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**ISSUE 14, JUNE 2024**

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## JLSN

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# **Diaspora, Women, and Film: Unveiling Feminist Narratives in Nollywood**

**IRENE ISOKEN AGUNLOYE**

## **Abstract**

The African diaspora emerges as a profound site of storytelling and cultural negotiation in the interplay between identity, migration, and creative expression. This intersection is vividly captured through Nollywood, Nigeria's dynamic film industry, where stories of diaspora and womanhood are brought to life, challenging conventions and celebrating resilience. Within this cinematic space, women's narratives in the diaspora stand out, offering unique perspectives on migration, identity, and empowerment. This paper explores how Nollywood is a lens for examining the feminist dimensions of diasporic experiences. It interrogates the representation of women navigating transnational spaces, their redefinition of belonging, and their roles as agents of cultural and personal transformation. By focusing on feminist narratives, this study sheds light on the complexities of gender, intersectionality, and diaspora in Nollywood films. Aligned with the conference theme, "African Diasporic Literature & Film," this paper underscores the connection between literary and cinematic storytelling as vehicles for articulating the diverse realities of African diasporic identities. Nollywood, through its vibrant storytelling, acts as a bridge between the literary and visual, creating a space where feminist voices within the African diaspora are not only heard but celebrated.

## **The Nollywood Diaspora: Nigerians Abroad**

In the context of this paper and Nollywood Diaspora, a Diaspora film refers to a genre of movies that specifically explore the experiences of Nigerians living overseas. These films are produced through collaborations between the Nollywood industry and African immigrant communities in various countries such as Europe, North America, Brazil, China, and elsewhere. These narratives fluctuate between the perspectives of settled expatriates and those grounded at home in Nigeria. Through this lens, we explore questions of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity. (Haynes 2013 p.77)

Nigerians living abroad have a strong affinity for Nollywood films and several factors contribute to this enduring interest. First is nostalgia and connection. Nollywood movies serve as a virtual bridge connecting Nigerians in the diaspora to their homeland. Viewing Nigerian movies is like a virtual journey back home. For Africans in the diaspora, it's a trip down memory lane—a way to reconnect with their cultural roots and reminisce about life in Nigeria. These films often depict familiar landscapes, clothing styles, body language, houses, and dances. Watching them can evoke a sense of nostalgia. Secondly, the films serve as 'group therapy' because Nollywood films provide a sense of community and shared experience. Watching these movies becomes a form of group therapy for those far from home, allowing them to feel connected to their fellow Nigerians across borders.

Thirdly is Cultural Familiarity: Although an increasing number of Nollywood films are set in locations abroad, they remain firmly grounded in Nigerian cultures. The portrayal of familiar customs, languages, and everyday life resonates with the diaspora audience, reinforcing their sense of identity and belonging.

The fourth reason is Educational Value: Many viewers emphasize the moral lessons embedded in Nollywood films. These movies often weave tales that portray cultural norms, family dynamics, and societal issues and messages that help Nigerians living outside to teach their children. As a result, they are seen not only as entertainment but also as educational tools that convey important messages.

The fifth reason is Language and Identity: While some viewers prefer films in their native languages (such as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Edo, and Itsekiri), a significant portion of the diaspora audience watch Nollywood movies in English. This choice allows them to maintain a connection with their Nigerian identity while also appealing to a broader audience who were not born in Nigeria or do not understand the local languages. There are other reasons as stated below.

The sixth reason is Global Reach and Distribution: The diaspora has facilitated the distribution of Nollywood films beyond Nigeria's borders. Nigerian immigrants in Europe, North America, and other regions actively promote and consume Nollywood content. Nollywood movies are now screened in international film festivals, reaching diverse audiences. This exposure has elevated the industry's profile and encouraged collaborations with filmmakers worldwide.

Another reason is Cultural Hybridity: Nollywood diaspora filmmakers blend Nigerian storytelling with their host countries' cinematic sensibilities. This fusion results in unique narratives that resonate with local and global viewers. Themes of migration, identity, and belonging emerge as characters navigate the complexities of living abroad. These stories reflect the diaspora's experiences and challenges. Financial Investment is also a tenable factor as Nigerian expatriates invest in

Nollywood productions, injecting capital and expertise. Their financial contributions bolster the industry's growth and sustainability. Co-productions between Nollywood and diaspora filmmakers create synergies, pooling resources and talents for ambitious projects.

Representation and Authenticity are also reasons. Diaspora filmmakers bring authenticity to Nollywood by capturing the images of life abroad. They depict diaspora communities' struggles, triumphs, and cultural clashes. These films challenge stereotypes and broaden Nollywood's portrayal of Nigerians beyond national borders. Audiences witness diverse narratives that reflect their own lives as against the cynicism expressed by Haynes that “the films' establishing shots tend, as in Nollywood, films generally, to be stereotypical rather than exploratory” (2013, p.81). This is to note therefore; that this genre of Nollywood has bestrides such narrow categorization. The defining characteristics of these Nollywood Diaspora films include:

**Transnational Settings:** These Diaspora films often feature dual locations: Nigeria (the homeland) and the foreign country where Nigerians reside. These settings highlight the cultural encounters, challenges, and identity negotiations faced by characters.

**Cultural Encounters and Hybrid Identities:** Protagonists navigate the clash between their African heritage and the Western environment. The blend of cultural elements creates hybrid identities and shapes the characters' experiences.

**Immigration and Settlement:** The films explore the struggles of immigrants, including issues related to undocumented immigration. Characters must make contact with the African expatriate community, which becomes their primary social horizon.

Nollywood, often dubbed the "Hollywood of Africa," has emerged as a global cultural powerhouse. Its films are not only reflections of Nigerian society but also a repository for diasporic identities and experiences. “Present-day Nollywood is a thriving industry and a key component of Nigeria's economy. Churning out over 2,500 films a year, the country's film sector is not just a cultural phenomenon but also a ticket to the world”. (Amokeoja: 2024) For African women navigating diaspora, Nollywood provides a unique platform to explore their intersectional identities, blending humor, drama, and social realities. Films like *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London* exemplify this dynamic, offering windows into the lives of African women as they negotiate displacement, identity, and cultural assimilation. Nollywood's storytelling often intertwines diasporic experiences with themes of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity. For women, these narratives become even more complex, highlighting their navigation of gender norms within transnational

spaces. Films like *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London* serve as cultural artifacts, reflecting diasporic realities through humor, drama, and social critique. While these films are often celebrated for their comedic elements, a deeper analysis reveals feminist undertones that resonate with the challenges and triumphs of women in the diaspora.

### Theoretical Frameworks

Exploring multiple feminist frameworks enriches the analysis of *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London*, providing multiple lenses to understand the films' engagement with gender, diaspora, and identity. Postcolonial, Black, and transnational feminism, as well as ecofeminism and standpoint theory, reveal the layered experiences of African women in Nollywood's diasporic narratives. These frameworks underscore the films' contributions to global feminist discourse, highlighting their power to critique, inspire, and celebrate the resilience of African women.

### Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality

Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality emphasizes how overlapping systems of oppression—such as race, gender, class, and migration—create unique experiences of marginalization. In diasporic contexts, African women often navigate complex intersections that amplify the challenges of displacement, cultural adaptation, and systemic inequality. In *30 Days in Atlanta*, female characters like Kimberly represent the intersection of race, gender, and migration. As an African woman living in the U.S., Kimberly faces racial marginalization as the diaspora narrative highlights implicit racial biases she encounters, though these are nuanced through the comedic lens. Kimberly confronts traditional expectations of African women's roles in relationships and society, choosing autonomy and agency instead of conforming to patriarchal norms. Her ability to seamlessly navigate Western norms while maintaining her African heritage embodies the intersectional pressures of identity. Crenshaw's framework highlights Kimberly's dual challenges: succeeding as a Black woman in a Western, often male-dominated world while maintaining her identity as an African woman. These challenges shape her character's resilience and independence, central to the film's feminist undertones.

In *Osuofia in London*, the women embody intersectionality through their negotiation of cultural and gender roles. The cultural Intersection is obvious as we consider how women in the film are at the crossroads of preserving African traditions, while adapting to London's Western society. This is evident in their interactions with Osuofia, where they subtly resist his patriarchal views. The women

navigate traditional African gender roles while asserting independence within the diaspora, demonstrating how intersectionality complicates their experiences and portrays gender marginalization. Crenshaw's theory helps unpack how these women mediate their multiple identities, showcasing their adaptability and resilience in overcoming the compounded challenges of race, gender, and migration.

#### Homi Bhabha's Cultural Hybridity

Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity describes how diasporic identities are formed in the “third space,” where cultures blend and new, hybrid identities emerge. This framework is particularly useful in analyzing how African women in Nollywood diasporic films navigate and redefine their roles across cultural boundaries. In *30 Days in Atlanta*, cultural hybridity is evident in the way African and American cultural norms interact:

Kimberly is portrayed as a hybrid figure. She embodies hybridity through her ability to merge African values with American modernity. For instance, her professional success and independence reflect Western ideals, while her connections to her African roots remain intact. The cross-cultural relationships and the romantic subplot underscores the negotiation of cultural differences. As the characters navigate misunderstandings and cultural clashes, they create new, hybrid dynamics that reflect the “third space” described by Bhabha. The film portrays cultural hybridity as a space of empowerment, where African women can reimagine their identities by blending the strengths of both cultural worlds. Cultural hybridity plays a significant role in *Osuofia in London*, particularly through the women's roles: The women act as cultural mediators, negotiating between Osuofia's traditional African values and the modern Western environment of London. Their ability to operate in this hybrid space highlights their adaptability and agency. The comedic moments, such as Osuofia's struggles to adapt to London, underscore the challenges of cultural hybridity while celebrating the resilience of those who successfully navigate it. Bhabha's “third space” is central to the film's exploration of diaspora, showing how women create and inhabit hybrid identities that transcend rigid cultural boundaries.

#### Judith Butler's Gender Performativity

Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender is not an inherent identity but a set of behaviors performed in accordance with societal expectations. This framework challenges the fixed roles often assigned to women, emphasizing the fluid and constructed nature of gender. In *30 Days in Atlanta*, the portrayal of female characters like Kimberly challenges traditional performances of gender. Kimberly performs gender in ways that defy traditional expectations of African women. Her

assertiveness, independence, and professional success challenge the notion that women's roles are confined to domestic spaces thereby subverting gender norms. Humor is used here as a feminist device. The comedic misunderstandings between Akpos and the women highlight how gender roles are socially constructed. For example, Akpos's outdated views clash with Kimberly's modern perspective, emphasizing that traditional gender performances are subject to critique and reinvention. Butler's theory reveals how *30 Days in Atlanta* uses humor to deconstruct and reimagine gender roles, portraying women as empowered and dynamic individuals.

In *Osuofia in London*, gender performativity is explored through the interactions between Osuofia and the women he encounters. In resisting patriarchy, the women perform gender roles that challenge Osuofia's patriarchal expectations. For instance, their independence and assertiveness contrast sharply with his traditional views, creating comedic tension that critiques gender norms. The women's ability to navigate both African and Western gender expectations underscores the performative nature of gender. They adapt their behaviors to suit different cultural contexts, revealing the fluidity of gender roles. By applying Butler's theory, *Osuofia in London* can be seen as a critique of rigid gender performances, highlighting the agency of women in shaping their identities.

### Feminist Standpoint Theory

Nancy Hartsock foundational work on standpoint theory and Sandra Harding's emphasis on marginalized knowledge systems provides a lens for understanding the feminist narratives in diasporic films. This framework argues that marginalized groups, including women, possess unique perspectives that offer critical insights into societal power dynamics. African women's experiences in diaspora provide a distinctive standpoint for analyzing intersectional oppression and cultural hybridity. In both *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London*, women's experiences offer critical insights into gender and cultural power dynamics. Their narratives hints at an understanding of how diaspora reshapes identity. Kimberly's professional success in *30 Days in Atlanta* reflects her ability to leverage her standpoint as an African woman to navigate and succeed in Western spaces.

### Postcolonial Feminism

The key proponents of postcolonial feminism like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, whose work in *Under Western Eyes* critiques the homogenization of women's experiences by Western feminism, advocating for a contextual understanding of African women's struggles. In her analysis, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, another proponent,

illustrates how her concept of the “subaltern” can be used to analyze how African women in Nollywood films assert their voices despite systemic marginalization in both African and Western societies. Postcolonial feminism critiques the intersection of colonial history, patriarchy, and the marginalization of women in formerly colonized societies. It focuses on how race, culture, and power dynamics shape women's experiences, particularly in the Global South.

