meeting Mr T puts into perspective for Runner G their shared experience of watching elements of their life fall away bit by bit when he recalls the sequence of events that brought them to where he and his

family now find themselves:

‘In our case, there had been clear signs. The domestic staff were the first to go. Then our garage emptied, then the flat-screen TV was sold, leaving a square patch lighter than the rest of the wall. Yet, it was only when the landlord came to our house with policemen that I realised that this phase of our lives was not temporary’ (Onuzo 2012:22-23)

Runner G’s mother, clearly unable to part with the lifestyle that she is used to, arguably makes their situation worse than it had to be by not trying to adjust quicker to their new financial circumstances. She tells Runner G that she had to continue taking them on foreign holidays and trying to maintain, for his own sake, the life that his friends had at school (Onuzo 2012:195). In terms of materialism, this is perhaps a perfect example of how many societies around the world have been corrupted and manipulated into thinking that what they want is what they need: resulting in their priorities being heavily perverted and their income being misspent.

Finally, Runner G’s interaction with Mr T also demonstrates to him how fortunate his family had been even with the little assistance that they had from his father’s friends: ‘We are luckier than most to have a two-bedroom flat all to ourselves. My father’s leftover money combined with the sporadic generosity of his old colleagues and friends was enough to pay rent for five years’ (Onuzo 2012:54). Regardless of how fortunate Runner G and his family are over others in the same situation, their experience brings to the fore the difficulties of modernity and city life in Nigeria. Had his mother changed her priorities and tried to save all the money that they had left from the start, would Runner G have left school? Would he have felt the urgency to bring home an income and become a hawker? There is also the question of what the movement between the different echelons of society within one person’s lifetime would do to the process of social stratification and stability in Nigeria as a whole. Arguably, Onuzo’s novel acts as a warning and reflection through which to view the pit falls of a developing state trying to progress in a time of global fast paced expectations of technology, modernity and consumerism.

Identity and Memory in Runner G's Metamorphosis

Identity plays a key role in how the reader relates to Runner G in Onuzo's novel. Through the character's exploration of his present and past identity, the reader is able to see not only the affects that a drastic change in lifestyle could have on a person, but also his lack of a relationship with a national identity once he becomes a hawker. Ferreira Pinto-Bailey argues that: "The question of national identity poses the question of self-identity and vice versa" (Ferreira Pinto-Bailey 2014:205). In the case of Runner G, his inability to define his personal identity results in a lack of a compulsion to define a national identity. As the narrative progresses, the reader begins to recognise that Runner G has been conditioned to live a different type of life than the one he is living. Throughout the novel Runner G narrates his inner thoughts, giving the reader an insight into his feelings about his past and his present: bringing to the fore the difficulties he has in negotiating a way through day-to-day life now that his family are poor. As a result of his father's death, Runner G and his family's lives are '*...drastically altered*' (Onuzo 2012:113). Despite residing within the city and country in which he was born, Runner G is then placed in a foreign space. These spaces are not in fact geographic but are more figurative, becoming apparent only when characters from different social classes are placed in a social space that is not their own. In Runner G's case, it is evident that he struggles to adjust to the new life that he is now faced with, especially when he accepts the permanence of his situation: '*...this phase of our lives is not temporary*' (Ibid.23). Runner G's difficulties in transitioning into this new life is predominately a result of his tendency to view his surroundings through the same lens that he once did. Entering spaces that he may have once known of, but not in the same social capacity as he does now.

In an effort to maintain a connection to his former self, Runner G tries to distance himself from his new peers: 'I was curt, I sneered at their grammar, I faked an American twang, anything to show I was different' (Onuzo 2012:38). Returning to the portrayal of 'othering' in the novel, it is clear here that through these first parts of Runner G's transitional phase, he is now faced with the 'other' that he has spent most of his life defining

himself in opposition to. Consequently, he struggles to accept that he has now himself become one of them. Onuzo uses the literary space as a way of bringing polarised characters together and placing them in spaces that are not their own. A sense of realism or believability is not required in this instance because the intention is to juxtapose those two worlds and challenge the process of 'othering' that takes place in Nigerian society. This is again the uniqueness and importance of Runner G and Abikẹ's relationship in the novel. Onuzo's narrative seems to suggest that empathy is going to be an important tool in the overall process of developing the Nigerian state.

With the introduction of Abikẹ to Runner G's life, the reader witnesses the conflict between Runner G's past and present identity become more complex and increasingly difficult to manage. Whilst Runner G has always been faced with reminders of his past, he has certainly never been able to interact with or have a relationship with that past, as he does when he spends time with Abikẹ. As a result, Abikẹ becomes symbolic of Runner G's past and a present that could have been. Throughout their interaction in the novel Runner G toys with the idea of revealing to Abikẹ more about who he really was or in fact, still is inside: 'you should have seen what I was like a few years ago. If you'd known me, you wouldn't have thought I'd be able to do this job.' 'I wonder what you were like' (Onuzo 2012:35-36). For Runner G, the experience of being with Abikẹ is bitter sweet. Always a little suspicious and unsure of her motives, he often wants to protect himself from her in case the fascination that she has with him ends abruptly.

Thus, leaving Runner G to return to his life as a hawker with no other possible opportunity of maintaining a connection to his old lifestyle. Nevertheless, allowing himself to maintain the connection with his past, makes accepting his present that much harder. Even being seen with characters such as Mr T when Abikẹ is around leaves Runner G caught in limbo, not feeling like he belongs to either side anymore: 'the distance between us grew as pride and other things filled my head. You know you've fallen when you are a hawker that is friends with beggars' (Onuzo

2012:20). Abikẹ's continued presence in Runner G's space appears magnify the negative aspects of his situation and cause him to feel a little more hopeless about ever escaping it. On the occasions when Runner G does not see Abikẹ he finds himself going '...to the *buka* to hang with the boys...' and notices that during his absence '...they had grown scruffier in the time a little menacing' (Ibid.164). This further illustrates how Runner G's past and present perspectives of life are in constant contention with one another.

Runner G's decision not to tell Abikẹ about his past becomes one of the biggest barriers to their relationship becoming more than just a friendship. Runner G cites his reason for doing so only in the latter parts of the novel: 'my story is my only thing of value so I am sparing with it' (Onuzo 2012:116). In this statement, it becomes clear that the relationship with his memories and his identity are so important that they cannot be shared. In a similar situation, Mr T also highlights the significance of one's memories and life story in relation to your personal identity:

'I brought you here to pay you with something more precious than naira. Many have wanted to know what I am about to tell you. One man from America even asked for an interview. He came with a tape recorder and notebook. I refused him. You will be the first person to hear my story in the past twenty years' (Onuzo 2012:20)

Such examples show not only that one's sense of identity is intrinsically linked with a sense of locality and memories, but it also highlights the importance and value of oral history in Nigerian society. When Runner G decides to become a hawker, it acts as a defining action in relation to his character's transition within the novel. With no prior experience navigating his way through the streets of Lagos or working as a trader, he first must overcome his own naivety before he can truly begin to survive. It is during this part of the novel that the reader can bear witness to Runner G's introduction to a sense of foreignness in his own city. Runner G is not blind to the fact that this was not the life that his parents had hoped he would live, or one that they would have prepared him for living. However, due to the mental and emotional absence of his mother—who is also dealing with

her own transition into a new lifestyle—the obstacles that he faces during this juncture of his life are events and incidences that he must resolve by himself:

‘When I first started I used to mind my manners. Yes please, no thank you, like my mother taught me, but those manners were for a boy who was meant to go to university and work in a law firm. She never told me what to do if a customer sprinted away with my money. She never gave me advice on how to handle the touts that came here sometimes asking for ‘tax’ (Onuzo 2012:14)

What this quote from the novel illustrates is not only Runner G’s admission of the difficulties that he faces in learning how to fend for himself, but it also reinforces the expectations of the mother figure as a point of strength and stability. For example, the use of repetition when Runner G says ‘She never...’ demonstrates the reliance that children have on their mother in preparing them for life. As a result, it can be argued again that the mother figure in both the domestic and community space has a very significant effect on the national space and subsequently, the process of nation building.

Runner G’s mother experiences a very different transition into her new life to that of her children. Both Runner G and Jọkẹ (his sister) appear to make the best of their situation, even if they do wish for their old life back. In the beginning of the novel, his mother is unable to motivate herself to eat or get dressed, let alone go out to find work to support her children. As a result, the domestic roles are reversed and she is the child and her children become the parents: ‘I told her about my mother to reassure us both, that once she had been different. Jọkẹ and I don’t speak of her, except as one would of a child. Has she eaten? Has she bathed?’ (Onuzo 2012:101). This reversal proves to be a destabilising factor in Runner G’s life and despite his efforts to take on the responsibility of the family, the absence of a mother figure in the domestic setting results in Runner G making very misguided decisions. Of course, her absence, whilst not physical, is mental and proves just as damaging to her children than if she too had died with their father:

‘Lately it has become more difficult to make number 5 happen. She cries when I ask her to eat. I have his voice, Jòkẹ tells me, so my mother’s salty tears drip on to the slice of bread meant for breakfast. This morning when we left, she was still in her nightie with her hair scattered from sleep. There was a time she would have hated anyone to see her looking like this. Now she is like a tree in the dry season. Every day a piece of her old self falls off’ (Onuzo 2012:2-3)

This image of Runner G’s mother shedding leaves like a tree, lends itself to the idea of letting go of the past to allow for rebirth in the future. As a result, even though all seems hopeless, at this stage of the novel it not only creates a feeling of promise that Runner G’s mother may blossom once again into something new, but also presents an idea of women having a sense of resilience even through the difficult times.

The absence of a mother figure in Runner G’s life is not something that is merely referenced to in the novel. Runner G and Jòkẹ are both portrayed as being frustrated with their mother for the way in which she behaves. The reader is initially lead to believe that the cause of this reaction is the loss of her former lifestyle:

‘Widowhood is not a disease, I wanted to say as I watched her shuffle to her door. Or maybe her vacancy had nothing to do with the loss of my father. Maybe she was still mourning her jewellery and manicured nails. Stripped of those things, she was nothing’ (Onuzo 2012:82)

Here Onuzo again engages with the idea of one’s identity being largely associated to the lifestyle that you lead. To suggest that without the luxuries that she was once used to she is “nothing” confirms that difficulty in re-establishing one’s sense of locality and identity in relations to a social status. In fact, she later suggests to the reader that Runner G’s mother may be suffering with a mental health issue, namely, depression:

‘What about your mother?’
‘She used to bake before my father died. I think she’s depressed now. You saw her. I wish I could buy her anti-depressants. They’re too expensive. Thousands of naira for a few and once they finish what will I do?’ (Onuzo 2012:103)

Not only does Onuzo bring to the fore the reality of mental health issues in Nigeria, but also the lack of access that many have to the right medication for such things. The suggestion being here perhaps that if access to such medication were better in Nigeria, perhaps Runner G's mother may have been able to get the help that she needed in order to adjust to the loss of her husband and her sense of identity.