In *Osuofia in London*, postcolonial feminism illuminates how African women must navigate the residual impact of colonial structures while asserting their agency in Western spaces. The film's humor often critiques the cultural misunderstandings between African traditions and Western modernity, highlighting women's roles as cultural negotiators. *30 Days in Atlanta* embodies postcolonial feminist ideals by showcasing African women like Kimberly who thrive in diasporic spaces. Her ability to succeed in a predominantly Western society reflects the resilience and empowerment central to postcolonial feminist thought.

### Black Feminism

Black feminism specifically addresses the unique struggles faced by Black women, who experience overlapping systems of oppression due to race, gender, and class. This framework emphasizes lived experiences, resilience, and community.

Both films reflect the dual marginalization African women face as women of color in Western societies. For example, in *30 Days in Atlanta*, Kimberly's professional success highlights her ability to overcome barriers in a space where race and gender intersect. In *Osuofia in London*, the women's independence and adaptability align with Black feminist ideals of resilience and resistance against oppressive structures.

Patricia Hill Collins, one of the proponents of this theory, in her concept of the “matrix of domination” helps analyze how African women in these films navigate intersecting power structures, from patriarchy to racial bias. bell hooks, another proponent, discusses how representation and intersectionality are critical for understanding how Nollywood portrays African women's voices in diaspora.

### Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism critiques the universalization of Western feminist ideals, emphasizing the importance of local and global intersections in shaping women's lives. It seeks to understand how migration, globalization, and cross-cultural exchanges influence gender roles. In this vein, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, key scholars of this theory, explore in their work on *Scattered Hegemonies* how global power structures intersect with local contexts, offering insights into the

feminist themes in Nollywood diasporic films.

*30 Days in Atlanta* exemplifies transnational feminism by depicting how African women adapt to and influence Western norms through cross-cultural negotiation. Kimberly's story reflects the challenges and opportunities of living in a globalized world, where gender and culture intersect. In *Osuofia in London*, we are confronted with global networks of power as the experiences of women highlight how globalization creates new opportunities and constraints, shaping diasporic identities within a transnational framework.

### Ecofeminism

Vandana Shiva a proponent of Ecofeminism discusses of how preservation and resistance can metaphorically relate to how Nollywood portrays African women as cultural sustainers in diaspora. Ecofeminism draws connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, emphasizing interconnected systems of domination. Though not directly related to environmental themes, this framework can metaphorically apply to diasporic films by examining how women resist systemic exploitation and sustain cultural “roots.”

In *Osuofia in London*, the women's roles as cultural mediators can be seen as acts of preservation, akin to ecofeminist ideals of sustaining life and legacy. Their adaptability ensures that African traditions thrive in new environments. *30 Days in Atlanta* portrays women as agents of healing and balance, navigating patriarchal and racial challenges to build harmonious transnational identities.

These theories collectively enrich the understanding of feminist narratives in Nollywood diasporic films, illustrating how they engage with global feminist discourse while remaining rooted in African experiences.

Expanding on feminist frameworks offers rich analytical tools to probe deeper into the feminist and diasporic narratives in *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London*.

### Synopsis of *Osuofia in London* (2003)

*Osuofia in London* is a Nigerian comedy film which was release in 2003, produced and directed by Kingsley Ogoro, starring the talented Nkem Owoh as Osuofia. The film which was a box office hit, is arguably one of the highest-selling Nollywood films in history, takes us on a humorous journey that bridges cultural gaps and misunderstandings. Osuofia is a simple villager living in Nigeria. His life takes an unexpected turn when he receives word of his brother Donatus's demise in London. To Osuofia's surprise, his late brother's will designates him as the sole beneficiary of a huge estate in London. Excited and curious, Osuofia embarks on a journey to

London to claim his fortune, his inheritance. Upon arriving in London, Osuofia encounters a world vastly different from his rural Nigerian village. He grapples with cultural shock, language barriers, and the fast-paced city life. His interactions with Londoners, both humorous and heartwarming, form the crux of the film. However, things quickly become complicated. His late brother's English fiancée, Samantha (played by Mara Derwent), is uncertain about Nigerian traditions and the idea of Osuofia inheriting the properties. *Osuofia in London* is a lively blend of humor, cultural exploration, and heartwarming moments, portraying the resilience of a village man in a foreign land. As Osuofia navigates the complexities of London, he discovers that his inheritance isn't as straightforward as he thought. The film blends comedy, satire, and cultural commentary, highlighting the clash between tradition and modernity.

*Osuofia in London* celebrates the resilience of the human spirit, the joy of cross-cultural encounters, and the universal language of laughter. It remains a beloved classic in Nigerian cinema, cherished for its wit, memorable performances, and heartwarming moments. The film captures the essence of diasporic experiences, cultural clashes, and the universal theme of family inheritance. It explores themes of identity, tradition, and cross-cultural interactions. Through Osuofia's antics, it sheds light on the challenges faced by diaspora communities and the clash of cultural norms. *Osuofia in London* remains a beloved classic in Nollywood history. The film's success lies not only in its stellar cast but also in the dedication and expertise of its technical crew. The talented cast and crew include, Nkem Owoh as Osuofia, The iconic lead character who embarks on hilarious adventures in London. Mara Ashton as Samantha, the fiancé of Osuofia's late brother, Donatus. Cynthia Okereke as Uremma, Osuofia's wife in Nigeria, Paul Udonsi as Teacher Charles. Sabina Mole as Ijeoma, Blessing Onolleka as Nkechi, Oluchi Agunwa as Uloaku and Chiwendu Onuga plays the role of Adaku in Nigeria. Others are Patricia Ezeani as Madam Hemehe, Romanus Amuta as Elders and Tom Njamanze as Izukwu. Summers, Francis Odega. Sebastian Hall, Rosa Nicholson-Ellis, Lucie Bond, Alessandro Sanguinetti and Ester Lauren are also part of the cast. The technical crew includes John Ishemeke, the Cinematography and screenwriters, Kola Munis, Emeka Obiakonwa and Kingsley Ogoro.

### **Film Text Analysis of *Osuofia in London***

*Osuofia in London* serves as a lens through which we examine cultural hybridity, postcolonial dynamics, and the interplay between African and Western influences in the context of Nollywood cinema

○ (Onuzulike: 2018). A critical analysis of the Nollywood film *Osuofia in London* provides interesting insights into how the movie synthesizes African and Western cultural identities. The film juxtaposes traditional African belief systems with Western belief system. Osuofia, the protagonist, navigates these contrasting worldviews. In the movie, Osuofia oscillate between his traditional African attire and the English costumes. This reflects his Igbo heritage and the influence of his Western encounter and exposure. There is also interplay of African folk music and Western Music. The soundtrack blends African folk music with Western musical influences. This fusion mirrors the broader cultural synthesis portrayed in the film. Also Osuofia's culinary experiences bridge the gap between African and Western cuisines. Food becomes a metaphor for cultural exchange. The film also juxtaposes traditional African medicine against modern medicine, exploring contrasting approaches to healing. Osuofia grapples with traditional African remedies and modern medical practices. There is an exploration of power dynamics and globalization as unequal power relations, which persist throughout the film. Despite challenging Western ideologies, Osuofia inadvertently perpetuates them. Globalization, with its economic, political, and technological forces, shapes these interactions.

#### Feminist Issues in *Osuofia in London*

*Osuofia in London*, provides a platform through which to explore feminist issues. A critical review of the complexities of this comedic and melodramatic movie gives us a picture of the gender roles and expectations. The film portrays the clash between traditional Igbo culture and Western ideals. Osuofia, the protagonist, embodies both worlds. His interactions with women—whether in Nigeria or London—reveal societal expectations and the limitations placed on women. The tension between his Nigerian wife and the British woman he encounters highlights differing gender norms. While Osuofia often challenges Western ideologies, he also perpetuates them. The film presents women as multifaceted individuals with desires, dreams, and agency. Osuofia's daughter, Joy, exemplifies resilience and determination, pursuing her education despite societal pressures. The diasporic context amplifies the negotiation of identities. Women grapple with their dual roles—navigating Nigerian traditions and British modernity. The film raises questions about cultural authenticity and adaptation. Globalization and postcolonial dynamics shape power imbalances. Osuofia's interactions with women reveal underlying hierarchies. *Osuofia in London* invites us to consider feminism beyond national borders. How do women negotiate their rights and aspirations in a transnational context? The film prompts discussions about solidarity, intersectionality, and shared struggles.

*Osuofia in London* serves as a microcosm of gender complexities, cultural

clashes, and the quest for empowerment.

### Synopsis of *30 Days in Atlanta*

*30 Days in Atlanta* is a 2014 Nigerian romantic comedy film directed by Robert Peters and produced by Ayo Makun. The movie follows the adventures of Akpos, played by Ayo Makun, who wins a month-long trip to Atlanta, Georgia. He invites his cousin Richard, an IT specialist, to accompany him on this all-expense-paid journey. The film humorously blends Akpos's unique personality, highlighting both his smartness and ignorance. As the story unfolds, Richard meets the beautiful Kimberly, leading to a series of entertaining and unexpected events. In Atlanta, Akpos embarks on a hilarious and eye-opening journey where he encounters cultural differences, unexpected romance, and plenty of comedic mishaps. From navigating American cuisine to dealing with eccentric characters, *30 days in Atlanta* is filled with laughter, love, eye-opening, and unforgettable experiences.

As the days unfold, Akpos discovers that life in Atlanta is not all glitz and glamour. He faces challenges, learns valuable lessons, and even finds himself caught up in problems. Despite that, the film celebrates friendship, love, and the joy of unexpected adventures. It was shot in both Lagos (Nigeria) and Atlanta (United States of America). This dual setting allows the film to showcase both Nigerian and American cultures. The film humorously draws on cultural references and stereotypes. It portrays Nigerians rich cultural values by weaving these values into the narrative, *30 Days in Atlanta* celebrates Nigeria's unique identity and contrasts it with American culture, exploring the differences. The film provides an affectionate look at Nigeria and the USA and highlights how each country views the other. Through the characters' experiences in both Lagos and Atlanta, the film explores cultural differences, language nuances, and social norms. Despite mixed critical reviews, it became the highest-grossing film in Nigerian cinemas in 2015.

### Filmic Analysis of *30 Days in Atlanta*.

*30 Days in Atlanta* is a 2014 Nigerian romantic comedy film that combines humor, adventure, and cultural exploration. Directed by Robert Peters, written by Patrick "Koinage" Nnamani, produced by Ayo Makun, the movie was shot in two distinct locations: Lagos, Nigeria, and Atlanta, United States of America. The contrasting backdrops of these cities contribute to the film's visual appeal. Lagos provides vibrant colors, bustling streets, and local flavor, while Atlanta offers a different urban landscape. The movie follows the adventures of Akpos, (Ayo Makun (A.Y.)), who wins a 30-day holiday for two to Atlanta, Georgia. It offers a lively experience, blending cultural differences, humor, and adventure in the context of a 30-day

adventure to the historic city of Atlanta. The film combines humor, wit, and rhetoric as Akpos navigates his way through the culturally new terrain of Atlanta. The film revolves around two Warri Boys, Akpos (played by Ayo Makun) and Richard (Ramsey Nouah), who win a free 30-day trip to Atlanta, Georgia. Their journey from Nigeria to the United States becomes a central theme, highlighting cultural differences, stereotypes, and the clash of expectations.

The movie captures Akpos' unique personality, blending his 'Nigerianess' with his new found identity with exciting mix of humor. The cast consist Ayo Makun (A.Y.) plays Akpos. Other notable actors include Ramsey Nouah, Desmond Elliot, Vivica A. Fox, and Mercy Johnson Okojie. The audience reception is with mixture reviews. Some viewers appreciated the humor and unique character of Akpos, while others found it less appealing.

The film juxtaposes Nigerian and American cultures. Akpos and Richard encounter various situations that challenge their preconceptions about life in Atlanta. The portrayal of customs, language, and lifestyle adds depth to the narrative. Akpos and Richard's bond drives the story. Their interactions, banter, and shared experiences create a heartwarming aspect. The film celebrates friendship as they navigate a foreign land together. It has a romantic subplot, where Richard's affairs with Kimberly (Vivica A. Fox) and Akpos' love life add emotional layers. The film explores attraction, heartbreak, and loyalty. Ese's interference complicates Richard's feelings. Akpos' witty remarks serve as social commentary. The film critiques societal norms, family expectations, and immigration challenges. Odiye's character, a restaurateur turned househusband, exemplifies this satire. The movie excels in humor, with competent jokes throughout. Guest appearances by industry talents (Majid Michel, Juliet Ibrahim, Desmond Elliot) enhance the entertainment value. However, the film's greatness lies primarily in its humor. Comedy films often prioritize entertainment over originality. The predictable "happily ever after" ending is accepted because of the genre. Despite implausible scenarios, viewers embrace it for the laughs. Generally, *30 Days in Atlanta* celebrates friendship, love, and cultural exploration while delivering an enjoyable and amusing experience.