Runner G, however, is not the only character in the novel that experiences an emotional and psychological absence of their maternal mother. Abike's mother is also somewhat absent from her life and she too is caught up in the memory of what was her former self: *'Most days, you can find her wallowing in the Den, a portion of the basement that is her equivalent of the 'study'. In there, she has built a shrine to her dead career. Love Me or Die was on when I walked in'* (Onuzo 2012:78). However, despite her mother's absence, Abike is at least not left without a mother figure in her life. There is only one other character in the novel that Abike speaks to with a similar level of affection to that of Runner G: her nanny and maid, Aunty Grace. Her affection towards the maid is also something that does not go unnoticed by Runner G: *'her voice was tender and she called this maid, who could be no relative of hers, Aunty'* (Ibid.108). Abike's relationship with Aunty Grace is in many ways as important as her relationship with Runner G. It further exemplifies that the 'othering' of people from difference class groupings often takes place when one is not faced with the reality of human interaction. It is also evidence not only of the need for a mother figure in the domestic setting, but also that sense of community mothering that has been shown in the works of many of the Nigerian authors. Abike even believes as a child that the maid is her mother because she was always with when her biological was not. This maid and Runner G are the only characters that successfully manage to disarm Abike and this, I argue, is because they offer her a genuine and sincere relationship. They both invoke an emotion in her that leaves her more vulnerable than she is comfortable with. This is something that she does not have with any other characters in the novel and in many ways only seeks validation from these two characters. It can also be

argued that this is a main reason why Abike invests so much time in getting to know Runner G, despite the class polarity of the two characters.

It has been shown in this chapter that memory plays an important role in helping several characters in Onuzo's novel attempt to define their sense of personal identity. Within the canon of Nigerian literature, memory also plays a crucial role in remembering the histories and cultural practices of some of the ethnic group in Nigeria. It is personal memory that plays the most prominent role in constructing one's self-identity in Onuzo's novel. Whilst the narrative focuses primarily on the experience of Runner G, it also presents the experiences of other characters in the novel, demonstrating how their memories allow them to retain some sense of personal identity. When associating autobiographical memory to a sense of personal identity Schechtman argues "...that memory does not logically presuppose personal identity" (Schechtman 2011:65). This is something that we see clearly with Runner G, who is often unable to authenticate the reality of the memories from his former life: 'sometimes, I search my memories for a clip of before and play it to myself. A favourite is the first time I saw snow. I was in New York and it was not snow like you saw in the movies. It was brown and gritty like sand' (Onuzo 2012:57). Further evidence of the unreliability of memory can be seen when Runner G sees a photograph of his father and recalls, 'he was taller in my memory...' (Ibid.186). Even for the average person whose life does not significantly change across their lifetime, memories become distorted and unreliable sources of information. For someone like Runner G (and in fact Mr T) who has experienced a drastic lifestyle change, memories become even more unreliable, but at the same time they also act as their only evidence of who they once were.

As the narrative progresses, Runner G continues to try and connect his former and present self by accessing those memories from his past. This becomes problematic when his present perception of reality is in such opposition to that of his past: 'now it seems a lie that, once upon a time, my father's bank account was full enough for the American embassy to

grant us visas. But it is true' (Onuzo 2012:57). This Roache terms as "quasi-memory" and argues that, "from my quasi-memory of doing X, I cannot infer that I did X, but I can infer that *somebody* did X" (Roache 2016:479-480). When Runner G thinks back to the life he once lived, he recalls snippets of what once was:

'I was a child again, waiting for one of the maids to put on my pyjamas for me. Waiting because I knew she would give in and pick up the pyjamas that were next to me and put them over my head. Then she would uncross my arms and push them through the sleeves. No maid would be coming tonight' (Onuzo 2012:157)

The thoughts that Runner G has of his former life act as a narrative for the person that he once was. He replays these scenes in his head as a way of confirming that he was once that child, that there was a maid and that all that he remembers was in fact real. However, sometimes Runner G finds himself searching his memories for what once was somewhat toxic and counterproductive to his present circumstances:

'Yet even now, when increasingly I was accepting this life as normal, I was still afraid of the past. It was a seductive trap for me. During my three months at the Mile 12 school, I had wallowed in it, longing for it almost to the point of madness' (Onuzo 2012:186)

His ability to accept that the likelihood of him regaining his former life is what allows him to survive and move forward, despite his occasional rendezvous with his former self in his memories. This is in stark contrast to his mother who struggles with her new sense of purpose and existence so much that she effectively shuts down.

Onuzo's novel presents readers with a very important portrayal of city life in Nigeria and the pitfalls of the economic underdevelopment of the country in an urban context. Arguably the most significant aspect of Runner G's relationship with Abike is that their interaction allows the reader to see the juxtaposition of the two worlds existing within one geopolitical space. Whilst there is little chance of a friendship such as that of

Abike and Runner G happening outside of the literary page, what is important to take from their interaction is that what happens to Runner G and his family is perhaps more than just a fictional construction. Creative license certainly allows for—and encourages—placing the extraordinary within the arts and this is exactly why their relationship is so significant. Without it, the reader would not have been made aware of the extent of Runner G's misfortunes and would also not have been able to bear witness to the gap between the lives of the haves and have-nots.

Runner G's experience is one of transition, which is arguably also a form of "waithood". As discussed, during this period Runner G begins to accept that there is a sense of permanence about his situation and as a result has little choice but to accept and understand his new identity. His decision not to remain in education can be seen as a form of "choicelessness" in the novel. This is because whether he had stayed in education or decided to become a street trader his future presented him with a feeling of hopelessness. As discussed in chapter three, citing similar examples such as Kingsley from Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* and Obinze from Adichie's *Americanah*, one of the main catalysts of "choicelessness" is the absence of a productive future for the young people in Nigeria. As a result, Runner G's character also becomes representative of the arrested development of the Nigerian youth and yet another obstacle in the process of nation building.

What Onuzo presents in her novel is an image of a country still needing to provide for many of its citizens whilst at the same time exploring its sense of personal and collective identity. For many of the characters in the novel, memory becomes an important tool through which they explore their sense of personal identity; piecing back together fragments of who they once were and subsequently imagining who they could have been. In the next chapter, memory once again becomes an important tool through which both the Nigerian and Biafran identity is explored. Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (first published in 2006) was written based on historical texts and the personal memory of those who had experienced the Nigeria-Biafra War. It is the national memory and depiction of those identities that will be explored in the following chapter.

**Chapter 5 - Was There a Country?:
Female Perspectives on the
Biafran Nation in Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow
Sun* and Buchi Emecheta's
*Destination Biafra***

The history of Nigeria as a unified state has been fraught with both prosperity and tragedy. It is a history of difference; in culture, politics, religion and access to state resources. After Nigeria became an independent country on October 1st 1960 from British colonial rule, the stage was set for more than 200 different ethnic groups to come together as a unified and functioning state in order to compete in the global capitalist system if they so desired (Hawley 2008; Amuta 1983). Whilst the idea of a state is nothing new to human history, it has evolved over the years into the current nation-state structure where states look to compete economically in a capitalist system and in many ways sees states run more like businesses than countries (Fukuyama 2004:1). When looking at the success of the nation-state system around the world, states in Africa have been "...said to have utterly failed in delivering the promises made at the time of...birth" (Chatterjee 2011:10). The unfortunate bi-product of the capitalist nation-state system is greed and corruption, something that is not exclusive to African governments but is in fact a global issue. It is arguably greed—both of the British and the newly found government of Nigeria—that would be one of the key contributing factors that would lead the country to a civil war that would cause serious divisions throughout Nigeria for decades to come.

The Nigeria-Biafra War⁴⁴ was fought between Nigeria (the Federal state) and the Eastern region of Nigeria (Biafra), which seceded from the federation in 1967 after a series of pogroms carried out against the Igbos who lived in the North and to a lesser extent, the South-West. The war was fought for just under three years and was concluded only by the surrender of the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra when the Nigerian Federal forces and their allies used blockading and starvation tactics on the civilians in the Eastern region. It would be another defining point in Nigerian history so soon after independence from Britain. The Nigeria-Biafra War caused a huge change in the landscape of Nigerian society and further complicated the identity politics in the country. It has also had a

⁴⁴ This war is known by several different names such as The Biafran War, The Biafran War of Independence, The Nigeria-Biafra War and The Nigerian Civil War to name a few.

huge effect on the literary and arts scenes in the country that are still—decades after the war—seeking to engage with the trauma associated with the war through the work of various artists and authors (Ouma 2011; Omotoso 1991; Hawley 2008; Dalley 2013; Wiseberg 1975). Kole Omotoso argues that “before the civil war, novels tended to reflect a Nigerian national consciousness, but through a single ethnic national framework” (Omotoso 1991:146). This is very much connected to the shared experience of colonialism and a desire to bring about “...the liquidation of colonial empires” (Dieckhoff 2016:56). As Chatterjee argues, an analysis and questioning of the politics of identity in Nigerian novels is essential to any critical inquiry of the discourse (Chatterjee 2011:22). This will be a key focus in this chapter as it has been throughout my research.

This chapter will critically examine two novels which are set at various points during the Nigeria-Biafra War. One of the novels was written by an author who was alive to witness the conflict and one of which was written by an author who was not. I will also make reference to other civil war novels throughout the analysis where relevant to the discussion at hand. The aim of this chapter is twofold: firstly, it looks to understand the way in which the nation and nationalism is portrayed in these civil war novels. Secondly, whether or not these novels set during the Nigeria-Biafra War seek to heal the past in an effort to move toward a unified Nigerian nation or whether they seek instead to further the idea of the Biafran nation in the hope that it could one day become a reality.

The image of the Biafran nation in civil war novels is shown predominantly through the identity of the individual characters. In these novels, the geo-political entity that is Biafra is seldom depicted as having a sense of stability or permanence, despite the desires of many characters for this to be true. As a result, the character’s sense of nationalism and identity becomes vital in constructing the Biafran identity and expressing this image to the reader. These characters are conscious of their national identity because it is in conjunction with their sense of belonging to a group of peoples that have been wronged. The tensions that these characters are depicted as experiencing through their relationship with their national identity is often apparent even before the outbreak of the

war. These characters also portray important images of what life was like during this period which may even help the reader to garner a greater understanding as to why the sense of Biafran nationalism is still prevalent in contemporary Nigeria. There are numerous examples of this within the Nigerian literary canon however, in this section I will focus on three characters, two of which come from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the final character, who comes from Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (first published in 1982). I feel it is necessary before progressing to the analysis of the novels that a short introduction is given about the Nigeria-Biafra War, so that the subsequent analysis may be placed in some sort of context.

A Short History of the Nigeria-Biafra War and the Civil War Novel

The Nigeria-Biafra War began in 1967 when Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared that the Eastern region of Nigeria—a region that is populated predominantly by the Igbo ethnic group—would secede from the rest of the country, rebranding itself as the Republic of Biafra. In response, General Yakubu Gowon led the Nigerian Federal forces against the break-away region, determined to keep the geo-political entity of Nigeria as a unified state. The causes of the war can be understood when examining the years preceding the conflict. Sources suggest that these causes can be traced as far back as just before Nigeria achieved independence from British colonial rule (Ekwe-Ekwe 2006; Siollun 2009; Offodile 2016). What would become the country of Nigeria was made up a Southern protectorate—which was made up of people from the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups—and a Northern protectorate—which was predominantly a Hausa-Fulani ethnic region. Both the Northern and Southern protectorates are also made up of a large number of minority ethnic groups. During colonial rule, the British allowed the Emirs in the Northern protectorate more autonomy than they afforded the traditional leaders in the Southern protectorate. Salamone has argued that the Hausa people in the North of the country "...have controlled post-

colonial Nigeria for much of its period of independence and exert a strong influence on its current politics” (Salamone 2010:7).