Visual Style of the film combines colorful cinematography with a mix of urban and natural landscapes. Expect shots of Lagos markets, cityscapes, and lush greenery in Atlanta. James M. Castello's creativity in the cinematography captures both the vibrancy of Lagos, Nigeria, and the allure of Atlanta, Georgia. In Lagos, warm tones and bustling streets create an authentic Nigerian atmosphere. In Atlanta, wide shots portrays the city's skyline, parks, and iconic landmarks. The use of wide-angle shots captures the grandeur of both cities, emphasizing their unique characteristics. The film's color palette reflects the contrasting settings.

Lagos scenes feature earthy tones, vibrant fabrics, and lively street markets. Atlanta scenes emphasize blues, grays, and greens, portraying a more western urban environment. The characters' costume design reflects their personalities and cultural backgrounds. Akpos, the protagonist, wears casual sports and colorful Nigerian prints, symbolizing his exuberance. Kimberly's elegant dresses emphasize her sophistication. Richard's smart-casual outfits highlight his distinct styles. *30 Days in Atlanta* weaves together humor, romance, and cultural exploration, making it an enjoyable cinematic experience.

*30 Days in Atlanta*, directed by Robert Peters, offers a filmic blend of aesthetics that contribute to its unique charm, the film's visual and stylistic elements. The set design also shows seamless transitions between Lagos and Atlanta. Lagos scenes portrays modest homes, crowded streets, and local hangouts. The lighting in the film shows natural lighting dominates outdoor scenes, especially in Atlanta. Indoor scenes vary, warm tones for family gatherings, cooler tones for serious moments. Night scenes in Atlanta evoke a sense of adventure and mystery. Atlanta scenes feature upscale restaurants, conference halls, and scenic spots. The film uses visual humour, gags and slapstick humour. The juxtaposition of cultural norms adds to the humor. The film's humor and wit lies in the interactions between characters, especially Akpos. Witty dialogues, slapstick moments, and clever one-liners, Akpos's unique personality—smart yet ignorant—adds to the comedic charm 23. The film explores love, relationships, and cultural differences. it portrays many romantic elements, Akpos relationship with Clara, the Immigration Lawyer's Richard's encounter with the beautiful Kimberly sparks romance, but her controlling father complicates matters.

In the editing and pacing, the film maintains a brisk pace, keeping viewers engaged. Quick cuts during humorous dialogues enhance comedic timing. Montages capture Akpos and Richard's escapades, emphasizing their whirlwind adventure. Akpos' exaggerated expressions, clumsy actions, and witty gestures enhance comedic moments. The scenic beauty is heightened by Atlanta's skyline, parks, and lush greenery provide picturesque backdrops and Lagos scenes showcase the city's energy, street life, and vibrant markets. The director balances aesthetics with humor, creating an enjoyable visual experience that celebrates both Nigerian and American cities, culture, and nuances. *30 Days in Atlanta* weaves together humor, romance, and cultural exploration, making it an enjoyable cinematic experience.

### Women and Cultural Adaptation in *Osuofia in London*

This film humorously portrays the journey of Osuofia, a 'village' man, as he navigates the cultural differences between Nigeria and the UK. Although the film centers on a

male protagonist, the female characters offer rich ground for feminist analysis as listed below:

**Negotiation of Cultural Identity:** The women in the film, particularly those in London, navigate dual expectations—embracing modernity while retaining elements of their African heritage. This reflects the lived experiences of many diasporic women.

**Gender Dynamics:** The interactions between Osuofia and the women challenge traditional patriarchal attitudes, offering subtle critiques of gender stereotypes.

The film sheds light on the silent labor of women as cultural mediators, showcasing their adaptability and resilience in the face of transnational pressures.

This film humorously juxtaposes traditional African values with Western modernity through the character of Osuofia. While much of the narrative centers on his journey, women play pivotal roles that warrant feminist analysis:

**Adaptability in New Spaces:** Female characters in the diaspora embody adaptability, serving as mediators between two worlds. Their portrayal reflects the silent labor of women in diasporic contexts, where they balance cultural preservation with assimilation. In what can be termed subtle agency the women's interactions with Osuofia subtly challenge traditional patriarchal narratives, showcasing moments of resistance and autonomy within a comedic framework. Also, there is evidence of representation of feminine resilience as the resilience of women characters highlights their ability to navigate not only the cultural but also the gendered challenges of diaspora life. By placing women in roles of influence, albeit understated, the film underscores their importance in bridging cultural divides.

**Feminist Undertones in *30 Days in Atlanta***

Unlike *Osuofia in London*, *30 Days in Atlanta* adopts a more contemporary narrative, exploring romance and cross-cultural interactions. The depiction of women in this film is more pronounced, offering valuable insights into feminist discourse. Female characters represent modern African women who are assertive, independent, and capable of shaping their identities amidst cross-cultural challenges, there by redefining their identity in the Diaspora. The romantic dynamics and interpersonal relationships reflect feminist ideals of agency and equality, moving away from the passive roles often assigned to women in traditional narratives to agency and empowerment. While comedic, the film subtly critiques stereotypes, presenting women as multifaceted individuals whose identities go beyond cultural tropes. The diasporic experience is infused with humor and romance, providing a light-hearted

yet insightful exploration of cultural clashes. The film's portrayal of women introduces themes that align with feminist discourses. Female characters in the diaspora exhibit agency, independence, and the ability to navigate cross-cultural relationships exhibiting Independence and Empowerment. Representing the modern African women, the women in this film embody the complexities of diasporic life, challenging traditional narratives that often restrict African women to domestic roles. By portraying women as active participants in shaping their identities, *30 Days in Atlanta* contributes to the evolving representation of African women in Nollywood. Through its engaging storytelling, *30 Days in Atlanta* positions women as active participants in their own narratives, embodying the essence of feminist empowerment within diasporic contexts.

#### Feminist Narratives and Diasporic Realities

Both films contribute to feminist narratives within Nollywood by offering varied portrayals of women's roles in diasporic settings. They highlight the tensions between traditional expectations and contemporary realities, showcasing how women navigate these dualities. These narratives bring attention to the social and cultural contributions of women in diaspora, emphasizing their agency and resilience. While the comedic elements of these films may overshadow their feminist undertones at first glance, a closer analysis reveals significant commentary on gender roles and transnational identity.

#### Exploring Intersectionality in Diasporic Narratives

Both films touch on intersectionality—the convergence of gender, culture, and migration. For African women in the diaspora, this often means navigating multiple layers of identity. Women in the diaspora face the dual pressures of gender-based discrimination and cultural displacement portraying women's dual marginalization in the diaspora. These films highlight how female characters rise above these challenges, asserting their agency in transnational spaces. Examining cultural hybridity in these films, the blending of African and Western values becomes visible, as seen in the narratives of *Osuofia in London* and *30 Days in Atlanta*, this underscores the hybridity that defines diaspora experiences. Women are portrayed as key agents in negotiating this hybridity. The films emphasize the role of women in fostering community and redefining the sense of belonging within diasporic settings. Intersectionality is central to feminist narratives, and these films successfully capture its complexity, enriching Nollywood's contribution to African diasporic discourse.

### Exploration of Themes in *Osuofia in London*

These themes offer a deeper lens to analyze *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London* within the context of diaspora and feminist narratives.

**Women as Custodians of Culture:** Though *Osuofia in London* primarily focuses on a male protagonist, it subtly highlights the roles of women as custodians of culture in diaspora.

**Cultural Gatekeeping:** The women in the story, especially those with diasporic ties, embody the preservation of Nigerian traditions while also navigating modernity.

**Negotiating Dual Realities:** The female characters balance the expectations of their traditional African heritage with the demands of Western society, often with humor and resilience.

**Critique of Patriarchal Norms:** The interactions between *Osuofia* and the female characters provide moments of quiet resistance to patriarchal attitudes. Women in the diaspora are portrayed as assertive, challenging *Osuofia's* outdated patriarchal mindset in subtle yet impactful ways. For example, his attempts to assert dominance are often met with wit and humor, undermining his authority in non-confrontational ways.

**Representation of Resilience and Independence:** The women's resilience in navigating life in a foreign land is a key theme. While *Osuofia* struggles to adapt, the women are shown as more adept at negotiating the challenges of diasporic life, demonstrating independence and agency. This positions the women as role models, subtly shifting the narrative focus from *Osuofia's* journey to their strength and adaptability.

In *30 Days in Atlanta*, the female characters serve as a lens for examining the redefinition of gender roles within the diasporic space. They challenge traditional African gender dynamics by showcasing independence and control over their lives in a foreign cultural setting. For instance:

**Cultural Agency:** The film portrays diasporic women as individuals with their voices and choices, navigating the intersections of romantic relationships and cultural expectations.

**Symbol of Modern African Womanhood:** Female characters reflect the evolving role of women in contemporary African societies, blending traditional values with modern aspirations. Their behavior, dress, and career choices emphasize autonomy and empowerment.

### Humor as a Feminist Tool

The lighthearted tone of the movie allows feminist themes to be subtly embedded in

its narrative without appearing didactic. Humor is used to critique societal norms, especially around gender roles and cultural stereotypes, making the message accessible to a broad audience. By presenting female characters who assert control in humorous situations, the film breaks down resistance to conversations about gender equality.

#### Diasporic Identity Through Feminine Perspectives

The film presents a perspective of African women balancing the demands of living abroad while maintaining cultural roots. The juxtaposition of romanticized notions of the diaspora with the realities of life in Atlanta allows the audience to reflect on the complexities of belonging and identity, especially for women.

#### Comparative Reflection on Feminist Themes

Both films tackle feminist narratives differently but converge on some important points. In both films, women are depicted as agents of cultural and personal transformation, navigating the challenges of diaspora with resilience and agency. Humor is used as a narrative device in both films to soften and amplify conversations about gender, making feminist critiques more accessible to diverse audiences. Both films also address the unique challenges faced by African women in the diaspora, including the intersection of race, gender, and cultural identity. The films also portray the tension between traditional African expectations of women and the opportunities presented by diasporic life.

Both films also portray the role of romance in defining feminist narratives by using romantic subplots to highlight and challenge traditional views of love and gender roles. Since Nollywood diasporic films often center on the experiences of African migrants, including the dual challenges faced by women, these films highlight themes such as cultural adaptation where diasporic women must navigate the tension between preserving their African heritage and adapting to Western norms. This duality often places them in a position of cultural mediators. Diasporic narratives frequently portray women as resilient figures, redefining their identities in foreign environments. They also explore how gender intersects with migration and race, revealing the additional layers of marginalization faced by African women abroad. Through these themes, Nollywood reflects the lived realities of African women in the diaspora, offering both critique and celebration of their journeys.

#### Critique of Feminist Representations

Despite their contributions, both *Osuofia in London* and *30 Days in Atlanta* face critiques regarding their portrayal of women. The comedic tone sometimes

simplifies complex gender issues, risking the perpetuation of stereotypes. Female characters, while empowered, often occupy secondary roles, reflecting the male-centric focus of many Nollywood narratives. There is limited diversity in representation, as the portrayal of women in these films may not fully capture the diverse realities of African diasporic women. These critiques highlight the need for more nuanced and central feminist portrayals in Nollywood's diasporic films. Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for Nollywood to deepen its engagement with feminist storytelling and ensure more diverse, central portrayals of women's experiences.

### Conclusion

Through films like *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London*, Nollywood engages with diasporic themes while embedding subtle feminist narratives. By presenting women as resilient, adaptable, and independent, these films contribute to the discourse on African diasporic literature and film. However, continued efforts are necessary to ensure that feminist narratives occupy central spaces in Nollywood's evolving storytelling. Through *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London*, Nollywood provides a degree of exploration of the diaspora, women, and feminist narratives. These films celebrate the resilience and agency of African women, offering insights into their lived experiences in transnational spaces. While the contributions are significant, the industry must continue to evolve, addressing critiques and expanding its portrayal of feminist narratives to better reflect the diversity of African diasporic women. As Nollywood grows, its ability to amplify these voices will remain pivotal in shaping the global discourse on African diasporic literature and film.

*30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London* exemplify Nollywood's capacity to engage with feminist and diasporic narratives while maintaining its characteristic humor and relatability. These films celebrate the resilience, agency, and adaptability of African women in diaspora, offering insights into the intersectionality of gender, culture, and migration. However, their limitations underscore the need for continued evolution in Nollywood's portrayal of women, ensuring that feminist narratives occupy more central and diverse spaces in African cinema. By engaging with the feminist undertones of these films, we can better understand how Nollywood contributes to the global discourse on gender, identity, and diaspora. These cinematic works serve as cultural touchstones, bridging the gap between African and diasporic realities, and amplifying the voices of African women in the global cultural landscape.