One way in which the British afforded the Northern Emirs more autonomy was by ensuring that in the Christian missionaries were not permitted to operate in the predominantly Muslim North, ensuring that Islamic teachings would remain the core of the Northern education system. As a result, those in the Southern protectorate received European structured educations, making them the more likely to fill civil service posts in Nigeria. When Nigeria was in the process of planning for its first democratic elections, which would bring about the future government who would lead a post-independent Nigeria, those in the Northern part of the country were keenly aware that they were outnumbered in civil service and government posts (Gould 2012; Siollun 2009; Bourne 2015). Concerned that if the newly independent Nigerian government could be ruled by those from Southern ethnic groups, the Emirs in the North knew that they would need to do something to ensure that they would retain a large powerbase in the new country that would come to be known as, Nigeria.

The first democratic elections took place in Nigeria in 1959 and saw a Northern Premier elected in the form of Ahmadu Bello, a Northern Prime Minister called Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and a Southern President named Nnamdi Azikiwe. Through the election of these two men, the British felt that there was some level of appeasement for both the Igbo’s in the South-East and the Hausa-Fulani in the North. Bourne argues that “Azikiwe in himself encompassed the country’s three main cultural groups, speaking Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba – an Igbo by origin, he had grown up as a Hausa boy and, living in Lagos, had given his children Yoruba names” (Bourne 2015:76). The party representing the Yoruba majority in the South-West of the country did not receive enough of the national vote in the general election and as a result, they did not have a significant enough majority in the newly elected parliament. Only a few years after the election took place and independence from the British was achieved, discontent grew among the citizens of Nigeria. They began to feel as though the new Nigerian government that had replaced British rule had done little to

change the status quo⁴⁵ in the country in regards to development for the country as a whole and all citizens that now fell within its borders (Gould 2012). Sensing the growing frustrations of the Nigerian public, coupled with their own frustrations with the inaction of the new government, in 1966 a small group of soldiers took it upon themselves to remove the newly elected leaders from power. Whilst the coup was unsuccessful to some degree, it did result in the assassinations of many key government officials; most notable among them was the Premier Ahmadu Bello and the Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.

Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, a Nigerian military leader of Igbo descent, stepped in to stop the coup from going any further and took back power over the country in an attempt to regain some form of law and order. Whilst in power, one of Aguiyi-Ironsi's first actions was to announce the enforcement of decree 34, which would abolish the federal structure in Nigeria left by the British, in an attempt to tackle the growing ethnic disputes across the new country (Gould 2012). This decree played into some of the fears of those in the North, believing once again that without their majority they would be subservient to other ethnic groups in Nigeria (Siollun 2009). One of the key aspects of the first coup is that of all the government ministers who were assassinated or removed from power, none of them derived from the Igbo ethnic group. To make matters worse, the group of military officers who carried out the coup were also Igbo, leading some to believe that this was an attempt by one ethnic group to seize power over the whole country. As a result, Siollun argues that "the events of January 15, 1966 gave Northerners an opportunity to vent their frustrations" (Siollun 2009:17). In that same year, only months after the first, a second coup was mounted against General Aguiyi-Ironsi, this time

⁴⁵ In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (first published in 1961), Frantz Fanon discusses how the "colonialist bourgeoisie" across Africa had put in place a structure of elitism, individualism and corruption that the "petit bourgeoisie" readily assumed control of after independence (Fanon 2001). Whilst Fanon spoke primarily on the Algerian War of Independence, his analysis of the post-independent states across Africa, could be easily applied to many of the new governments and leaders of these countries. His other book *Black Skin, White Masks* (first published in 1952) provides further insight into the still colonised minds of the people across Africa and how this has been a great obstacle to the development of the people themselves and their newly independent states.

led by a group of Northern Hausa soldiers. Aguiyi-Ironsi was assassinated and what followed was the steady decline of any sense of order or unity in the newly independent country. Igbo people who had been living in the Northern region of the country for years, were now the victims of pogroms carried out—for the most part—by groups of Hausa-Fulani people (Siollun 2009; Offodile 2016; Gould 2012; Korieh 2012).

Many Igbo's who were fortunate enough to escape the massacres returned to the Eastern region of the country. Train load after train load of people returned to the Igbo heartland, wounded, traumatised and in some cases, already dead. Those in the East retaliated against any Hausa-Fulani that happened to be living in that region, however, these retaliations in no way compared to the scale of what had been carried out against the Igbos in the North (and to a lesser degree, the West). Gould argues that:

“In September 1966, after Gowon had abolished Ironsi's unification decree and reinstated the federal system which had existed before May 1966, Ojukwu made plain to the Consultative Committee of the Eastern Region his conclusion that the basis of unity no longer existed and the East should manage its own resources and its affairs, including foreign policy” (Gould 2012:42)

Shortly after this, Gowon decided to break the country up into 12 states (Offodile 2016; Bourne 2015). This was a deliberate act by Gowon to make the reality of Ojukwu's call for an Igbo country problematic, believing that the minority groups residing in the East would not support living in a country with an Igbo majority. This act did little in stopping Ojukwu declaring secession from the Nigerian federation in 1967 but did result in minority groups seeking more power after the war had ended, dividing the country further from 12 states into 36 (Bourne 2015). The conflict lasted for three years, during which time, “only Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, South Africa, and the Ivory Coast recognized Biafra as a new state...” (Hawley 2008:16). Heavily supported by the British, the Nigerian Federal forces starved and bombed Biafra into submission and in 1967, when Ojukwu fled Biafra, the war was declared to be over (Ekwe-Ekwe 2006).

The death toll before and during the war was staggering, with some sources claiming that more than three million people from both Igbo and

ethnic minority groups from the Eastern region were massacred (Ewke-Ekwe 2006). The motives and ways in which these massacres were conducted are also very important to the history of this war, as they go a long way towards explaining why the Eastern region responded in the way that it did. Whilst reasons for the Biafran defeat during the conflict vary, one argued causes of the eventual defeat lay with the minority ethnic groups, as they were accused of being saboteurs and providing the Nigerian Federal forces with intelligence that allowed them to win back territory (Offodile 2016). However, it must be noted that the accusations that one was a saboteur were not solely reserved for those who were not Igbo, because as the war progressed, anyone that spoke out against the Biafran war effort was given this same label. Paranoia was so widespread that those whose villages were taken over by the Federal forces were also considered to be speaking out against Biafra and they too, would also be labelled a saboteur. This paranoia and in-fighting took a hold of what was already beginning to become a fragile belief that Biafra could win the war and most certainly contributed to the demise of the Biafran war effort. In the end, the Republic of Biafra was not to be—at least, not in 1970—however, the nation of Biafra is still alive and well amongst many still living in the Eastern region of Nigeria and in the pages of various forms of art and literature.

Civil War Novels

The Nigeria-Biafra War had an undeniable impact on the way in which Nigeria has developed as a country. By not acknowledging the tragedies of the war, the Nigerian government—intentionally or unintentionally—set a precedence for the lasting divisions of the multiple ethnic groups in the country. Consequently, Duru posits that “the memory of the Nigeria-Biafra War passed down from the preceding generation of Nigerians is a *dangerous memory*” (Duru 2012:210). With no collective or government led means of acknowledging the massacres and the trauma that the country had sustained, various mediums of the arts became a tool through which this national pain would be tackled. Amuta suggests that what is “fundamental to an understanding of Nigerian civil war literature is an insight into the socio-historical coefficients which made that war both inevitable and avoidable” (Amuta 1983:87). Furthermore, Falola and Ezekwem also suggest that:

“Analysing the Nigeria-Biafra war literature within the parameters of its social, political, and cultural contexts provide insight into the bases of the strife that plague this historical event and its consequent body of knowledge” (Falola and Ezekwem 2016:1)

Many of the Nigerian civil war novels include a prelude to the war, presenting events in the narrative which highlight how it was that the citizens of Nigeria found themselves at war with one another. One such example that goes into great detail in the dialogue of the novel is Buchi Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra*, which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. The more common civil war narratives present an image of the Biafran struggle for independence from the perspective of the victims, namely, the Igbos. This is largely a result of Igbo authors leading the way in producing and shaping those narrative depictions of the war. The injustices felt as a result of the massacres that happened before and during the war—as well as the way in which the conflict ended—many Igbo people have not been able to find peace or reconciliation. Consequently, the civil war novel became an important space in which to grieve.

There is also a trend in these novels to depict the different ethnic groups based on their involvement in the war. This of course changes depending on where the author of the novel derives from. The Hausas are commonly depicted as the aggressors and the ones who take the lead on waging a brutal retaliation for what they saw as an attack by the Igbos during the first coup in 1966. Whilst not depicted as the primary aggressors, the Yoruba people are often portrayed as followers of the Hausas in the fight against the Igbos. However, some texts suggest that there were a number of Yoruba people who fought alongside the Biafrans and as a result, "...many of them were harassed and detained in Nigeria..." (Offodile 2016:50). The ethnic minority groups based in the Eastern region sometimes do not feature in the civil war narratives at all, however, where there is mention of these groups, few authors give any sort of lengthy insight into their experience of the war. In some civil war narratives those smaller ethnic groups (for example, Ijaw, Ibibio and Tiv, to name a few), whilst not always individually named, are portrayed as saboteurs, which frames some of the historically accurate incidences that happened during the war. However, there has in fact been a change in the strength of all these depictions over the years.

Those writers who experienced the war or at the very least were alive to know what was happening at the time, often wrote with a certain tone of anger or deep sadness in their narrative. Arguably, this came from a place of injustice and a very close felt attachment to what they had witnessed happening to their fellow countrymen and women. With no peace or resolution offered by the Nigerian or international community, fictional spaces became some of the few places where they could document their anger and sadness. In recent years, this has changed because the younger generations of Nigerian authors—those who had not experienced the war first hand but had heard stories from their parents and grandparents—have created characters that look to portray more holistic perspectives on the experience. Their focus is not solely on the conflict, but instead on the civilians, highlighting how they were affected by the experience from the pogroms through to the end of the actual conflict.

One such example is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which will be examined further in the following section.

The Construction of the Biafran Nation in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half of a Yellow Sun tells the story of two lovers—Olanna and Odenigbo—and their extended family—Kainene, Ugwu and Richard—who find their lives rapidly change from Nigerian independence to the outbreak of war. Each chapter provides the reader with the differing perspectives of these character's as they try to survive the conflict and trauma on a day-to-day basis. Many war novels focus on the military interaction and conflict, however, Adichie's novel looks to provide readers with an insight into the civilian experience of war. The novel begins with Ugwu arriving at Odenigbo's house from a near-by village to work for him by helping around the house. Olanna and her twin sister Kainene move from Lagos back to the Eastern region of the country, with Olanna joining Odenigbo at his house in Nsukka. At first the novel appears to focus on the love story between Odenigbo and Olanna, detailing the difficulties that they go through concerning Odenigbo's mother and her dislike of Olanna, as well as Odenigbo's infidelity. As the narrative continues and the outbreak of war ensues, there appears to be in the initial stages little impact on their day-to-day lives. As a result, the reader is able to see how the Nigeria-Biafra War was not an isolated part of history where all life stopped functioning until it's end. Instead the novel offers the reader an important insight into the way in which the conflict itself intruded upon the lives of individual people across Nigeria.

Odenigbo: Post-Colonial African Identity

Within the Nigerian literary canon as a whole there is a common thematic focus on the identity of African peoples as they look to develop nations from the colonially constructed borders they inherited. As discussed in chapter one, many of the early African authors used their work to engage with the deconstruction of black and African identities. Schools of thought such as pan-Africanism and Négritude became some of the driving intellectual forces that would lead to the end of direct colonial rule across Africa. Within Adichie's novel, *Odenigbo* presents the reader with a perfect example of those academics and intellectuals that invested so much energy in trying to decolonise the minds of new generations of people across Africa and the Americas. *Odenigbo's* concern with identity and justice is apparent throughout the novel and the secession of the Eastern region of Nigeria further fuels his passion, leading him to better define his own brand of nationalism. This begins initially out of the phase of decolonization from the British and the history and legacy that they have left behind across Africa. However, when the Eastern region becomes the Republic of Biafra, *Odenigbo* begins to dissociate himself altogether from a Nigerian identity. In this instance, the nation of Biafra is constructed along the lines of an us versus them dichotomy. This is in fact not an uncommon way for new states or nations to be forged or for national identities to be rationalised. It can be argued then that by its very nature, nationalism encourages various forms of 'othering' by allowing for a sense of common kinship, be that in cultural ideals and/or those with historical connections to one another. In the early stages of the novel *Odenigbo* is described by one of his friends as '...a hopeless tribalist...' (Adichie 2006:21) which becomes evident to the reader throughout the narrative. As a character, *Odenigbo* makes no secret of the fact that he finds his kinship to be first and foremost with his Igbo ethnic identity:

'I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came' (Adichie 2006:20)

Here Adichie uses Odenigbo's character as a critical tool through which to challenge the master narratives of black and African identities. Similar characters can also be found in many of Adichie's novels, including *Americanah*, which was discussed in greater detail in chapter two. His deconstruction of his own identity reveals his sense of locality to be with his ethnic and cultural heritage and not the European constructions of black identities. Odenigbo's belief that his Nigerian identity was forced upon him by external colonial factors means that his ability to divorce himself from that nationality is done with great ease.

From the outset, the reader is able to see how Odenigbo looks to empower everyone around him with what he has learnt, especially Ugwu. When Ugwu first comes to work for Odenigbo from his village, he is illiterate, but Odenigbo tells Ugwu that he will pay for him to attend school. Odenigbo's motive for doing so is not linked to a feeling of obligatory charitable duties, but rather a belief that the only way in which to decolonise the mind is through knowledge: 'education is a priority! How can we resist exploitation if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation?' (Adichie 2006:11). Egbunike posits that Odenigbo's "...decolonising agenda signals a new era in the politics of knowledge production in Nigerian institutions of higher education..." (Egbunike 2017:22). Odenigbo's continual engagement with his personal and national identity portrays him as a type of freedom fighter and nationalist, but as a character, he is far from the usual depiction of African intellectuals. Odenigbo is one of very few characters in the Nigerian literary canon that does not ascribe to the political ideals of pan-Africanism, believing that it '...is fundamentally a European notion' (Adichie 2006:20). Whilst pan-Africanism has been adopted by many intellectuals both in Africa and in the African diaspora, it has been argued that some writers in the diaspora fall into a trend of perpetuating Eurocentric ideals of African identity (Joseph 2001). If one is not careful when applying pan-African ideals, it is possible to misrepresent the discourses of decolonisation by grouping the continent together and omitting to acknowledge the nuances of African societies. Adichie is

clearly not one of those authors and through Odenigbo's character engages with the many nuances of identities coming from both Western and African voices.

Some of the most significant scenes related to Nigerian nationalism in the novel take place in Odenigbo's study. In his study, both before and during the tensions across Nigeria, the subject of ethnic integration in the country is discussed at length. Within this space, Adichie demonstrates how the subject of ethno-nationalism and state nationalism was primarily a preoccupation of academics more than it was for anyone else in the country. Odenigbo's friends and colleagues who he entertains in his study come from a number of places. Mr Johnson is from the Caribbean, Professor Lehman is American, Dr Patel is Indian, Professor Ezeka is Igbo, Okeoma is Igbo and Miss Adebayo is Yoruba. Through the diversity of Odenigbo's friends and colleagues, Adichie portrays not only an image of a culturally rich and ethnically mixed independent Nigeria, but also demonstrates that debates surrounding nationalism in Nigeria were had by all. Adichie also does not present Igbo nationalism as perfect or that ethno-nationalism is any less problematic than state nationalism. The author presents this in the dialogue between Odenigbo and his colleagues, who challenge his suggestions to the contrary. His connection with his Igbo identity and rejection of a Nigerian identity is challenged not by someone from another ethnic group in Nigeria, but by someone who also identifies as an Igbo person: 'but you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race' (Adichie 2006:20). This is something that Odenigbo refutes, claiming that: 'the pan-Igbo idea existed long before the white man!' (Ibid.21).

The debates in Odenigbo's study, with characters from other ethnic groups in Nigeria and other countries, acts as a space within the narrative for the discourse on nationalism and identity in Nigeria to be explored. Whilst it is clear in the novel that Adichie seeks to focus mainly on the experience of Igbo civilians during the Nigeria-Biafra War, she does not omit to include the voices of those from other ethnic groups in the narrative

(ethnic minority groups are included in this but to a lesser degree). Adichie is also cautious not to demonise all those in the novel who are non-Igbo and instead appears to make a conscious effort to depict the lines that divide those who do not want war and those who commit barbaric acts. The challenges in the novel to the idea of a pan-Igbo identity suggests to the reader that the Biafran identity was not pre-conceived but was instead a product of the massacres of Igbo people across Nigeria. Offodile provides an important analysis on the birth of Biafra when he postulates that:

“Biafra was conceived with no clear idea of the kind of country it would be, a clear indication that Biafra was unprepared at the time and was forced into secession and war. Because of the war situation, Biafra was ruled by decree. It was a unitary state and had no constitution” (Offodile 2016:49)

What Offodile’s assertions suggest is that Biafra was not just born of a pan-Igbo identity but instead conceived out of a sense of injustice and survival. As a result, Biafran nationalism becomes an attractive prospect to both revolutionaries and civilians alike, as it represents a nation born out of struggle. As to who would be considered a Biafran in this new country, there were unfortunately too many voices and too little unity on the matter.

Civil Society: Grassroots Nation Building

Adichie’s novel does not only present the debates that took place surrounding the subject of nationalism in the country at the time, but it also acknowledges the way in which civil society was a key driver in Biafran nation building. It is clear that Odenigbo’s interest in Biafran and Igbo nationalism is not restricted only to himself. His revolutionary outlook extends to all those who fall within the borders of Biafra and also those who wish to distance themselves from colonialism and injustice. Odenigbo’s ideas about what will make Biafra a successful state, are often in opposition to Western ideals of state building:

‘What matters is whatever will make our people move forwards. Let’s assume that a capitalist democracy is a good thing in principle, but if it is our kind – where somebody gives you a dress

that they tell you looks like their own, but it doesn't fit you and the buttons have fallen off – then you have to discard it and make a dress that is your own size. You simply have to!' (Adichie 2006:123-124)

The metaphor used here portrays an image and justification for why a one size fits all approach to democracy and state building does not always work. This once again acts a challenge to the master narratives and sources of knowledge production surrounding nation and state building globally. His insistence here being that the Western model would not work for African countries. Odenigbo's efforts to build the Biafran nation are also shown in his contribution to grass roots politics and state building:

'He had joined the Agitator Corps; after work, they went into the interior to educate the people. She often imagined him standing in the middle of a gathering of rapt villagers, talking in the sonorous voice about the great nation that Biafra would be. His eyes saw the future' (Adichie 2006:262)

It is possible then for the reader to view Odenigbo's character as a key contributor to the cause of nation building in Biafra. However, whilst in this narrative the focus is on the Biafran nation, what Odenigbo represents is the revolutionary characters needed as part of the forces for nation and state building for any country.

The involvement of civil society in the process of nation building is vital. The inclusion of this in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is not only an acknowledgement of this, but it also presents to the reader the possibilities for nation building when the civilian population are galvanised into being actively involved. After news of the massacres in the North of the country makes its way to those in the East, Odenigbo and his other university colleagues become actively involved in fighting for the secession of the Eastern region: '...WE, UNIVERSITY STAFF, DEMAND SECESSION AS A MEANS OF SECURITY...' (Adichie 2006:161). Such scenes in the novel suggest to the reader, that whilst the outbreak of the war and conflict was due to decisions made by those in positions of power, many of the ordinary people in the Eastern region supported the secession. Adichie goes on to paint an image of unity in their desire and demands for their

own state and place of relative safety (Ibid.162). Placing the rally on the campus of the University of Nsukka becomes symbolic not only of the strength of academic institutions and students in bringing about social changes, but also the distance that can sometimes be found between the wants and desires of intellectuals versus the everyday citizen.

Consequently, a conflict can arise between the desires of the general public and those of the intellectual classes. Jeyifo postulates that one of the tragedies of the war was how determined the “Biafran ruling class” were in seeing the war through to the very end, resulting in millions of deaths that could possibly have been avoided (Jeyifo 2016:263). What becomes clear then is the delicate balance of intellectual leadership and ensuring there is genuine consent from the greater populace when taking actions on their behalf. Only then will grass-roots civil activism and participation be beneficial to the process of nation building.

As I have already acknowledged in other chapters of this research, the contribution of women as functioning and active members of society in Nigeria, has often been excluded from narratives in the Nigerian literary canon. For this reason, it is important to draw attention to Adichie’s inclusion of the role of women during the Nigeria-Biafra War through civil activism. After the massacres in the North but before the outbreak of war, Richard (who is the boyfriend of Olanna’s sister Kainene) is asked to deliver a lecture by the university’s ‘women’s association’ titled ‘In Case of War’ (Adichie 2006:169). It may appear as a minor and perhaps even a trivial detail in the overall narrative of the novel, however, the acknowledgement of the existence of such organisations and their involvement in preparing for every eventuality is an important contribution to the Nigerian literary canon. As Azodo argues:

“...it was the women who were constantly on the go, were behind enemy lines engaging in attack trade, cooking to feed the fighting men in the front by making dry pack at different centers, welcoming them home when they were on leave from the front, and cooking at home for all young boys and girls as they grew up preparing to continue the relay—the boys to join the army voluntarily or be conscripted, and the girls to continue in the womanly roles that were

the mainstay, the stable rock of the foundation of the war” (Azodo 2012: 210)

It once again places women in an important position in society, where consideration for growth and survival is at the forefront of their priorities. In many ways, women’s role throughout the war did not change but the way in which they fulfilled those roles did. They were placed—and in many ways place themselves—in a position where the needs of everyone around them would take precedence before themselves (Spleth 2017; Dodgson-Katiyo 2017; Amuta 1983; Ouma 2011).

Adichie goes further in her framing of women’s civil activism when Olanna can be seen taking an active involvement in the war effort by volunteering at the school. Maintaining some form of education and training during periods of conflict is of the utmost importance. Without future generations who are ready to carry on the legacy of nation building and development, nations and states alike are bound to struggle if not collapse entirely. The most contemporary example of this would be the Syrian War, which at the time of writing this is well into its ninth year. Psychologically rebuilding the nations will be just as mammoth a task as physically rebuilding the bricks and mortar of all those fallen cities. When Olanna first takes on the role of volunteering at the school there is an air of optimism for the future. As the war progresses and the conflict begins to make its way closer and closer to where Olanna and Odenigbo are staying, Olanna becomes more and more jaded, filling her with an anger and resentment toward the Nigerian Federal forces. After another day of bombardment by the Nigerian planes flying overhead, Olanna makes her way to the school to teach:

“About a quarter of her class attended school. She taught them about the Biafran flag. They sat on wooden planks and the weak morning sun streamed into the roofless class as she unfurled Odenigbo’s cloth flag and told them what the symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future” (Adichie 2006:281)

Like most nations, flags hold an enormous amount of symbolism relating

to the birth and history of that country. Teaching the children about this puts in context the reasons for the emergence of the new country. In many ways, the children need to be re-educated in order to be able to redefine their current and future identities. This is a delicate matter and important responsibility; a fact that is not lost on Olanna.