By grounding the analysis of these films in multiple theoretical frameworks,

comparative insights, and cultural critique, a more focused exploration of feminist and diasporic narratives in *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London*. These elements enrich the understanding of how Nollywood films contribute to global feminist discourse and redefine African identities in transnational spaces. Nollywood diasporic films, when analyzed through a feminist lens, offer a rich tapestry of narratives that reflect the complexities of gender and migration. These films celebrate the resilience and agency of African women while critiquing the societal norms that seek to constrain them. By continuing to challenge stereotypes and broaden representations, Nollywood can further its role as a powerful medium for feminist storytelling, bridging the gap between African and diasporic realities.

Through a feminist lens, *30 Days in Atlanta* and *Osuofia in London* offer narratives that celebrate the resilience and agency of African women in diaspora. By engaging with theoretical frameworks like intersectionality, cultural hybridity, and gender performativity, these films contribute to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and diasporic challenges. While their limitations highlight areas for improvement, their achievements in amplifying feminist voices and critiquing societal norms underscore Nollywood's role as a powerful medium for feminist storytelling.

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# **Migration and the Development of African Diasporic Literature & Film**

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## **Introduction**

The history of mankind has been the history of migration. W.M. Spellman poses the conundrum as to, “Why do people remove themselves, and often their entire families, great distances to unfamiliar lands and uncertain futures?” (1). The above question is germane to our discourse, especially as it directs the theme of this conference, “African Diasporic Literature and Film.” In the same corollary, the answer to this question will seek to slice up and expose the factors that precipitate the development and direction of African literature and film in the diaspora.

The very nature of humans is inherent in mobility, travels and adventure. All these are determined by myriads of factors. In his natal state Man was originally food gatherer who moved from one location to the other in search for food. From gathering of food, Man graduated to food cultivation, using stone implements. This was long before the discovery of iron and the use of fire for cooking. At this level Man was wrapped up in the state of nature. With the ‘discovery’ of iron and the use of fire Man developed the desire for hunting of animals for food. This engagement inevitably propelled him to stray out of the immediate environment.

As the human family grew in size and number, it became imperative for movement and change of locational habitations. The capriciousness of weather and hostility arising from competition for fertile land also provided justification for such movements. Over time human societies grew more and more in size, thereby becoming more sophisticated and complex in nature and dynamic. Attitudes formed character and interests which more often than not developed into crises of interests among and between community members.

The sophistication of human communities, interests, and growing civilisation informed the need for governance and participation in the affairs that concern members. This had to be achieved through representative democracy and rules of engagement called the constitution which regulates the conduct of members of a given community. Representative governance, as it were, has always been dictated by both personal and group interests. Often times, some of these interests

collide, thereby resulting in disagreements, conflicts and dissention which create unfavourable conditions.

These disagreements, conflicts, and dissention as cited above could cause aggrieved members to move to what they may consider as more convenient and conducive environments. Other factors that may necessitate migration of people include unfavourable conditions such as war, famine, insecurity and natural disasters, political and religious persecutions, unfavourable economic conditions, the ravages of climate change and the desire for better life outside the homeland, among but not limited to the above factors.

In Nigeria, over the past decades, and in Africa generally, bad, inept and corrupt leadership, weak institutions, constitutional breaches, monumental and hydra headed corruption in high places, religious intolerance and terrorism, banditry and kidnapping for ransom have provided justifications for African migration to Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia.

This paper seeks to delve into a robust discussion on the nature of migration out of Africa, what constitutes diaspora, the composition of and the development and direction of diaspora literature and film over the ages. In literature there is an organic relationship between fiction and reality in form and content. The content of literature could draw from imaginative creation, fictional history or social context. In this light, therefore, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre* (1993) contends that, "Literature, more than all the fleeting images brought about by the screen or newsprint, is one of the more enduring multinational cultural processes which have been building the basis of a shared common tradition" (13).

## Early Migration Out of Africa

### I. The Trans-Sahara Slave Trade

Migration is referred to as a movement of a person or persons from one place to another; the one place is familiar while the other is often not familiar. We will recast the question that W.M. Spellman posed in the opening statement of the introduction to this paper: "Why do people remove themselves, and often their entire families, great distances to unfamiliar lands and uncertain future?" Answer(s) to this question have been provided in sketches above. By the very implication of the nature and size of migration, there are two categories of migration—the voluntary and the involuntary. This section is concerned primarily with the involuntary migration that was precipitated by both the trans-Sahara slave trade and the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

These two trades in humans constituted the most harrowing, brutal and

colossal movement of people that were involuntarily uprooted from their homes and carted away to what Spellman refers to as, “unfamiliar lands and uncertain future”(1). The first of these was the trans-Saharan trade. The relationship or contact between the ancient empires of West Africa (Ghana, Mali and Songhai) predated the contact between the coastal regions of West Africa and the European slave traders. This contact was not originally conceived to be a trade in human traffic because it began as purely an economic engagement between the Arabs and the Western Sudanese kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. It was essentially trade by barter where the main items of trade were gold from West Africa and slaves, and salt as well as variety of manufactured goods and luxuries from North Africa. West Africa slaves along with camels were used to transport the gold across the desert to North Africa and the Arab world. Other notable items of trade included copper, spices, ivory and ebony, among others.

The trade flourished unabatedly over several centuries that witnessed the rise and fall of three important West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, respectively. Unarguably, however, the most profound commodity of trade was the slaves who had great social and economic benefits to the Arabs on the one hand and the Islamic religion and culture on the other. Ronald Segal underscores this benefit as, “Slaves in Islam were directed at the service sector—concubines and cooks, porters and soldiers—with slavery itself primarily a form of consumption rather than a factor of production” (4). What this translates to is the fact that while female slaves served as concubines and cooks in the homesteads, the male slaves provided services as security guards, porters and soldiers.

As a result of this trade that spanned several centuries that engendered a flourishing miscegenation through concubinage system, we have a prevalence of what is described as a black Arab population in the Arab world. But sadly, though, this minority population suffers discrimination as a result of the dark skin colour.

## ii. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Because of its very nature the trans-Atlantic slave trade has often been cited as the most brutal and noxious human trade in history. In the entire human history, there has never been such a huge movement of humans of the same racial group who were transported systematically and deliberately across the Atlantic Ocean over a period of more than three centuries as this.

West African communities readily became the centres of this trade in human beings. This trade was organised in a systematic manner where the local chiefs and their warring agents regularly raided communities, plundered, and captured victims who were sold as slaves to the European slave merchants at the coasts. The trade

gained notoriety because it was organised as an economic enterprise that provided free labour for the European industrial machine. The vultures of economic exploitation and slavery carried on this heinous trade because, according to Anthony Esler, “It had always been a profitable business for the intruders and a deeply destructive experience for the African society” (466). It was deeply destructive for the African society because it plundered not only the natural resources of Africa, but depopulated Africa of her able bodied young men and women.

Indeed, the debilitating and excruciating experiences of the slaves could best be imagined as they became commodities of exchange that were sold as chattels to the highest bidder. Once again, Esler provides a glimpse of this harrowing experience as, “Seized in their inland villages by slave-raiding warriors, they had been roped in long lines and led sometimes hundreds of miles to the coast. After weeks or months in dank dungeons or open pens, they had been crammed into the holds of European slave ships for the westward journey. Broken by disease, filth, brutal treatment, and the shock of the experience, between a tenth and a quarter of the two hundred Africans crowded into a typical slave ship die” (466).

It is to be noted that both the trans-Sahara trade and the trans-Atlantic trade were involuntary (or forced migration) in nature. The point of departure between the two trades largely lies in the manner of treatment of the slaves. While the trans-Sahara trade was to a large extent driven by consumer motive, the European slave trade was, exploitative, purely and brutally economic in nature. Capitalism and imperialism determined the brutal nature of this trade in humans. Be that as it may, both trades were guilty of the same crime; i.e., commoditisation of human beings and the subjugation of humans to subhuman level.

Africans in this category that were uprooted from the homeland have nowhere to refer to as home because of their tragic physical dislocation. They have no contact, no families or friends to relate with back home in Africa. Their attachment with Africa is merely sentimental and emotional. Consequently, they are culturally dislocated so much so that they adopt the names, religion, and identity of their conquerors.

### Modern Migration Out of Africa

Modern migration can be classified into two categories—the regular and irregular migration. Whether regular or irregular, both of these are voluntary in nature because the individuals or group of individuals involved set out on their own volition to migrate. There are several factors that engender such movements across trans-national boundaries. Some of these reasons have been stated in the earlier section of this paper to include, among others, the desire for better living condition abroad,

insecurity at home, political victimisation at home, search for the Golden Fleece, etc. The individuals in this category leave behind them families, locational contacts, acquaintances and friends. They often visit their homes periodically as well as sending home money to family members and friends. In addition, they more often than not get involved in their community development engagements even while abroad.

Contemporary or modern migration out of Africa has largely been informed by intractable political leadership crises, ineptitude leadership, underdevelopment and corruption. These factors have impeded development efforts of most African nations, leaving in its wake a frustrated, demoralised and asphyxiated citizenry. As citizens scamper for new life overseas, most of them tend to adopt the citizenship of their adopted countries which invariably grants them the right to basic necessities such as employment, political recognition and democratic participation, among others.

### The Diaspora and Diasporic

The known modern historical reference to the term **Diaspora** was the Jewish dispersion across the world, especially in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe, Germany, and France. According to W.M. Spellman, “The ancient Jewish diaspora is without much question the best known of the involuntary migrations within the Western context”(188). Spellman’s assertion holds sway only as stated, “within the Western context”, which preceded the global trade in African slaves between the 16<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, within the world context, the best known involuntary migrations have been the wholesale displacement and dislocation of millions of black Africans across the Atlantic Ocean and the Sahara desert as commodities of exchange. This position is corroborated by John Mack Faragher, *et al* who argue that “The movement of Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas was the largest forced migration in world history” (83). These are victims of displacement and dislocation from the original homeland into unfamiliar and uncertain lands, cultures and civilisations.

In conceptualising ‘Diaspora’, John Urry contends that, “Diasporas entail the notion that ‘the old country’ where one is no longer living, exerts some claim upon one’s loyalties, emotions and identity. Such an old country can be defined in terms of language, religion, customs or folklore. All diasporic communities are thus in part cultural” in nature and design (154-55). There emerges the contestation of citizenship, loyalty, identity and cultural hybridisation. In effect, even a new personality develops if the diaspora must fit into the new environment and survive. This movement into a new dwelling and the determination for survival poses the

terse question of ‘belongingness’.

The challenges faced by the diaspora are myriad and complex, to say the least. The diaspora are not only considered to be strangers in the adopted home, they are culturally displaced, psychologically ‘homeless’ and occasionally traumatised, and often times discriminated against. Often times also, they find themselves living on the fringes of the mainstream cultures. This situation informs Amirikpa Oyigbenu’s argument that, “Diasporic citizenship is, therefore, contested in spaces which constitute a political and legal claim between the perceived autochthonous and the diasporic; or aliens whose contested citizenship and identity face the problematic of acceptability and recognition”(75). In this study and from the foregoing presentation so far we have come to the conclusion that the sum total of these Africans that domicile abroad either through deliberate, in-deliberate, whether involuntary or voluntary migrations are referred to as Diaspora or the Diasporic—a slice but visible population of black Africans that are living in countries and continents outside Africa south of the Sahara.

#### Overview of African Diasporic Literature

In a simple context, African diasporic literature is that gamut of literature that has been written by Africans in the diaspora or foreign lands, as distinct from the literature that is written by Africans in the homeland. It is expected that the themes, styles, and language will be different as informed by their diasporic experiences in foreign lands. In fact, these experiences can be said to constitute the soul and heart of the content of literature and film that are produced by Africans in the diaspora. This position is further re-enforced by John Urry in the postulation that, “The cultures that get produced are a curious hybrids, constructed and reconstructed through heterogeneity, difference and diverse mobilities” (155).

This section establishes the contrast in the production and the treatment of themes and styles between the two categories of African diaspora that we have identified and discussed in this paper—literature as produced by descendants of slaves in the Americas and Europe, and modern day diaspora of voluntary migration.

We could as well ask the question: what is literature? In a pedestrian understanding, ‘Literature’ could be said to be any imaginative /creative composition (prose, poetry, or drama) that inform, entertain and amuse the reader. Literature invokes feelings, the appreciation of beauty and encapsulates experiences that are both material and abstract. This aspect of literature derives from the writer’s creative imagination. There are also literatures that are non-fictional in nature. These include inspirational, motivational, scientific or subject-based academic writings that are intended to instruct the reader. According to Alison Booth, J. Paul Hunter and Kelly J.