After teaching the children about the significance of the Biafran flag, Olanna is shocked to see the potential dangers that could come from such positions of power and influence. During a lesson, one of the children tells Olanna of their desire ‘...to kill all the vandals...’ (Adichie 2006:281)—another name given to the advancing Nigerian Federal forces—which is something that leaves Olanna feeling somewhat troubled. Throughout the narrative, Olanna and Odenigbo can be placed in opposition to one another in terms of the strength of their views on the war. Both characters acknowledge the need for patriotism, however, Olanna appears to be the only one that considers the potential dangers that such blind patriotism can have on the development of the nation. In some instances, in the novel that blind patriotism would come to help to bring about the downfall of Biafra, most commonly through the paranoia that developed from it as a result. However, Olanna’s decision to teach the children about the Biafran flag in school presents itself as an important example of the function of civil society groups and their contribution to nation building, both during periods of conflict and peace time. Adichie’s decision to include women as the characters that take on the role of teaching the children speaks to the trend by female authors to show women in positions of national growth. Once again, it becomes women’s role to ensure that the nurturing of the next generation is being carried out, highlighting again the important role that women play in the process of nation building.

The Afia Attack was the name given to groups of women who would cross from the battle lines between Biafra and Nigeria to bring back food and essential supplies in order to support the Biafran war effort. It is such an important part of the history of the Nigeria-Biafra War and yet, little is documented about it. In April of 2017 at the annual Igbo Conference in London, the event screened a documentary by Ujuaku Nwakalor Akukwe & Chris Odili titled *AFIA ATTACK: The Untold Survival Stories of Women*

in the Nigeria-Biafra War was premiered (Igbo Conference 2017). It told the story of those women who were involved in the Afia Attack by survivors, family members and academics. It is a vital contribution to the history of Nigeria and the history of women in general. In Adichie's novel, Kainene is a representation and an acknowledgement of the actions of those women who took part in the Afia Attack (Dodgson-Katiyo 2017; Ouma 2011). Whilst there is no direct reference or labelling of the Afia Attack in the novel, it is suggested through the dialogue between characters that this is what Kainene is taking part in:

'It's all decided. I leave with Inatimi early tomorrow morning, and we'll be back by evening,' Kainene said, with that finality to her tone that Richard knew well. He was not opposed to the trip, though; he knew many people who did what she wanted to do' (Adichie 2006:403)

Throughout the latter part of the novel, Kainene continues to make these dangerous excursions across the battle lines in order to bring back needed supplies. As the conflict intensifies, the number of crossings into Nigeria that Kainene makes increases and so too does the risk. By the end of the novel it becomes clear that something has happened to Kainene during one of these excursions. Her absence is felt most acutely by her twin sister Olanna, who finds that with the end of the conflict comes the opportunity for her to find her sister: 'now I can go and find my sister,' she said quietly' (Adichie 2006:412). The novel ends with the whereabouts of Kainene unresolved, which becomes symbolic not only of the women who lost their lives whilst taking part in the Afia Attacks, but also the unresolved losses of everyone as a result of the Nigeria-Biafra War.

Nationalism and Patriotism: Olanna's Metamorphosis

Whilst Odenigbo is depicted as a staunch freedom fighter and patriot, Olanna is portrayed as more of a moderate patriot and nationalist, but a nationalist nonetheless. Both Olanna and Kainene hail from the upper-echelons of Nigerian society during that period and were both educated in a British university, which is in contrast to that of Odenigbo. Whilst Olanna and Kainene frequent the elite social scenes in Lagos, Adichie marks out the twin sisters as different from those who happily abide by the class politics within that elitist circle. Olanna is also not—as Odenigbo has been termed—a ‘tribalist’, which is evident very early on in the novel when she travels to the Northern region of Nigeria to visit not only her family, but also her friend Mohammed, who is Hausa. It is implied in the dialogue between Olanna and Mohammed that they were once lovers and were potentially going to marry one day, despite knowing that their parents would not have approved: ‘I am no longer the Igbo woman you wanted to marry who would taint the lineage with infidel blood,’ Olanna said, as they climbed into Mohammed’s red Porsche. ‘So I am a friend now’ (Adichie 2006:46). The relationship that she has with Mohammed holds great significance in the context of the overall tensions across the country. This is because it allows the reader to see that the bonds between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria were never so fraught that individual relationships were not created. Here again, Adichie’s narrative focuses on the day-to-day lives and loves of people across Nigeria, looking to ensure that the reader’s attention is focused on the people over the politics. Furthermore, her interaction with Mohammed also introduces the reader to a side of Olanna that they are yet to see in the novel, when he labels her ‘...a nationalist and a patriot...’ who will eventually marry a ‘...freedom fighter’ (Ibid.46). This sets up Odenigbo as the ideal partner for Olanna, especially when considering what they are both about to face together. Olanna and Mohammed’s relationship would later fall apart, simply because of the fact that Olanna’s life drastically changes living within the borders of Biafra and Mohammed’s only contact with her during

the conflict demonstrates his lack of understanding or empathy for what is actually happening to people in Biafra.

Olanna's transition from the life that she once knew to the one that she eventually finds herself living begins to become apparent the longer the war goes on. Having come from such an affluent background, it is initially very difficult for Olanna to acclimatise to the life that she lives during the war: '...while he was murmuring in her ear, she was mourning her money in the bank in Lagos' (Adichie 2006:262). The extent to which she is living in poverty is of course not something that she could have planned for and in many ways, relates back to Runner G's experience in *The Spider King's Daughter* of how drastic changes in one's social circumstances can at times have detrimental effects on multiple aspects of one's identity. However, as the conflict intensifies, Olanna has no choice but to adapt in order to survive. An example of which would be when she visits the relief centre, which after many days of being closed finally opens:

'It was not until Saturday that the gate swung open and Olanna surprised herself by how easily she joined in the inward rush of the crowd, how she moved numbly from queue to queue, dodged the swinging canes of the militia, pushed back when somebody pushed her. She was leaving with small bags of cornmeal and egg yolk and two pieces of stockfish when Okoromadu arrived' (Adichie 2006:271-272)

This image of Olanna fighting with other people for small amounts of food to take back for her family, is in stark contrast to the life that she is living when the reader is first introduced to her and Kainene. What the reader is now faced with, is an image of someone 'mourning'; the loss of their finances and their former life.

As a character in the context of this novel, part of this change can arguably be attributed to Olanna's revolutionary spirit and perhaps a feeling inside of her that strength and survival is what is needed in order to ensure the longevity of the Biafran nation. However, the other part of this perhaps brings to the fore questions surrounding humanity as a species and the driving forces behind some of our actions. In his book *The Social Contract* (first published in 1762) Jean-Jacques Rousseau posits that by the very action of participating in the prescribed laws of society,

humankind agrees to what he terms “the social contract” (Rousseau 1998:19). In the case of war, it can be argued that these laws—both morally conceived and institutionally prescribed—are not always as easy to abide by under such circumstances. Therefore, by Olanna’s very involvement in the war effort and her participation in the new means of her sourcing food, she has agreed to abide by a new “social contract”. Despite this, the fact remains that as a character, Olanna’s own contribution to the idea of nation building can be seen through these kinds of actions. Taken out of the context of the Nigeria-Biafra War, these characteristics would be seen as essential when trying to forge a nation through grassroots activism.

Despite this newfound sense of Biafran nationalism, Olanna, unlike Odenigbo, does not lose sight of who the true aggressors are and who is merely a pawn in the tragic events that had unfolded. Odenigbo on the other hand starts to find that his anger and frustration cannot be contained:

‘Don’t you say I have no sympathy! To say that secession is not the only way to security does not mean I don’t have sympathy!’ It was Miss Adebayo.

‘Did your cousins die? Did your uncle die? You’re going back to your people in Lagos next week and nobody will harass you for being Yoruba. Is it not your own people who are killing the Igbo in Lagos? Didn’t a group of your chiefs go to the North to thank the emirs for sparing Yoruba people? So what are you saying? How is your opinion relevant?’ (Adichie 2006:174)

This fallout that Odenigbo has with his friend Miss Adebayo is in many ways understandable as it comes from a place of anger and injustice. However, Olanna does not agree with Odenigbo’s treatment of his guest, telling him: ‘this is unacceptable, Odenigbo! You owe her an apology!’ (Adichie 2006:174). The juxtaposition of Olanna and Odenigbo in this situation frames the varying voices of those in Biafra who were trying to find a sense of normality amongst the chaos, whilst still trying to relate to those who were considered their fellow country men and women at one time. What is also clear is that acknowledgement that to ensure the longevity of your own nation, relationships must be possible with other

nations around them, especially if that country wishes to participate in the capitalist system in its current construction.

Before the outbreak of the war in the novel, the main narrative focuses on the love affair between Olanna and Odenigbo. The importance of which highlights how unprepared they were for the outbreak of war, but also how quickly they adapted to it. From the outset of the war, Olanna's continually questions her relationship with her national identity, as she tries to make sense of what it means to be Nigerian or Biafran. A key example of this in the novel is when Olanna witnesses the symbolic birth of Biafra by the people themselves in a somewhat ceremonial occasion:

'Some young men were carrying a coffin with NIGERIA written on it in white chalk; they raised it up, mock solemnity on their faces. Then they placed it down and pulled their shirts off and started to dig a shallow hole in the ground. When they lowered the coffin into the hole, a cheer rose in the crowd and spread, ripplelike, until it was one cheer, until Olanna felt that everybody there had become one' (Adichie 2006:163)

The image of the coffin, representing their Nigerian identity, being buried is very powerful. It is the point of change in the novel for most of the characters who reside in Biafra, but especially for Olanna, who finds herself accepting without resistance this new sense of unity amongst other people who now define themselves as Biafran.

Moreover, the feeling of unity for the new nation of Biafra was not just about a way of the Eastern region stepping away from Nigeria. Within the novel Adichie portrays not only the historical realism of the Biafran identity and nation, but also what Biafra became symbolic of: 'Biafra is born! We will lead Black Africa! We will live in security! Nobody will ever again attack us! Never again!' (Adichie 2006:163). Here we see that what Biafra symbolised was hope, security and a sense of justice for many peoples and countries across Africa:

'Olanna watched them and realized with a sweet surge that they all felt what she felt, what Odenigbo felt, as though it were liquid steel instead of blood that flowed through their veins, as though they could stand barefoot over red-hot embers' (Adichie 2006:163)

As discussed, this is the turning point for Olanna, where those innate desires to belong, her nationalistic fervour and her sense of what is just and right, find themselves connecting with a Biafran identity. Consequently, the focus becomes about associating with a cause more than it does any sort of singular pan-Igbo identity. When read in this way, Olanna's Biafra becomes inclusive of multiple ethnic groups by its very nature and intention.