Mays (2006), the boundary of literature has shifted from merely artistic writing to include both oral and visual forms. Broadly speaking, we could adduce that literature includes all works that are written, orally presented and animated like movies and stage performances. The concern in this paper, therefore, is the literature that is written to invoke emotion, beauty, pleasure and amusement. Although creative and imaginative in nature, it possesses the shared experiences of individuals or a group of individuals and communities.

In the forced or slave diaspora category, we choose to treat selected works of Phyllis Wheatley (poetry), Toni Morrison (fiction), and Ossie Davis (drama) as representative literature. These choices are despite the fact that the first published literary works by the black diaspora of the slave ancestry were the works of Phyllis Wheatley. By every standard, Wheatley was a pioneer in the literary trail that conveyed the experiences, feelings, pains, alienation, hopes and dreams of the slave diaspora community.

#### Phyllis Wheatley's "On Being Brought from Africa to America"

Phyllis Wheatley (1753?-1784) was a slave girl of between six and eight years old when she was captured and sold to John and Susannah Wheatley at the Boston slave market in America. Her native African name is not known. Her African name not known, but was deduced to have been captured from Gambia or Senegal in West Africa. Phyllis Wheatley was shaped by the environment that produced her; i.e., the social and Puritan religious background of the Wheatley family of Boston. Phyllis eulogised her mistress, Mrs Susannah Wheatley nobly in the following encomium: "I was treated by her more like her child than her servant" (224). Not surprising, however, without formal education she was taught by Mary Wheatley, the daughter of the Wheatleys to read and write in the English language of the time. Her exposure and childhood upbringing in the New England environment and tradition was able to shape her instincts, philosophy and spirituality as reflected in the themes of her poems.

Among the numerous poems to her credit, we shall focus more on one that elucidates her social and religious environmental influences the most: "On Being Brought from Africa to America." This is a very short poem of eight lines and one stanza. According to her, " 'T was mercy that brought me from my *Pagan* land./ Taught my benighted soul to understand/That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:/Once I freedom neither sought nor knew/Some view our sable race with scornful eye,/"Their colour is a diabolic die."/Remember, *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*, /May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train" (culled from *The American Tradition in Literature*, 1999). The title of this poem is suggestive of its theme which alludes to

her leaving Africa to America to be a blessing through God's unrequited mercy. Phyllis' allusion to Africa in negative narrative derives essentially from deliberate indoctrination and the tutelage of her Puritan Christian environment. This explains why she refers to her African homeland as, "*Pagan land*", in addition to her belief that God's mercy brought her out of Africa to be redeemed from damnation. As such, her slave status was a blessing and gratifying.

From her own personal account, she neither sought nor knew of God's redemption but obtained it gratuitously. Again, emanating from the slave master's narrative about the primitivism and debased status of the African, Christianity provides the needed hope of eternal salvation. So far, the only apparent reference to the negative racial stereotype is her allusion to what white people say about her race: "Some view our race with scornful eye". Another line states that, "Their colour is a diabolic die". Despite these negative narratives, Phyllis provides what could be described as hope for the salvation of *Christians* and *Negroes*, although "black as Cain/ May be refin'd and join th' angelic train".

The thematic account of this poem and others point to the fact that Phyllis was never subjected to the vagaries and the dehumanising conditions of slavery on the plantations. Therefore, she could not have experienced racial segregation, deprivation, torture and the bitterness of separation. Simply put, Phyllis was an exceptionally privileged slave girl.

### Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

On a cultural level, the ravages of both the trans-Saharan and the trans-Atlantic slave trades took debilitating tolls on the personality, culture and traditions of the enslaved African people. As if these were not enough calamities for black Africans, the subsequent activities of missionaries which were preceded by colonial conquest of the African continent, the entire black African worldview became distorted, twisted and destroyed with the concomitant consequences for Africans on the homeland and in the diaspora. Toni Morrison's novel establishes the nexus between the historical reality and the literary composition of the extent to which the innocuous and innocent protagonist is exposed to construct an image other than her natural self. The narrative represents the extent of the destruction of the psyche and personality of the average African-American female folks as a result of the stereotypes that formed as a result of slave culture.

The main character or protagonist in *The Bluest Eye* is a young girl by the name Pecola Breedlove who is sexually, emotionally, socially and psychologically brutalised and traumatised by her family and the society. Ashley Montagu argues that, "The one thing clear concerning racial hostility and prejudice is the ease with

which persons are led to exhibit it” (225). The exhibition of racial prejudice and hostility overflow from the victim’s psyche which invariably might have been deliberately twisted to suit such a purpose. It is a manifestation of the contestation of superior and inferior binary as dictated by the assumed superior racial group. Against such a warped background, therefore, the wounded victim becomes psychologically and emotionally traumatised with the dire consequence of seeking for the expurgation of such feeling in whatever possible way. We then tend to identify with the internal conflict and agony of the victim, and sometimes even ask questions as to why the victim decides on the course of action taken.

The novel introduces a ‘normal’ family structure consisting of a father, mother and two daughters, all living harmoniously together under the protection of the father. Paradoxically, however, the family is sadly fractured because Pecola lives with Frieda-Claudia family, her mother lives with the woman she works for, Sammy lives elsewhere, while the father is thrown into jail. The two-room apartment where the family lived was desolate, cramped and incommensurate, painting a graphic picture of poverty and denying them of comfort and privacy. What is more, the habitual drunkenness of Cholly Breedlove, the father/husband often degenerates into violent squabbles with his wife, thereby compounding the already bad situation in the family. Discipline, love, care, respect and parental authority are lacking in the family. This unfortunate situation, therefore, breeds psychological and emotional self-hate, lack of self-esteem and alienation which make some of the family members, especially Pecola, to perceive them as being ‘ugly’.

This seething feeling of being ‘ugly’ pervades the atmosphere in the home as a looming shadow that casts a spell on the family. Most affected is Pecola who literally condemns herself as irredeemably ‘ugly’. Her deep-seated feeling of ‘ugliness’ and alienation that ensues is exacerbated by the torturous feeling of “Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike” (*The Bluest Eye*. 45). Pecola’s state of ugliness is further reinforced by her mother in the following words, “*But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly*” (126).

Pecola sees herself as ugly and wishes to be beautiful, lovable and acceptable by possessing the blue eyes of the white Caucasian race. The story is told of Claudia, Frieda’s younger sister who presents herself as a direct opposite of Pecola. While Pecola is desirous of the blue eyes, Claudia detests anything white; especially the white doll. She hates it even as Christmas gifts. Claudia’s dislike for the white baby dolls is transferred to white girls. According to her, “I destroyed white baby dolls”. As if this was not enough expression of horror and disgust, she confesses that, “The

truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulse to little white girls” (22). Claudia was practically revolted by what she calls the round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orange worm hair, the starched gauze or lace on the cotton dress of the baby dolls which were palpably artificial and irritated her with one longing desire; to dismember the white baby doll into shred.

Pecola’s obsession for beauty leads her to a spiritualist by the name Soaphead Church who promises to meet her need. He is a fake spiritualist, a charlatan and a swindler. His real name is Elihu Whitecomb, a brown-skin West Indian of mixed blood who is proud of his mixed racial background. Pecola’s case was the most challenging that has ever been brought to him, changing black eyes to blue eyes. He confesses that “Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty.... A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes”. He admits his incapacitation and goes spiritual by confessing that, “He sometimes uses me to help people. All I can do is to offer myself to Him as the instrument through which he works”. His spiritual limitation makes him to admit his powerlessness as he confesses that, “I can do nothing for you, my child. I am not a magician. I work only through the Lord. Soaphead’s subterfuge for a divine link with God for miraculous healing power led him to a despicable act of poisoning Bob, the old dog, as the only means by which Pecola could have her desire fulfilled. As a victim of Soaphead’s deceit, she goes away satisfied and happily fulfilled that she now has her black eyes transformed to blue eyes of her wish.

Although Pecola’s anxiety about having blue eyes constitutes the main thematic thrust of the novel there are other neatly knitted subthemes that weave together the general picture of desolation, frustration, denial, anguish and rejection. The mood in the novel is generally despondent and tragic not only for Pecola as a protagonist, but also affective of all other characters who are victims of the system. She perceives her apparent societal rejection, hardship and cruelty to result from her ugliness which she attributes to black eyes. She, along with other characters such as Cholly, her mother, her brother Sammy are lumped up as incorrigible failures. They are all products of a broken family who inexorably become victims of alcoholism, rape, separation, frustration and general feeling of inferiority as constructed by the mainstream culture.

Toni Morrison’s novel raises quite a number of fundamental topical existential questions, some of which she herself puts forward in the **Afterword** to the current edition. Some of these pertinent questions include the following: i. *who* told Pecola, a twelve year old black teenage girl that she is ugly? ii. Who made her feel that it was better to be a freak than what she was? iii. Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale? In an essay titled, “The

American Dream and the American Negro”, James Baldwin can be assumed to have answered all the questions posited above in the assertion that,

In the case of the American Negro, from the moment you are born every stick and stone, every face, is white. Since you have not seen a mirror, you suppose you are, too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5,6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. (1-5)

Pecola’s fate and the fate of other family members as chronicled by Morrison are a woven tragic narrative of the fabled myth of white racial superiority which evolved directly and deliberately from slave culture, colonialism and racism. The breakdown of the black family structure was constructed on the slave plantations where family members were decimated and scattered over distant plantations never to be reunited.

The psychological dislocations of black personality, black culture and black identity have remained ingrained in the psyche of the black African which constitutes the most dangerous form of slavery. As a result of these psychic disorientation there are on the African homeland millions of Pecola, in the Americas and in the entire diasporic world; as much as there are also millions of Cholly, and millions of African diaspora families that are deliberately disintegrated to justify the myth of the absence of the father figure among the African American families.

### Ossie Davis’ *Purlie Victorious*

Ossie Davis was one of the most celebrated African-American dramatists who was an icon of the Civil Rights Movement, along with the venerated Martin Luther King, Jnr., Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, Stokeley Carmichael, among others. On the literary and cultural front were James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy, Douglas Turner Ward, and many others.

*Purlie Victorious* is a play that derives exclusively from the slave-master relationship on the Southern plantations of the Deep South which was intricately paternalistic in nature. This paternalistic social structure congealed into a tightly bonded social institution that sought to perpetuate slavery as a divine covenant between the slave and the master. Expectedly, therefore, the responses of the African-American towards this instituted paternalism has been resentment, protests and occasional revolts as witnessed in the past and recent history of white-black relationship.

What the white Southern planters sought to achieve from this structure arrangement was the total subjugation, unfettered legal ownership and control of the

slaves to a position of eternal bondage and dependence. In order to actualise this desire, according to Franklin E. Frazier, the Deep South had to institute legal instruments that provided relevant legislative backing and support. This was the socio-political environment that dictated and facilitated the construction of Ossie Davis' play, *Purlie Victorious*. It was written during the explosive racial unrest under the aegis of the Black Civil Rights Movement, whose cardinal objective was the furtherance of the black struggle for the actualisation of freedom, liberty, and full citizenship of the African-American.

We need to understand the play story within the context of this slave-master-paternalistic relationship that is skewed in favour of the white planter. The play is set in a Southern Georgia Cotton Plantation known as the Cotchipee Hill, being the property of the white supremacist by the name Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee. This plantation doubles as the home to a community of Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee's black slave workers. The play revolves around the late Cousin Bee's inheritance of five hundred dollars which the black community members, led by the protagonist, Purlie Victorious, seek to recover from Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee, the owner of the plantation. The intention of the black community members is to use the money to buy over the Big Bethel Church. Their problem is how to secure the release of the inheritance cheque from the bigoted white plantation owner and master.

Purlie Judson Victorious, a professor of Negro philosophy, but now a preacher, devises a subterfuge to recover the money by presenting what he considers to be a suitable look-alike of Cousin Bee in the person of Lutiebelle Gussie Mae Jenkins because, according to him, "White folks can't tell one of us from another by the head!" (*Purlie Victorious*, 132). Unfortunately, however, even though Lutiebelle is equally as beautiful as the late Cousin Bee, she is not as educated. But to enable him to accomplish his personality swap, Purlie puts Lutiebelle, the 'resurrected Cousin Bee', through a theatrical rehearsal of what to say and how to say to Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee. The rehearsal and role playing go on quite successfully, preparatory to a face-to-face meeting with the old Captain that would consequently achieve the payment of the money. Unfortunately, for the black community, when Lutiebelle finally confronts Ol' Cap'n, she develops fright, flounders and fumbles at the first attempt, then summons courage to render the prepared dramatic script that was prepared by Purlie. But noting her initial inadequacies, Purlie quickly takes over by flattering Ol' Cap'n. In his satiric rendition, Purlie refers to Ol' Cap'n as the "Great White Father of the Year" (61).