The Experiences of Minority Groups and Women in Destination Biafra

Biafran Nationalism and The Minority Question

There is not one ethnic group that solely populates the Eastern region of Nigeria, which is in fact the case for the country as a whole. Whilst the Igbos are the majority ethnic group in that region, there are many other smaller minority ethnic groups living within the same geographical location as the Igbos. Even within the Igbo ethnic group itself, there are several different groups of Igbos. Whilst it is important to analyse the idea of a Biafran identity in relation to pan-Igboism, it would only offer a narrow perspective of the Biafran experience if the ethnic minority groups that fell within the new boundaries of Biafra were omitted from the analysis. Within the Nigerian civil war literary canon, many of the characters that belong to some of those minority ethnic groups in the East have often either been absent from the narratives or where they have been included, the portrayals have been somewhat minor or negative. These kinds of novels tend to focus primarily on polarised images of those who had the will and desire to see the Biafran state succeed and those who did not: with the minority ethnic groups often being confined to the latter grouping. One of the concerns of some of those minority groups has been described in both fictional and non-fictional texts on the war, as being about not wanting to, once again, be and or feel oppressed by a larger ethnic group. This would become one of the main reasons as to why

divisions would begin to show amongst the Biafran population and paranoia would bring about witch hunts for not only those from minority ethnic groups, but anyone who spoke negatively about the war effort. These people were labelled saboteurs.

Nevertheless, details surrounding the experience of ethnic minorities in Biafra are still largely undocumented by authors of both fictional and non-fictional texts. In particular, Obi argues that there is a need for further exploration of the ethnic groups living in the Niger Delta region, in order to examine the battle for control of the oil and how that affected those living that area (Obi 2016:231). Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (first published in 1985) is one of the only fictional novels that addresses the experience of those in the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa was himself Ogoni, an ethnic group that originates from the Delta region, who have themselves been subjected to continual oppression and violence over the years as a result of their proximity to the natural oil reserves in Nigeria. His treatment of the Nigeria-Biafra War in *Sozaboy* brings to the fore some of the confusion that many of the smaller ethnic groups had endured during that period; finding themselves involved in a war, the cause of which they were not entirely sure of. Coffey argues that the minority subject has been dealt with in some aspects in other novels such as Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (first published 1976) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, but suggests that this was done "...without ever resolving it comfortably" (Coffey 2016:267). Both novels go some way towards suggesting that the goal of Biafra was not to just create a new nation solely for the Igbos to call home, but one that was intended to be inclusive for all those living in the Eastern region of Nigeria (Ibid.267). However, Obi has argued to the contrary of this, highlighting the:

"...perspective of double-layered oppression: the first by the ethnic-majority groups that dominate political power in Nigeria and Biafra, and second by those ethnic minority elites profiting from the suffering of their own people" (Obi 2016:239)

The latter element of Obi's argument is certainly addressed in Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, but arguably, the suggestion of a "double-layered oppression" in this context warrants further examination and research.

With further inquiry into the idea of the minority groups being oppressed (of course not in all regions or instances during the war), the pieces could be better placed to understand if the minority groups did assist the Nigerian Federal forces and if so, why? and what would have been different if the Biafran nation building project had acknowledged their importance at an early stage in the war?

Within the canon of Nigerian civil war literature, the image of the ethnic minority and the term saboteur are usually never far from one another. This has become one of the most prominent depictions of those from minority ethnic groups within these novels. Saboteurs were often labelled as such because they were accused of playing some part in the successes of the Nigerian Federal forces advancements into Biafran territory by providing them with intelligence. Within these fictional and non-fictional narratives of the Nigerian civil war literature, the existence of saboteurs is primarily presented as a result of mass paranoia, which resulted in witch hunts and in some cases the carrying out of vigilante justice. Several novels suggest that this suspicion and paranoia of one another would play a huge role in the downfall of Biafra on the civil front. In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* the subject of minority groups is only touched upon in one chapter and examines this exact suspicion of the non-Igbo betraying the Biafran cause:

'First the pregnant young woman recoiled and then she spat with a vicious intensity that wrinkled her forehead. The watery smear of saliva landed on Dr Inyang's chin.
'Saboteur!' the pregnant woman said. 'It is you non-Igbo who are showing the enemy the way! *Hapu m!* It is you people that showed them the way to my hometown!' (Adichie 2006:320)

Here the reader is presented with a perfect example of that paranoia and the belief that these saboteurs are bringing down Biafra by helping the "enemy": The Nigerian Federal forces. The repeated presence of this theme in civil war narratives goes some way towards validating the fears that those from some of the smaller ethnic groups had about being oppressed and marginalised by the Igbos. Gellner postulates that should nationalist movements "...eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not

then replace it by the old local low culture; it revives, or invents, a local high...culture of its own..." (Gellner 1983:57). By this, Gellner suggests that by its very nature, nationalism struggles to be equally inclusive and ultimately develops some form of cultural hierarchy and system of superiority. However, in Adichie's novel the author makes a point of challenging the belief that these suspicions were widely held without evidence of a difference of opinion amongst Igbo people:

'Kainene walked over briskly and slapped the pregnant woman, two hard snacks in quick succession on her cheek.

'We are all Biafrans! *Anyincha bu Biafra!*' Kainene said. 'Do you understand me? We are all Biafrans!' (Adichie 2006:320)

The significance of Kainene's reaction to the pregnant woman is that it not only challenges the idea that all Igbos saw the minority ethnic groups as saboteurs, but it also supports the idea that Biafra represented more than just an Igbo nation building project. Its intention, as far as the people were concerned, was to be a nation of justice, for the simple reason that it was born out of unjust acts. However, the goals and intentions of civil society do not always match the political goals of the state.

Flora Nwapa's novella *Never Again* (first published in 1975) deals with the theme of the saboteur in some detail. *Never Again* appears to focus on the general sense of paranoia that was felt amongst many in Biafra during those civil war years, especially amongst civilians. It tells the story of an Igbo woman called Kate, who begins to see the dangers of such paranoid sentiments and those who perpetuate them. As discussed, this paranoia and label saboteur was not solely reserved for those from ethnic minority groups and this is something that Nwapa draws the reader's attention to in her novella. Many people in the villages that were captured by the Nigerian Federal forces had no choice but to move on and find other places where they would be safe. This was more often than not a neighbouring village. This action in itself was seen as a form of betrayal and treason, warranting, some believed, the label saboteur:

‘Every village we came to called us saboteurs and refused to let us pass. We had allowed the Nigerians to take our town, we were all saboteurs. We all deserved to be shot, just as the original saboteurs were shot. My blood ran cold. I knew the original saboteurs. I didn’t know why they were shot. God pardon Biafra. Forgive this blindness, this folly’ (Nwapa 1992:64-65)

The realisation of the “folly” of the Biafran people is shown here when Kate’s character realises that they themselves once easily assigned the term saboteur perhaps without considering the validity of their claims.

Those living in Biafra were not only labelled saboteurs because they were from minority groups or had escaped the destruction of their village. They were also labelled this way if they spoke negatively about the war effort or spoke out against Ojukwu. As a result, the paranoia is further exacerbated in Nwapa’s novel by the spreading of rumours that were designed to instil fear and compliance in people:

‘They don’t know that Ojukwu has the file of everybody in Biafra. One day they will betray themselves and the D.M.I. will arrest them. They are damn saboteurs. I won’t be surprised if I wake up one morning and hear that they had gone back to Nigeria, these people’ (Nwapa 1992:25)

Based on historical reports of that period, the likelihood of Biafra having the institutional capacity to maintain public records on all potential “enemies of the state” is highly unlikely. However, what Nwapa shows is that the reality of this is irrelevant because the effect that it had on the people in Biafra was enough for it to serve its purpose. In some instances, those fears amounted to outright threats: ‘Those of you will not go combing, you are all saboteurs. When this war is over you will be dealt with. Those of you who are too big to comb, too big to go to war, you all till be dealt with’ (Nwapa 1992:48). In this respect, the novella serves as a warning and a lesson to the dangers of using fear tactics to encourage unity amongst any group of peoples. It also depicts another experience of minority groups during the civil war.

Debbie Ogedemgbe: A Woman's War Experience

One novel that has given great attention to the minority and women's experience—both before and during the war—is Buchi Emecheta in her novel *Destination Biafra*. Whilst the novel received quite critical reviews, it still remains a key novel worthy of inquiry on the subject of Biafra. The protagonist of the novel, Debbie, comes from the Itsekiri ethnic group, who are described in the novel as '...neither Ibos nor Yorubas, although their language was something of a mixture' (Emecheta 1983:107). Whilst Debbie does not come from an ethnic group that is completely separate to any of the larger ethnic group, she is still representative of those who were caught between in what may have felt like someone else's war. Emecheta's decision to make her protagonist someone who is caught between two of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, goes some way towards presenting the reader with some of the complexities surrounding ethno-nationalism in country. It begs a reimagining of the history of the Nigeria-Biafra War, especially some of the more common accounts which have not always acknowledged those complexities in any detail. The novel is also different to other fictional accounts of Nigerian civil war literature because the majority of the narrative takes place outside of Biafra and also pays a greater deal of attention to the experience of women during the war:

"Her decision to keep close to the reality of the ground, painting not only the suffering and violence but also the political events and military exploits, was possibly motivated by her desire to facilitate her readers' identification with events described in the novel and support the political reflections she explores in the text"
(Ugochukwu 2016:365)

The novel adds to the canon of Nigerian civil war literature an important examination of those who were caught up in the injustice and brutality of the conflict, regardless of the side they were on. Never one to shy away from graphic details, Emecheta's novel looks to present the reader with an insight into the level of violence and trauma that many civilians were subject to throughout the conflict.

In particular, Emecheta's novel places a great deal of focus on the violence and trauma that women had experienced during the Nigeria-Biafra War. Regarding this, Ezeigbo argues that "there is no other writer on the war that has devoted so much space to women, women's suffering and women's intellectual activities side by side with men as Emecheta has done" (Ezeigbo 1991:100). In her autobiography *Head Above Water*, Emecheta describes Debbie's character as "...my dream woman..." (Emecheta 1994c:1). What is interesting about this admission from the author is that Debbie is the only female protagonist that Emecheta has created who does not have children, showing that the authors dream woman appears to be in contrast to her previous ideas of womanhood. For Debbie, the stage is set for her to present the reader with the difficulties that many women in Nigeria face, especially during those early years of independence from British rule. Even the descriptions of Debbie in the narrative frame the way in which she is perceived in this kind of double-vision by those in Nigeria (both Nigerians and resident colonials): '...for all her Oxford knowhow. She was slim and pretty, but arrogant. She was intelligent, nice to be with, but independent. She was too English for his liking' (Emecheta 1983:36). In this example from the novel what is shown is the way in which a positive description of Debbie is followed by a perceived negative, especially if we consider her decision to be "independent" as a negative. As a result, the male characters in the novel are convinced that Debbie will undoubtedly experience '...big identity problems...' (Ibid.36). She goes against the grain and wants something different for her life than what is expected of her:

'It was just that she did not wish to live a version of their life – to marry a wealthy Nigerian, ride the most expensive cars in the world, be attended by servants...No, she did not want that; her own ideas of independence in marriage had no place in that set-up. She wanted to do something more than child breeding and rearing and being a good passive wife to a man whose ego she must boost all her days, while making sure to submerge every impulse that made her a full human' (Emecheta 1983:45)

In this passage, Emecheta makes clear the type of woman that Debbie is

and puts her, in many ways, in opposition to the more common depictions of women in Nigeria at the time. Whilst Emecheta has always explored the experiences and desires that many women have for motherhood, she creates in the form of Debbie's character a woman who can see beyond this and other expectations of her. Within the narrative, she is then singled out as different and the clear heroine of the novel.