Having been impressed by the satiric honour and accolade displayed by Purlie, Ol' Cap'n gets motivated to pay the money for which a receipt must be signed as required for record purpose. Rather than allow Purlie to sign the receipt Lutiebelle

offers to do it, thereby signing her actual name in place of Cousin Bee's for which Ol' Cap'n orders the sheriff to arrest her. In the ensuing confusion, Purlie and Lutiebelle escape. However, as a preacher, Purlie threatens revenge come-back by preaching violence against the white plantation establishment.

Presumably aware and concerned by the envisaged negative consequences of such violence on the economic fortunes of the plantation economy and their owners, especially his own father, Charlie the son of Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee presents himself as being sympathetic to the cause for desegregation and freedom for the black people decides to break into his father's commissary and removes the contentious five hundred dollars and hands it over to Purlie Victorious, In addition to this brave act of courage, Charlie also secures the title deed to the Big Bethel in the name of Purlie Judson Victorious and hands it over to him. Charlie's act also ensures full ownership of both the inheritance and the Church for the black community. Seeing that Charlie's action betrays the white supremacist core values of racial superiority and non-compromise, Ol' Cap'n decides to die standing without stooping low and without compromising his avowed principles.

The unnatural form of Ol' Cap'n's death vis-a-his son, Charlie's identification and presumed sympathy with and for the black plantation work2ers are symbolic of wider relationships. These two personalities represent generational constructs of the old and the new order in race relationship; the need for the old order giving way to the new. Against this background, therefore, the three forced diaspora writers (Phyllis Wheatley, Toni Morrison and Ossie Davis) that we have discussed are equally representational of the mood and responses of the general slave era and the struggles for freedom, liberty and citizenship in the post abolition era which culminated in the black civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s through the 1980s.

#### Literature of the Modern (voluntary) African Diaspora

We now veer into the diaspora literature of the voluntary or modern diaspora community outside Africa. As earlier stated these are a community of Africans with possibilities and capacities to turn around the fortunes of their individual countries, their communities and their immediate families, but because of circumstances and conditions they consider as unfavourable and hostile, they chose to leave their own nations on their own volition, not forced, not coerced, but voluntary. While some of these migrants are termed regular migrants, others are termed irregular migrants. The regular migrants are those who go through the legitimate procedure of securing passports and visas at designated embassies. The irregular are those that try to short-change the system through illegitimate means.

Many African writers belong to the category of those seeking for improved material life- style and global visibility abroad. Some of them are frustrated by the policies and actions of their national governments; like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Nuruddin Farah, *et al*, while others are driven by personal dreams and hopes for better future, like Ngozi Adichie, Femi Oj-Ade, *et al* . Central to the dominant theme in most literatures of this category of diasporas is the contestation and negotiation of citizenship, participation and rights. There are also the nagging dilemma of alienation, estrangement, and not belonging that define and intrigue these African diasporas. The prevailing determiner has always been the skin colour, or race. The individual and collective experiences (the pull and push factors) in the diaspora world provide the much needed nexus and platforms for the thematic construction of these literatures.

#### Femi Ojo-Ade’s *Home, Sweet, Sweet Home*

Whether in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Western Europe or the South American nations, the relational responses of the immigrant revolve around citizenship, belonging, and alienation, and the crushing dilemma of return to the homeland. It, therefore, becomes imperative to open this dialogue with a long excerpt from Femi Ojo-Ade’s **Epilogue** in the novel, *Home, Sweet, Sweet Home* because it encapsulates the emotional, psychological, spiritual and material conflicts of the modern day diaspora. The **Epilogue** reads in part:

Ade came and left and some might say he was a fool, a self-opinionated hybrid, a coward, and he was indeed all of these things and more. He was and remains a symbol of the times, the quintessence of a whole universe, the epitome of a great nation. He came and left and his hypocritical hosts abroad might smile and say, ‘we told you so’. But let them not rejoice; for, his departure from home was not a flight from sadness to happiness. They knew as well as he does, that he would never find happiness till the day he dies. *And he’s not alone, was never alone, will never be alone.*(122) (emphasis mine)

Indeed, Ade is not alone, and could never be alone in this paradox of living as a split personality; neither properly fitted abroad nor back home.

In the opening chapter of the novel is a very short letter written to Ade by his father, urging him to come back home. The letter reads:

*Dear Son,*

*You have been away for too long. Your sisters, brothers and myself need you. Other relatives, too,  
Since you left, life has been going from bad to worse. Come back home. We all love you.  
Your father*

This letter which does not mention Ade's mother suggests that the mother is no more alive. The tone of his father in the short letter is loaded with layers of feelings and expectations. It is deducible that Ade is the emotional, psychological and material pillar of the family. His long absence has created a vacuum in the family life which no one could fill. Having spent twelve year of sojourn in America, Ade returns home in obedience to his father's prompting, but finds things completely changed, chaotic and order-less. Confusion, frustration and alienation dominate his life. However, can the love of his girlfriend be his salvation in this dilemma?

#### Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

Adichie's novel can be described as a travelogue and semi-autobiographical depending on the interpretive view of the reader or critic. The novel has three settings that are continental and connected by the Atlantic Ocean; connecting Nigeria on the African continent, Britain and the United States of America. Anyone that is conversant with Adichie's transoceanic movement vis-à-vis the major character, Ifemelu will support the assertion that the novel is semiautobiographical as it chronicles the trajectory of Ngozi Adichie in the United States. But this is not the concern in this paper.

The story in the novel revolves around Ifemelu and her boyfriend, Obinze who started together as students at a Nigerian university, but she decides to leave for the U.S. to continue her education. Living in Princeton, New Jersey, Ifemelu is faced with challenges of survival which led her to become a blogger under the blog name: *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. The fact that it is a blog by a non-American Black about American Blacks definitely attracted attention of the Black public and a cross-section of the white community as well. This became a source of income for her while it lasted.

The novel is episodic, changing settings and scenes forward and backward, using the flash back technique to connect the stories, incidents, characters and landscapes. The plot is, therefore, not linear in structure. For instance, the novel is constructed in Seven Parts, with each part subdivided into chapters of unequal length but neatly woven in a way that tells the story/adventures of Ifemelu in the U.S. and

the pull for a return to Nigeria to reconnect with her childhood love, Obinze.

Ifemelu's student visa does not qualify her for a paying job, but she needs a job that would fetch her some income. As a student on scholarship, she needed to pay her tuition and apartment rent. Things became hard for her, in fact, much harder than she expects. She tries possibilities in a restaurant or an office, but got rebuffed on account of her skin colour. But she desperately needed to pay her rent, so she accepts a 'job' offer of an amorous and coquettish tennis coach where he gives her one hundred dollars to have sex with him. Painfully she accepts, but realising that she compromised her sexuality and race, she quickly opts out of the 'job'. Ifemelu feels guilty, dirty, cheap and psychologically devastated.

Ifemelu, however, gets a job as a nanny to Kimberly's two children; Morgan and Taylor. She likes the job as much as she also loves the kids. While in the employment of Kimberly, Ifemelu falls in love with Curtin, Kimberley's cousin who is white and wealthy. Curt uses his connections and gets Ifemelu a job with a public relations organisation in Baltimore. At the Baltimore train station she was picked up by an Ethiopian taxi driver who thought she's "from Trinidad or one of those places" (240). He warns her, "You have to be very careful or America will corrupt you" (240). Nothing could be more truthful than this.

But as an African black lady, she cannot appear at the interview without straightening her hair. The chemical in the hair relaxant at the hair salon cause her hair to fall soon after she gets the job. Her hair began to fall off because, "She drenched it in rich, creamy conditioners, and sat under steamers until water droplets ran down her neck. Still, her hairline shifted further backwards each day" (242). Wambui warns her, "Do you know what's in a relaxer? That stuff can kill you. You need to cut your hair and go natural" (242).

Ifemelu breaks up her relationship with Curt because he does not understand her as a non-American black lady. In her confession to Ginika, Ifemelu states that, "There was a feeling I wanted to feel that I did not feel." (131). But the truth is that she cheated on Curt with a younger man by the name Rob who lived in her apartment in Charles Village. Certainly, however, between her and Curt, something was missing; there was a disconnect.

Obinze is another character that is closely connected with Ifemelu. As stated earlier, they started together as undergraduates in a Nigerian university before Ifemelu left for the United States to continue her education. His mother is a professor at Nsukka University but proceeded to Lagos on a two-year sabbatical. It was in Lagos that Obinze struck a romantic relationship with Ifemelu. Obimze desired to study at the University of Ibadan but because of his mother's accident in a library, he changed his mind and enrolled at the Nsukka University where he could be close to

her.

Obinze finds himself in London as an illegal immigrant without requisite travel documents and non-citizen. He adopts a pseudo-name, Vincent, in order to secure a job. He uses the English man's national insurance number on the agreement that Obinze will pay him 30% of the earning which will enable Obinze save enough money for a sham wedding that should afford him citizenship status and then guarantee him legitimate job opportunity. This contractual arrangement failed when Vincent demanded higher cut from Obinze who refuses. As a result, Obinze is turned over to immigration officials who arrested and deported him back to Nigeria. Fortune smiles on Obinze while back home in Lagos as he becomes a very successful business man.

Aside from Ifemelu's botched love affair with Curt, she also falls in love with Blaine, an African-American professor, although this relationship too was brief. Something indefinable is missing in Ifemelu's life which needs to be realised. The unfulfilled but brief romance that connected her with the sham opportunistic tennis coach, the chance meeting with Curt, and equally brief acquaintanceship of Blaine all fail to fill the vacuous space in her life. Not even the blogging, the baby-sitting at Kimberly's or the public relation job in Baltimore provided fulfilment for her. To say the least, Ifemelu is deeply lonely. She is a victim of her own self, a soul seeking for the fulfilment of a dream, like most youths. After ten years in the United States, that dream for self-accomplishment, self-realisation, and self-fulfilment collapses like Langston Hughes' "A Dream Deferred".

Ifemelu is hooked on to the 'pull' for a return home to Nigeria where she belongs as a citizen where she cannot go underground but be visible. Back in Lagos, Ifemelu reconnects with her childhood lover, Obinze, the successful business man and happily married family man with a child. Ifemelu becomes 'Americanised' in mannerism and etiquette that adjusting to the home environment becomes difficult, but she must adjust nonetheless. In the long run she did adjust; after all, she started from this environment before straying abroad, to strange land, before the return HOME. It was this observed Americanisation that earned her the sobriquet, *Americanah*, at the same time the title of the novel.

While Ifemelu has been able to rediscover herself and connects with the missing link which restores her peace and happiness, it is not without a price for Kosi, Obinze's wife and Buchi, the daughter. The hour of decision comes when after seven months since last the two met, Obinze puts up appearance at Ifemelu's Ikoyi apartment, ready to take the plunge of his life. Standing at the door of her house, he tells Ifemelu: "Kosi is a good woman and my marriage was a kind of floating-along contentment but I should never have married her. I always knew that something was

missing.... “Ifem, I’m chasing you. I’m going to chase you until you give this a chance” “ (538). At last, having heard what she longed to hear, she calls him by the pet name, ‘Ceiling’, and beckons him in, “Come in”, and the story ends, but the resonance and ripples are kept alive in the minds and hearts of its critics.

#### Black Diaspora Films as Literature

The film is a very effective and graphic electronic medium of storytelling. It preserves and promotes the experiences, dreams, aspirations and hopes of a community of people. It is a story that deploys the use of sound and motion pictures. Such stories could be imaginative creation intended for entertainment; sometimes they represent actual stories of events as they occur to communicate messages. Films are shown on television and the cinema houses to entertain, inform and communicate messages. As entertainment or leisure, the film eases tension and stress after a long hard day’s work. Thomas Alemoh posits that, “Communication facilitates social interaction” where “people get to understand one another by establishing interpersonal relationships, keeping in touch with others and are able to predict the reactions and responses of others in any given situation” (14).

The emergence of the internet technology has made the production and deployment of film instantaneous and urgent. Events taking place anywhere around the globe are immediately captured and instantly passed across to viewers through the smart phones or other instant electronic devices, thereby eliciting immediate reactions and responses from viewers. This explains Maya Angelou’s position that, “Without the film, we might not have been able to deny our own bestiality, but seeing it allowed us to face our barbarism and ran from it; to seek shelter in the horror we felt viewing that scene; to come closer to our own humanity” (99). This statement is a direct reference to the 1991 Rodney King brutal killing in Los Angeles, USA. It is also reminiscent of the not too long murder of George Floyd by a white American police wherein Floyd gasped, “I can’t breathe”, before finally died. Angelou describes the young man who covered this event on video as, “an embryonic historian”. The same could be said of the young school girl who covered the George Floyd murder on video.

Rodney King, George Floyd, and many others who paid the supreme price for being black are martyrs because theirs was/is the story of a race of a people, the black race who were/are daily being brutalised, maimed and murdered because they are Black people in America. Again, Maya Angelou says, “Rodney King’s isn’t a story of an individual American being denied basic human rights but the story of America. It is the story of black and white and Asian and native American” (101).

The contemporary power of the film is that it brings to limelight and make

visible that which had been invisible. The inhumanity and executive recklessness of politicians and leaders are publicly exposed through the video. The looting and starching of currency in sceptic tanks, in soak away pits, and other ridiculous means are daily being filmed and shown across the world. Police brutality, human rights violations, gender and sexual inequalities are equally being made public through the video films.

Apart from written history, music and songs, drama, prose fiction and poetry, African-Americans have deployed the use of the film to tell their stories and experiences in slavery, of racism, denial of basic human rights, the civil rights struggles of the 1960s through the 1970s, and still writing and narrating the ugly side of life in America as native black Americans who are still discriminated against by the mainstream community of white Caucasians.

African-American films are often referred to as urban cinemas whose locations are New York's Harlem and Brooklyn, South Side, Chicago and the South Central and Watts' Los Angeles neighbourhood. According to Paula J. Massood. The great southern migration of rural blacks to the industrial North bolstered the growth of the film audiences in the urban centres of Chicago's South Side, New York, Pennsylvania, among others. It is recorded that African-American film production dates back to 1912 but the African-American subject matter can be traced to the evolution of American film making in the 1890s. The early projection of African-American images and motifs in films developed from the caricature slave-master Jim Crow and Uncle Tom pejoratives of supine and peevish black man submitting to a white master's whims. The treatment of black stories and images were deliberately distorted to suit the racial interest of the mainstream community.

Paula J. Massood avers that, "Born of social protest and a desire to provide an antidote to already inscribed stereotypes, African American filmmaking has roots in a comparative discourse often determined by an anxiety over the images manufactured by mainstream filmmaking" (46). This development paved way for the emergence of what is often called 'race films'; which are intended to satisfy the demand and desires of the black community. It also represents what she, Massood describes as, "films intended for all-black audiences, starring all-black casts and featuring black subject matter" (47). There were black film companies whose sole preoccupation was to reverse and reinvent the negative caricature and stereotypes portrayal of blacks by white film makers, a re-enactment of the plantation culture.

African-American films also concerned themselves with the duty not only to entertain, but more importantly providing alternatives as, "a tool of protest and education for urban audiences that were increasingly populated by relocated migrants from the rural South" (Massood 48). Black films of this era were in all

intents and purposes intended to be pedagogical and politically inclined for the conscientisation of the uneducated and marginalised black people. There are other films whose motive is to galvanise the audiences towards hard work and social advancement. We now examine a few of the films that project period and thematic subject matters and their shifting paradigms.

### Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1920)

Oscar Micheaux was a successful film maker who was in full control of the production, distribution, funding and exhibition of his films without recourse to financial assistance from white financiers. He was a bourgeoisie of a different proclivity with high business acumen who believed in the capacity of the individual to uplift himself through hard work. His financial self-independence and success made him controversial along the two racial divide of white and black middle classes. Micheaux was perceived as leaning uneasily towards the promotion of the theme of lynching in his films; thereby setting black audiences against white audiences. The wound and scar of lynching which was common place in the South becomes the central theme in the film, *Within Our Gates*.

Lynching of blacks in the American Deep South was a historical reality that was carried out with brazen audacity by the white supremacists and their apologists, the Klu Klux Klan, (KKK). This was among the major factors that necessitated the great migration of rural blacks to the industrial North for safety. The heroine of the film is Sylvia Landry who sets out to save an all-black southern boarding school from insolvency. To achieve her mission, she needed the intervention of a kind-hearted philanthropist. This search led her to Boston in the New England state of Massachusetts. While in Boston, Sylvia confronts the good and the ugly sides of urban city life—a young black man who attempts to snatch her purse, and a young white doctor and member of the “Blue Vein Aristocrats”, who recovers her purse and eventually they fall in love.

On the contrary, it is not the young white doctor that donates the needed money, but a northern suffragette and patron who provided the money to the school. It is to be discovered by Sylvia's boyfriend, Dr. Vivian, that, “members of Sylvia's adopted family were the victims of a lynching in the South and that Sylvia herself is the product of an interracial relationship—which might have been a legitimate marriage” (50). This scenario is a backstory coming towards the end of the film that provides a background to the central message. Micheaux inserts images of a crowd of men, women, and even children who plan and execute the lynching. More worrisome is what Massood describes as, “In addition to the political impact of the lynching itself, the inclusion of all genders and generations as part of the lynch mob throws

doubt on the purity of the southern white womanhood in particular” (50).

The act of lynching in the American South was/is racially motivated and economically driven with the blacks as victims. These incidents were not peculiar to the South alone, but also prevalent in the Chicago South Side, a community that was daily receiving new migrants from the South. Consequent upon this social dynamics, there emerged competition for the available facilities and economic opportunities between white and black people. In the decades of the 1920s, Chicago became notorious for the crime of lynching, murder and arson that were racially targeted against the African-American population.

In addition to these sordid and gory images of the lynching act in the film, there is also a despicable scene in which Sylvia almost got raped by a man that turns out to be her biological father. How does one explain or justify the action of a father attempting to rape his daughter whom he is expected to protect? Could this act be traced to lust or some warped and twisted psyche, or frustration or self-denial? This could be adduced to result from the growing frustration in the unequal racial relationship between the whites and blacks which tends to place the black people in a perpetual subordinate social, political and economic status.

*Within Our Gates* also makes commentary on the role of the urban city space. The movement of Southern rural migrants to northern cities represents salvation and freedom from bondage, but it also represents damnation for them because of the socio-political and economic consequences associated with new life in the northern city. For example, we see the scene in Boston where Sylvia is threatened by a young black man who should protect her from city vagaries, but he turns out to be a gangster. Paradoxically, it turns out that this same Boston does not only provide her the needed funding to save Piney Woods boarding school, but it is Boston that provides her a suitable husband.

Micheaux's film explores the relationship between actual reality of the living conditions in the city with the narrative spaces in the film. This film undoubtedly speaks directly to the establishment in Chicago, the Deep South, Los Angeles, and other urban American urban centres. According to Paula J. Massood, “The fact that Micheaux's film spoke to the contemporary moment in Chicago (1919-1920) and this was considered enough of a threat that even the black bourgeoisie would call for censorship is an important early example of the connections between African American film's representations of urban spaces and contemporary social protest, connections that endure today” (52). It is a historical reality that remains a recurring decimal in black-white relationship.

### Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989)

Born Shelton Jackson Lee, Spike Lee is a prolific African-American film producer, director, screen writer, actor and author. His personality in the film industry has been phenomenal, iconic and stupefying. With over four decades in the film industry, Lee's works explore the race relations and unfolding ripples and responses within the black communities of Brooklyn and Harlem in particular, but other black communities of Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, among others. Among his many films, this paper selects *Do The Right Thing* (1989) for analysis.

The film is set in one block of building in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a Brooklyn neighbourhood which is populated by African-America's high and low, depicting their conflicts and tragedies on a steaming summer day. Lee brings to fore the heteroglossia of racial, economic, generational and gendered forces at play in the heterogeneous Brooklyn community, all playing out in a space of one hot summer day. The architectonics of the film represents an avant-garde innovation in cinematic creation, production, promotion and salesmanship that stands out Lee among other film makers of his time. In the context of the film setting, Paula Massod observes that, "Set in a single block in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant area, it details twenty four hours in the life of a neighbourhood on the hottest day of the year. Rather than exploring the causes and effects leading to the conditions of this particular black, Lee lets the block, its residents, and the day's events reveal the conditions and pressures of the inner city". (131). Lee uses this single block of apartment with its heterogeneous population to make a general commentary on the larger urban racial, economic, generational and gendered commentary. Most of the characters in the film are victims of economic displacement, surveillance and police brutality that characterise the American urban neighbourhoods; whether in Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, etc.

The stories in the film are minimal with minimal staging styles, while the characters are ordinary street people struggling to eke out a living. Each character is representative, embodying peculiar condition within the neighbourhood in particular and the larger society in general. For example, Mookie (Spike Lee) in the film faces a moral dilemma wherein he is confronted with the reality that "just getting paid" does not isolate nor preclude him of a responsibility to the neighbourhood. He is a member of the community, so with a paid job in an environment of jobless youths, he cannot be seen to be secured.

Stories are told minimally through the use of coded graffiti, signs and fashion; what Paula refers to as, "specific referents of contemporary urban black culture to provide the narrative with elements of realism and immediacy" (134). These are symbols that are culturally recognised and associated with urban black

culture. Costumes or clothing styles speak volumes to the audience that espouse the environment and attributes of characters. This is further illustrated graphically in the following words:

For instance, homeboy Radio Raheem's colourful T-shirt, reading simply "Bed-Stuy," encodes him as a part of the neighbourhood....DJ Senior Daddy's hats change according to the situation and mood. Mookie's ambiguous and often compromised position is suggested more by his Jackie Robinson baseball shirt than through his words and actions. Buggin' Out's kente-patterned T-shirt and shorts signify his "Afro-Nationalist" political agenda. And the embodiment of neighbourhood gentrification is Clifton, the white owner of a brownstone, who is outfitted in a Larry Bird Celtic's shirt, iconography bespeaking the ultimate white boys' basketball hero. (134)

The presence of Clifton in a black neighbourhood makes a commentary on the infiltration of upwardly mobile professionals into hitherto underdeveloped areas of the community who are seen to be tired of suburban living. This emerging seething social demography brews racial disharmony between white and black residents of the neighbourhood. The prevalent images of the T-shirt and the hat are signifiers of the African-American urban culture.

Aside the deployment of clothing symbols as narratives, there is also effective use of aural accompaniment that are signifiers of contemporary African-American political culture. The soundtrack mixture of language and dialogue as well as music that are often times rendered in patois by Mookie and Buggin' Out set them apart from the speech pattern of Da Mayor and Mother Sister whose speech (voice/sound) pattern is reminiscent of the South, as well as the history of migration from the South to the industrial North. Coconut Sid's speech pattern/accent also references the history of Caribbean migration and displacement into the mainland America. There are also the distinct speech cadences of Puerto Rican Spanish-English, American-Italian and Korean, among others, thus presenting the neighbourhood as a metaphorical image of the melting pot of racial diversity and multicultural urban landscape.

In addition to the ethnically identified speech patterns of characters, there is also the use of rap and jazz as musical motifs in *Do The Right Thing*. More often than not, Radio Raheem, the big and silent black character, communicates through his music than in words. He exemplifies the African-American male subculture that is perceived as a threat by the white middle-class. The significance of music in defining

characters, identities and relationships in *Do The Right Thing* cannot be ignored because music plays a dominant role in shaping the dynamics of characters in the film. Some of the music serves as rallying points for political action against the white middle-class members of the community.

Economic emasculation which breeds joblessness with the black community members as victims, as well as institutional racism are the thrust of the conflict in this film. This scenario re-enforces Paula's position that, "The chronic economic displacement of young African American men is explored via the experiences of the film's characters" (136). This debilitating condition is further exacerbated by unsolicited police surveillance of predominantly black neighbourhood and the concomitant brutality, often lead to murder and riot in the urban neighbourhoods across the nation.

Mookie is Sal's pizza sales boy. Always donning the Jackie Robinson-type baseball shirt, he faces verbal abuse and animosity from Sal's older son, Pino, while Vito, the younger son is overtly friendly with Mookie. Pino is obviously the most racist in the film. His Sal's Famous employment places Mookie in a precarious position in the neighbourhood as the black members suspect him of being allegiant to Sal who represents the oppressive and exploitative white members of the community. This perception places Mookie in a dilemma. However, repulsed by the murder of Radio Raheem, his position is finally defined in the scene where he throws a trashcan through Sal's pizzeria window that smashes it, thereby precipitating the looting and burning of the storefront that followed.

Unfortunately, it could be argued that by act of omission or commission, Sal invited Mookie's action upon himself by his act of dedicating what he calls "Wall of Fame" at the corner of his pizzeria that will be donned with celebrities that will be determined by him, and decide whether music will be played in the pizzeria or not. While Sal sees this as his "inalienable right", Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out see it as an audacious display of racism in the community which excludes black celebrities. The white-black suspicious relationship, the economic dominance by the white, the presence of the police in the community and their surveillance build up tension and pressure within the black community; thereby resulting in riots and violence that is seen in the movie, *Do The Right Thing* which culminates in the murder of Radio Raheem.