Despite her desire for a life outside of the ordinary being highlighted as a negative by many of the male characters in the novel, it is in fact her independence that allows her to take on the 'delicate mission' that the character General Abosi sends her off to do (Emecheta 1983:129). Debbie is portrayed as being crucial to the nation building project of both Biafra and Nigeria. In this respect, Emecheta quite plainly suggests to the reader that women do play a very important role in the construction of a nation, not only during a period of peace but also during periods of conflict. Whilst this does not always require a literal connection of war and military service, Debbie's character depicts the experience of those women who do choose to enter a space that has traditionally been '...a masculine preserve...' (Emecheta 1983:56). However, Debbie is well aware that her invasion of a male dominated space would not be an easy place for her to occupy, but is nevertheless determined to confront society's reaction to this (Ibid.56). In several instances, it is in fact women who have the harshest reaction to her desire to become a soldier:

'I don't know what has come over you girls. We all want freedom for women, but I doubt if we are ready for this type of freedom where young women smoke and carry guns instead of looking after husbands and nursing babies' (Emecheta 1983:108)

Here we see Debbie's mother expressing her concern about her daughter's decision to stray from the societal norms of what is expected of a woman (which of course would change depending on the society and culture in question). Within this example from the novel it is also important to address the deeper meaning behind Debbie's mother's comments. Emecheta draws the reader's attention to a key point in feminism that is predominantly derived from African female's voices, which is that there is not any one single goal or idea of freedom for women. In creating a

character like Debbie, Emecheta uses the literary space to explore those differing perspectives of African women and their numerous beliefs on what freedom and progression looks like for them and by them.

The experiences of women during the war are numerous, just as much as they were for men. The key difference between them being that in historical accounts of war the focus is usually placed on the experience of men, with the experiences of women and children appearing commonly as footnotes. In the context of the Nigeria-Biafra War, there are more and more sources being created that acknowledge the specific experience of women that were caught on the Biafran side of the conflict. In the canon of Nigerian civil war literature Debbie's character is unique, not only because she is from a minority group that is caught between an Igbo and a Yoruba identity, but also because she begins her journey on the Nigerian side of the conflict and ends it on the Biafran side. As a result, the reader is able to witness the differences that those on either side of the conflict would have experienced. However, whilst Debbie is one of the first females to join the military in the novel, she is not the only one:

'It was at this time that the first two female recruits were enrolled in the Nigerian army, as officers in training who would teach the fast-growing army population the English language. One of these was Debbie Ogedemgbe – some of the senior officers were not sure whether she set on avenging her father or on being commissioned for patriotic reasons – and the other was her friend Babs Teteku. As soon as it was announced that these two girls from illustrious homes had joined the army, three girls from the Ibo East applied, not to be outdone' (Emecheta 1983:74-75)

What is interesting here is the way in which Emecheta frames the somewhat competitive nature of the major ethnic groups with one another. This is in fact part of Britain's colonial legacy in the region and is explained in great detail in the first part of the novel. Britain's colonial legacy is also credited in the novel with robbing women of any type of equality that they may have had with men prior to the arrival of the Europeans: 'in the distant past in that part of Africa women were treated almost as men's equals, but with the arrival of colonialism their frail claim to equality had been taken

away' (Emecheta 1983:119). As war is traditionally portrayed as an experience predominately affecting men as combatants, Emecheta uses her novel to explore those on the peripheries of those narratives and places the blame for the war on the actions of men. It is then for the female characters in the novel to act as the heroines and saviours, resolving situations that they themselves were not party to creating: 'You men make all this mess and then call on us women to clear it up' (Emecheta 1983:114-115).

Despite her status as a soldier Debbie is not immune to the horrors that are inflicted on women during periods of war: most commonly, rape. Throughout history, in both fictional and non-fictional accounts of war, stories of women being subject to multiple instances of rape is unfortunately quite common place. In *Destination Biafra*, Emecheta introduces this subject matter to the reader when Debbie recounts some of the stories that she has been told of such things: 'there were stories of women being beaten and sexually assaulted by soldiers, whose commander would only say, "it is war, and in a war situation men lose their self-control," as if that were explanation enough' (Emecheta 1983:119). To make matters worse, there is also presented in the novel a female perspective on this that appears somewhat resigned to such a fate. After both Debbie and her mother are raped by a group of Nigerian soldiers as they make their way to Biafra, her mother attempts to offer her daughter solace by telling her, 'we are women. Daughter this is our lot' (Ibid.134). The statement here made by Debbie's mother presents a sad reflection on how women come to accept that their place in society is fixed as second-class citizens. The statement acts as a critique on the patriarchal structures of society, as well as the women who resign themselves to these masculine institutions and choose not challenge them.

It can be argued that Debbie's experience as a woman on both sides of the conflict goes a long way towards damaging her passion and belief in the strength of a Nigerian or a Biafran nation. This is not only as a result of her own traumatic experiences in the novel, such as the rape of her and her mother, but also what she witnesses other women, children

and men being subjected to during the war. She, like many other characters in civil war novels, is depicted as starting off or finishing with a romantic idea of what the Biafran state would be like. It is this idea of a somewhat utopian state that helps to keep alive this idea of nation based on justice and equality. What becomes clear in the narrative of *Destination Biafra* is the bloody war and horrors that ensued in order to try and make the Biafran state a reality. At the end of the novel when Debbie witnesses General Abosi fleeing Biafra on a plane she begins to rethink all that she had previously believed in:

‘A hot uncontrollable anger enveloped her, making her sweat and shiver at the same time. To be so betrayed, by the very symbol of Biafra! She remembered the pitiful baby Biafra who stretched and died on her back; she remembered the image of the young mother who was raped and then pounded to a pulp by those inhuman soldiers; she recalled the death of Ngbechi and his little brother Ogo, who had wanted plantain and chicken stew and could take no more’ (Emecheta 1983:257)

As she recalls all that she has witnessed on her way through Nigeria and Biafra in order to speak with General Abosi, she begins to see that, as a state Biafra may be little different from Nigeria. This is something that her mother warns her of before Debbie and herself part ways:

“Debbie, Debbie,” her mother called in a tired voice, “what are you talking about? These men, whether in uniform or not, will repeat the very mistakes the so-called politicians made. You mark my words. I can’t stop you; you’re a grown woman. Go to the Biafra of your dreams, and when you get there you’ll find ordinary people. Not angels, just people. And where there are people there will be corruption and exploitation. You can’t change human nature. But maybe we all need our Biafras to keep us going. I only hope you don’t get too disappointed with yours when you find it” (Emecheta 1983:160)

What becomes clear in the narrative is that regardless of the state, what Emecheta highlights as the important in the narrative is the human element and the effect that the conflict has on the civilians.

Abosi’s escape is not seen as a betrayal simply because he is leaving. When Debbie compares what she has seen on her travels to his ability to leave, it is the human endurance that comes to mind, more

specifically women's. Throughout the novel the reader is witness to the horrors and abuse that women endure throughout the war, but it is the response that women have that captures Debbie's and the reader's attention:

'Again Debbie marvelled at the resources of women. She had seen Uzoma Madako with her husband in Benin, seen the way she sat, her head resting passively on a pole that supported one of the sheds at the motor park; Debbie had seen the way she lifted her eyes as if they were so weighty, had heard the way she spoke in a whisper. And now look at the same woman, only a few days after the death of her husband, she had the courage to slap another woman, to tell another woman to stop indulging in self-pity'
(Emecheta 1983:213)

Debbie's perspective in the novel almost always draws the reader's attention back to the experience of women, both before and during the war. However, Emecheta does not omit to acknowledge the experience of men, but does place a focus on the way in which women respond to decisions that are made by men which affect them. As a result, Emecheta's brand of feminism becomes apparent where she looks to place more attention on the experience of women, but never at the expense of the male experience.

As there has been little effort from the Nigerian government to carry out an official line of inquiry into what happened during the Nigeria-Biafra War, fictional spaces remain some of the best place to engage with the memory and trauma of the war. It has forever changed the landscape of the Nigerian national identity and without some form of resolution it will haunt any future ideal of Nigerian nationalism. Through the portrayal of the Biafran nation in Nigerian novels, authors have the opportunity to construct the kind of national identity that they may wish the reader to adopt through consumption of the novel. However, apart from the works of female authors such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the image of Biafran nationalism also omitted to include the experience of women in their narratives. Consequently, the depiction of

the Biafran nation is no different to that of the Nigerian in silencing female voices from the national space. The contribution of those female authors goes a long way towards acknowledging the civil activism and day-to-day contribution of women during the Nigeria-Biafra War.

Although the civil war novels analysed in this chapter have placed a greater focus on the experience and contribution of women, in many ways they offer no further answers on the subject of the minorities than has already been documented. Whilst Emecheta's novel gives more of a voice to minorities than Adichie's, neither novel makes clear how the minority ethnic groups would have featured in the new nation of Biafra. Here, fictional representations of the Nigeria-Biafra War can only go so far in terms of defining what it meant to be Biafran. Consequently, the Nigerian civil war novel is still in need of the portrayal of a truly Biafran experience for the minority ethnic groups. It must be noted that what these female authors do provide is a portrayal of the war that acknowledges the experiences of both women and men; whether civilian or military. As with other novels written by female authors, there is an acknowledgement that the experiences of both men and women in relation to nationalism are equally important and valid.

Whilst there have been renewed calls for the secession of the country of Biafra, Nigeria remains a unified country. Political groups such as The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Biafra Nations Youth League (BNYL) use new mediums of technology available to them—such as Twitter and Facebook—to help realise their dream of an independent Biafran state. With the Nigerian government remaining firmly in opposition to the secession, coupled with the lack of a cohesive vision and disagreements amongst the secessionist groups, there appears to be little hope of a peaceful resolution to this in the foreseeable future. Until the Nigerian government takes actions towards resolving the Biafra question where all parties concerned are in agreement, the Biafran identity will remain immortalised on the pages of both fictional and non-fictional books.

Conclusion

Within the novels that have been analysed in my research it is clear that there is no single image of a Nigerian identity or the Nigerian nation. However, in some ways the authors do fall into two categories of style, where one group presents the Nigerian identity as the primary with the ethno-national identity as secondary and the other group presents the ethno-national identity as the primary, with the Nigerian identity as secondary. In both instances, it is made clear that these two elements are an important part of the identity formation as a whole. Consequently, readers are presented with some of the realities of the identity politics in Nigeria, where the citizens are able to readily interchange between their national and ethno-national identities. These framings of identity allow the intended and unintended audience of the text to understand the existence and importance of these multi-layered nationalisms that are hosted within Nigeria and many other African countries.

Since the advent of the Nigerian novel in English, the thematic focus on nationalism has been ever present in the narratives of the Nigerian literary canon. As a discourse, nationalism can be extremely complex. The application of its tenets and theories, becomes somewhat problematic when used in the context of the African nation. This is because the discourse on nationalism has largely been associated with the historical formation of European nations and states. On the topic of nationalism Gellner postulates that it is first and foremost "...a political principle..." (Gellner 1983:1). Consequently, the formation of nations presents itself as being partially born out of bonds of kinship and partially born out a necessity for order and control. It begs the question then that if culture is "...an essential function in the shaping of collective identities" (Dieckhoff 2016:15), then are national identities about legitimacy *and* power? Or is it the case that nations seek legitimacy but nation-states seek the power? When considering these questions in conjunction with the complex makeup of Nigeria as a country, the fragility of the Nigerian nation and national identity becomes apparent.

The works of these female authors explored in my research demonstrates how the multiplicity of Nigerian identities can be constructed in the narratives of Nigerian novels. This is shown by the way in which

they explore the characters experience through the lens of both their Nigerian and ethno-national identity. The significance of ethno-nationalism and the portrayal of those nations and cultures within the novels becomes an important contribution to the Nigerian literary canon. Through this, these Nigerian female authors challenge the discourse on nationalism and also offer readers an alternative concept of what national identities could look like; ones that are inclusive of multiple layers in their national identities. It can be argued then that the prefix supra- can be applied to the ethno-national identity, placing the Nigerian identity as an umbrella title that sits above the multi-national identities it encompasses (Bereketeab 2002). The structure of this—whilst not defined in these terms—can be seen in the novels of these Nigerian female authors.

Through their portrayals of strong female characters who continue to place importance on both the Nigerian and ethno-national identities, the role of the female in the national space becomes visible and crucial. The novels demonstrate that women play a vital role in preserving and developing the nation through their ability to give birth to new life and the subsequent nurturing of future generations. This belief is also shared by the first Nigerian female author Flora Nwapa who states that “the woman’s role in Africa is crucial for the survival and progress of the race. This is, of course, true of all women across the globe, be they black or white” (Nwapa 2007:527). Thus, these novels offer important contributions not only to the Nigerian literary canon, but all literary discourses surrounding the contribution of women to the preservation of nations and the human race.

One of the significant examples discussed in this research has been the symbolic portrayals of female resistance. These images of resistance challenge not only the restrictive structures of patriarchal societies—both in Nigeria and the diaspora—but also the pressures of Eurocentric centres of power that seek to control the future development of African peoples. These female characters have challenged those centres of power simply through reclaiming ownership of their children’s futures and changing those sources of knowledge production for future generations. Those characters based in the diaspora have demonstrated these forms of resistance in different ways to those based in Nigeria.

However, every example within the Nigerian literary canon of female authors only stands to further demonstrate the power that mothers wield over the future of the nation.

The works of Buchi Emecheta often portray an image of a protagonist whose identity is centred in both Yoruba and Igbo culture. These characters demonstrate meaningful representations of the cohabitation of ethno-nationalism in Nigeria and the influence that the multiculturalism of the country can have on individuals residing within it. The author also places great importance on the role of mothering, suggesting that this is tantamount to all other things in the community, regardless of the cultural derivation of the individual. The inclusion of such characters by female authors ensures that women—more importantly mothers—are no longer absent from the narrative of nation building. Whilst these authors place great importance on the contribution of the mother, they do not fail to negate the significant role of the father as well. In so doing, they present the canon with a more holistic view of the family unit. Even in the works of Buchi Emecheta, whose father characters are often flawed and absent from the family unit, there is still an acknowledgement of the role that fathers play in the lives of their children and the process of nation building.

In the case of the diaspora novel what becomes clear is that, as Egbunike posits, "...a life in exile cannot be disconnected from 'home', and Nigeria remains in the consciousness of its diaspora" (Egbunike 2014:231). The definition of where 'home' is, becomes dependent on the experience of the character, sometimes resulting in a denial of Nigeria as a place they can call home. The inclusion of subject matters in the novels surrounding the LGBTQ community in Nigeria would be an example of this. Such narratives challenge the discourse of Nigerian nationalism by questioning its inclusive and exclusive parameters for acceptance. Consequently, characters can be seen to be easily adopting foreign cultures and nationalities through their search for acceptance. This search

for acceptance is how the construction of belonging and 'unbelonging' begins to take shape in the narratives of Nigerian diaspora novels.

Life in the diaspora is also portrayed as confronting characters with challenges to the definition of their national identity. As a result of their ethno-national identity being little known to societies in the Western world, the connection to and definition of this remains unaltered in a foreign space. However, in those same Western spaces, characters are faced with the need to have both their race and national identity categorised. The character Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah* is faced with this experience and challenges those master narratives through the medium of blogging. Through Ifemelu's blog, Adichie frames the strength and contribution of Nigerian women who reshape and reimagine their society by challenging the status quo. In fact, Ifemelu's character represents not only the contribution of Nigerian women, but of the numerous contemporary bloggers who use the Internet as a means of bypassing traditional means of publishing and presenting alternative voices on the identity of African peoples. In her novel, Adichie both accepts and rejects the "configurations of blackness" and continual 'othering' through these definitions of African peoples (Morrison 2017:55). Thus, the characters who have lived in the diaspora, often return to Nigeria with a renewed sense of both their Nigerian and ethno-national identity.

The early Nigerian authors attempts to write the Nigerian nation onto the pages of their novels was done so in an attempt to unify the country in opposition to colonialism. Egya suggests that "...novelists, are inevitably saddled with the burden of history" (Egya 2012:209) and arguably from its birth, the Nigerian novel in English has been used as a tool to de- and re-construct Nigerian society. It is clear that the Nigeria-Biafra War was a significant turning point in the history of the country, which was immediately reflected on the pages of subsequent Nigeria novels. The nation of Nigeria would never again be portrayed in the same way. If it is the case that "...not all nationalisms can be satisfied...at the same time" (Gellner 1983:2) then the question remains as to how Nigeria will be able to appease the multiple nations that sit within its borders?

The existence of the Biafran nation in the narratives of Nigerian novels raises important questions surrounding these identity politics in Nigeria. Gellner argues that: “Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist *movement* is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind” (Gellner 1983:1 italics in original). Taking Gellner’s assertion into account, we are left to consider what will stop any future fragmentations of the Nigerian nation? When we consider the idea of the Biafran nation within the civil war novel, it becomes clear that in many ways it was not just about Igbo self-determination. Biafra was also a symbol of security and solidarity in the face of injustice. However, the question remains as to whether or not that same Biafran identity then carried a sense of injustice with it from the perspective of some minority ethnic groups. The minority ethnic groups fell into two categories; those who were aggrieved at being forced to join in the secession and those who were completely in support of the new breakaway country. As a result, it is difficult to see how well the Biafran national identity has been received by non-Igbo ethnic groups based in Nigeria.

What is clear in the civil war novels, whether written by female or male authors, is that they still construct an image of Biafra only in the period of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Consequently, Biafran nationalism remains in fictional texts as it does in non-fictional texts, which is something close to the revolutionary spirit that brought about the secession in the first place. Where instances still remain in Nigeria of aggrieved ethno-national sentiments, the fragility and unity of the Nigerian national identity remains pertinent. However, it has been argued that “secession is not the magic solution some invoke, saying that if two peoples cannot manage to live together, all they have to do is part ways for everything to fall back into place” (Dieckhoff 2016:149). If this is the case, then it is perhaps in the best interest of the Nigerian people to take back ownership of the process of defining their own Nigerian national identity, whilst at the same time not sacrificing important aspects of their ethno-national identity. In so doing, African countries would create alternative structures to the general formation of the nation-state.

Whilst the national and ethno-national identity is depicted as being a very important part of the narratives in these novels, so too is the function of the state. The difference between the nation and the state in this definition becomes the politics of identity versus the politics of governance respectively. What is highlighted as key in such narratives is state infrastructure and the facilities that are provided to its citizens. This thematic context places little value on the identity politics in Nigeria, which become secondary to the basic needs of the Nigerian citizens. An important example of this would be the arrested development of the Nigerian youth.

It is highly probable that future Nigerian novels will focus on the experience of the Nigerian youth in historical, contemporary and futuristic images of Nigerian society. What remains to be seen however, is how the thematic focus and subject matter will change regarding the Nigerian youth and their experience of “waithood” and “choicelessness”. The authors depictions of such experiences provide critical engagements on the capacity of the Nigerian state to provide a future for its youth. Within these narratives, the intent is concerned more with an optimally functioning state than any confirmed definition of Nigerian nationalism. Consequently, Nigerian novels have been unable to leave the theme of ‘brain-drain’ to the pages of literary history and instead feel the need to continually challenge the failings of the Nigerian government in not fully supporting the development of the Nigerian people.

Furthermore, the contemporary narratives of ‘brain-drain’ present readers with, in some cases, characters who encounter psychologically troubling experiences when leaving Nigeria. The stories of economic migrants trying to make their way to other countries—not only in Europe and North America but also neighbouring African states—is an important contemporary narrative to continue to engage with in the Nigerian literary canon. Such novels question definitions of human rights and the treatment of people based on the status of their legality or illegality in any particular state. As such, the pitfalls of the construction of the state and its relationship with human rights and national development are brought to

the fore. These narratives also challenge the Eurocentric master narratives that present African countries as ravaged by war, with terrified refugees fleeing for safety, rather than places where citizens would gladly stay and build a life for themselves, but instead leave as a result of limited career options. The possible danger in pursuing such narratives is the potential there is of perpetuating a stagnant image of African countries as places to escape from, rather than return to. Despite the damaging effects it has on the portrayal Nigerian nation building, whilst the subject matter remains relevant there are few signs of such narratives being archived to the Nigerian literary past.

Alternative narratives in relation to the failings of the Nigerian state tell the stories of characters such as Runner G in Onuzo's novel. The volatility of the Nigerian social strata can result in stories of rags to riches and riches to rags. In these narratives, it is the haves who are afforded the space to consider and philosophise their national identity, as they travel inside and outside of the country, constantly faced with the need to define themselves in opposition to those from other countries. In contrast, the have-nots seldom entertain such thoughts; instead concerned with day-to-day survival and continual frustrations with a government that prioritises the needs of the haves over the have-nots. In such narrative contexts, it becomes apparent that concerning oneself with a sense of national identity is a privilege, not a necessity. As the majority of the novels surveyed in this research are situated within urban settings, much of the criticism of these authors is aimed at the Nigerian government's inability to maintain its modern cities. If the Nigeria government is to expect all citizens to associate themselves with a Nigerian identity, then the government must do more to provide for all its citizens regardless of the class, ethno-nationality or location of its people. Without this there is little hope of any sense of collective loyalty towards a Nigerian identity.

Yuval-Davis argues that "...the future of 'the nation' is seen to depend on its continuous growth" (Yuval-Davis 2007:29) and Nigeria must find a way to develop its national identity in conjunction with the ethno-National identities that fall within its borders. Pertaining to the thematic focuses of the analysed novels in this research, there is a difference in the

work of female and male authors. Whilst both female and male authors continually challenge the Nigerian political class to do more for its citizens, it is primarily in the works of female authors that one can find the inclusion of both female and male experiences. This is because female authors understand that the nation—be that the supra-national or the ethno-national—can no longer be presented in piecemeal constructions of the Nigerian experience. Instead, they look to bring to the fore the significance of women in Nigerian society whilst at the same time acknowledging that of the male contribution. Thus, I argue that female authors contribute more holistic national depictions than male authors.

With so many new young female authors in Nigeria—as well as other African countries—having their work published both on the continent and globally, the contribution of women to the national space can no longer be silenced in the Nigerian literary canon. Regarding prospective contributions to the Nigerian literary canon, what is currently absent is an image of Nigeria in the future. Whilst the history books will always look to present an image of what was, Nigerian novels have the power to present an image of what could have been and what could be. In placing the narratives of Nigerian novels in an alternative present or future, authors have the power to convey to the reader a construction of the kind of country and Nigeria national identity that they want to see.

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