It is necessary that we identify the three ideological/ generational blocks of black people in the film: the accommodationist/integrationist, the post-civil right/Black Power, and the contemporary nihilist generation of the 1980s/1990s. These ideological block characters are shaped by the vicissitudes of their time and age. Mother Sister and Da Mayor represent the older generation that

migrated from the South, while DJ Mister Senor Love Daddy and the three Cornermen represent post-civil rights age. Mookie, Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out personify the restless youth in the neighbourhood. These groups collectively personify the history of African-American experiences from poverty in rural South to the great migration to the industrial North. A signifying motif that is associated with this third group of youth is Radio Raheem's music. The title of the music is instructively metaphorical, "Fight the Power" This music does not only introduce the film, it is present and alive throughout the film, serving as the motivator for the violence that takes place close to the end of the film.

### Conclusion

We have so far established the nexus between migration, the diaspora and the wide gamut of experiences in the diasporic world as expressed in literature and film. Wherever and whenever an individual or group relocate from their homeland they are physically dislocated as strangers in strange land. They are confronted with the reality of a new life and new experiences, cultivating new relationships while trying to adapt to the new environment. Paramount among the new challenges is that of citizenship. Whether the victim is a forced diaspora or a voluntary diaspora, the experiences are not diametrically different. The difference is the reality that the voluntary diaspora still has a home to return to in the long run, while the forced diaspora has no such privilege of a home on the homeland.

The Diasporas, therefore, are victims of social, psychological and emotional disconnect who suffers the pains and agonies of loss of citizenship and acceptance, discrimination, alienation and frustration. Diasporas are physically, emotionally, and verbally brutalised. Economically, they are skewed and subjected to menial employment, or shadow employment. Collectively, Diasporas are victims of institutional racism where they are regarded as inferior human beings, often viewed as criminals undeserving of freedom and rights.

Whether in drama, prose fiction, poetry, music and the film, most of these experiences are constructed as narrative themes. The only exception to the rule in the titles that we have treated is the poem of Phyllis Wheatley which eulogises her slave condition as salutary and redemptive. Her attitude as expressed in the poem is not unexpected because of the favourable treatment that she received in the Wheatleys' household. She was a privileged slave girl who was not only taught how to read and write, she was sent to England where she socialised with the nobles who praised her ingenuity. Ojo-Ade's *Home, Sweet, Sweet Home* and Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (voluntary Diasporas) narrate similar stories of dream, reality, frustration, and return to the homeland. On the other hand, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Ossie Davis'

*Purlie Victorious* (forced Diasporas) paint a gory narrative canvass of racism, economic strangulation, frustration and struggle for freedom and rights. Oscar Micheaux film, *Within Our Gates* and Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (forced Diasporas) graphically capture the reality of racism, economic emasculation of African-Americans and their daily struggle for survival in racially segregated American urban cities, in addition to recurring police brutality and murder.

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# **African Diasporic Literature and Film: The Reality of History**

**ALI SULE AKO**

## **Abstract**

African Diasporic Literature and Film deal with the study of literary and cinematic works created and produced by individuals of African origin or descent, who at a time have been dispersed throughout the world as a result of slavery, migration, and even colonization. African Diasporic Literature and Film incorporates works that delve into the histories, experiences, and cultural expressions of Africans in diasporic communities. The paper delves into the multifaceted and diverse field of African Diasporic Literature and Film, probing its significance in representing cultural resistance, identity, and representation. Taking into cognizance the main texts and films from prominent authors and filmmakers in the diasporic communities, the paper explores the social impact, critical theories, and historical context that reinforce this rich and dynamic turf. By critically analyzing the narrative strategies, theme, and historical connections in African Diasporic Literature and Film, the paper aims to throw more light on the various contributions made by authors, filmmakers, and other related movements that address the centrality of fostering dialogue, cultural expression and stimulating prevailing stories. With the clear impacts of the influence of feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and cultural education, the lead paper therefore seeks to enhance the basic understanding of the nuanced complications and socio-political inferences summarized in the context of African Diasporic Literature and Film. In a nutshell, the paper finds out that African Diasporic Literature and Film provide the opportunity for researchers to explore the impacts of historical events such as slavery, colonialism, and racial segregation among individuals living in diasporic communities. The research also finds out among others that African Diasporic Literature and film provide an insight into the diverse experiences, cultural expressions, and histories of individuals living in diasporic communities thus providing a counter-narrative to mainstream representation that repeatedly spreads stereotypes. It is recommended among others that there should be an increase in perceptibility and accessibility of African Diasporic Literature and Film in our libraries, educational curriculum, and even

cultural institutions to encourage and promote African Diasporic Literature and Film.

Keywords: Africa, Diaspora, Culture, Identity, Immigration, Exile, Displacement, Belonging, Representation, Trauma, Multiculturalism.

### Introduction

Africans who were forcibly or voluntarily relocated from their own country to other regions of the world are the subject of artistic works that are referred to as African Diasporic Literature and Film. African Diasporic literature and film address the themes of identity, displacement, new cultural recognition, and adaptation. They explore the realities of belonging to one's adopted nation or not. Above all, African Diasporic Literature and Film typically evaluate the complexities of navigating the dynamics of various cultural civilizations, histories, languages, and other characteristics unique to the African people. The essence is to provide Africans with a platform to share their narratives and difficulties to guarantee that their experiences in the diaspora are accurately viewed and understood.

However, it is important to recognize that the artistic creations of the populace speak to the difficulties, hopes, and adaptability of Africans living in diasporic communities. This needs to involve shedding more light on the roles that Interpower play, cultural preservation, and hybridity play in the new communities. The role of demystifying stereotypical issues and enhancing the link between different cultures must be considered important when dealing with African Diasporic Literature and Film. Stuart Hall (1990) in collaboration with the aforementioned submission averred that:

Diasporic communities are not fixed entities but are constantly evolving, hybrid, and multifaceted, and as such, it is important to note that literature and film play a crucial role in representing and articulating diasporic experiences and identities. In this regard, narratives could be deployed to challenge dormant stereotypes and constructs of identity as well as the potential for cultural production to foster new forms of belonging and understanding. (4)

Stuart's postulation brings to bear the dynamics of cultural orientation and reorientation, in diasporic communities. This implies that the experiences, hybridity, identity, and cosmology of African diasporic communities are key to their literature and films. Stuart further asserted that the people of the diasporic communities must establish a connection with their cultural roots and heritage. This will enable them to

communicate their experiences of relocation to express their struggles and identity in their newfound communities. We are also not oblivious to the fact that the core objective of African diasporic literature and film includes the preservation and sharing of histories, language, and traditions while taking a longer overview of hybridity, discrimination, identities, and the complex nature of a multi-ethnic society. It is also sufficient to provide the voices of those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented the chance to express the unique experiences they have had with relocation and adaptation. This will add to the celebration of multiplicity and display of resilience of Africans in diasporic communities and project their often-downplayed contributions to the larger communities' socio-political, cultural, and economic growth and development. In furtherance to this assertion, Paul Gilroy (1993) also re-affirmed that:

Cultural forms provide important insights into the experiences of diasporic communities and how they navigate issues of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage. It is how diasporic literature and film challenge traditional conceptions of national identity and foster a more inclusive understanding of cultural belonging. (9)

It is important to submit that the focus of African Diasporic Literature and Film has remained critical, considering the perspectives of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. Their submissions imply that, irrespective of the displacement, hybridity, experience, and adaptation, the literature and films of the people will continue to propel relevance in the creative industry. This is established within the ambit of multiculturalism, multinational, and globalization as buttressed by some critical theories and methodologies employed to drive this study.

Critical theories and methodologies employed for this study

In an attempt to carry out an all-inclusive survey on the critical study of African Diasporic Literature and Film, it thus becomes pertinent to also take into cognizance the various relevant theories and methodologies that could be adopted to drive this theme.

**Afrofuturism:** This theory appraises the intersectionality between African diasporic culture, technology, fiction, and science. It envisages alternative futures where black people prosper and own agency in a world that has marginalized them. Closely applied here are elements of folklore, mythology, and science to challenge power structures and social norms. This particular theory is considered very important in the discourse of African Diasporic Literature and Film thus its application in this study.

One other theory is the Black Feminist Theory which interrogates the intersection between class and gender race in diasporic communities. It investigates the experiences and struggles of the literature and film of black women who pursue to test and dismantle racist and patriarchal systems. This theory is considered apt in the critical analysis of African Diasporic Literature and Film and as such adopted for this critical study. Another theory which is employed to drive this study is the postcolonial theory which is also a major driving force in the analysis of African Diasporic Literature and Film. This important theory mainly observes the effects and consequences of colonialism as it affects individuals living in diasporic communities. The theory emphasizes the power-play between the colonized and the colonizers, representation of race and identities, culture and gender among others. In the same vein, some of the methodologies employed for this paper include the intertextuality methodology which encourages the analysis of literature and film as they affect texts and other cultural nuances. Also, a similarly important methodology for this study is the poststructuralism methodology which tends to critique the fixed meanings and binary oppositions contained in African Diasporic Literature and Film. The researcher uses this methodology to project the power of language unpredictability, identity construction, and even power relations to explain the multiple interpretations and perspectives of Africans in diasporic communities.

### The Impact of Multiculturalism and Globalization on African Diasporic Literature and Film

#### Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism explores the significance of the experiences, challenges, and identity questions faced by individuals or a group of people living outside the shores of their original birthplace. Multiculturalism refers to the overall acceptance of the coexistence of various cultures and their dynamics within a given society. More importantly, African diasporic literature and film emphasize and explain the diverse cultures and identities of African people. African Diasporic Literature and Film usually project an overview of the richness and difficulties of multicultural societies. One of the major advantages of multiculturalism is that it offers an articulated voice to confront the experiences of refugees, immigrants, and their descendants. It provides the theme of cultural hybridity, displacement, and belonging which most times, exposes the clash of cultures.

Furthermore, multiculturalism as viewed from the viewpoint of African Diasporic Literature and Film questions the various experiences as they relate to empathy and the understanding of different African cultures. It also strengthened the

interface between current issues by equipping the voiceless underrepresented communities. This implies that the existing social structures can be challenged for overall improvement, thus encouraging the celebration of cultural multiplicity through arts, music, food, and other cultural-related nuances. In aligning with the role of multiculturalism in African Diasporic Literature and Film, Jhumpa Lahore (2002) affirmed that:

The challenges and nuances of cultural assimilation, the sense of displacement, and the search for belonging faced by individuals living in the diaspora are rather challenging. This is because the tension between the cultural heritage of the people and their interaction with the dominant culture of the adopted country is usually accompanied by the navigation of the intersection of multiple cultural influences. (13)

The perspective of Jhumpa also adds another voice to the discourse of multiculturalism in African Diasporic Literature and Film because she explored the dynamics of the immigrant experience, the identity of culture, and the intricacies surrounding the beauty, complexity, and dynamics of multicultural societies. This perhaps is an added advantage to the African Diasporic experience in terms of richness.

### Globalization

Globalization has a significant impact on African Diasporic Literature and Film in so many ways. One of the ways includes facilitating the dissemination of African Diasporic Literature and Film to global audiences. This creates the opportunity for more proactive visibility and recognition of the creative works of African diasporic writers and filmmakers. The role of globalization in African Diasporic Literature and Film has led to improved collaboration between artists and creators from other parts of the global community. It is also pertinent to note that globalization has provided the opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas, cultural influences, and themes across different regions of the world. This has led to the emergence of new forms of storytelling and expression within the context of African Diasporic Literature and Film. It has also facilitated the incorporation of global impacts into the works of African Diasporic writers and filmmakers. Martin Mhando in his assessment of globalization (2023) observed that: *Globalization is the all-pervasive constituent of contemporary living. It is the narrative of socialization that helps us to locate the local within the global (1)*

Mhando's position on the concept of globalization is apt even in the context

of African Diasporic Literature and Film as it also explains the socialization of Africans in diasporic communities and how these communities experience the growth of transnational networks by exposing African Diasporic writers and filmmakers to connect with audiences for collaboration. This development has ushered in a more dynamic and interconnected effective creative scenery with increased chances for cross-cultural exchange and dialogue.

### African Diasporic Literature and Film: Cultural Experiences & Background of People in the Diaspora

African Diasporic Literature and Film typically project cultural diversity, background, and experience of Africans who left their homeland and live in the diaspora. African Diasporic Literature and Film explain themes of displacement, identity, and the relationship between the multiple cultures of African descent. The works explain the challenges of navigation between different cultural nuances among Africans. The essence is to explain the difficulties of identifying and preserving one's original heritage while also trying to adapt to a completely new environment. This provides the opportunity to interrogate the nature and importance of hybrid identities that are considered crucial. More so, African Diasporic Literature and Film provide the opportunity for the underrepresented and marginalized voices to be heard. This can be achieved by initiating a broader range of understanding of the various multifaceted and dynamic nature of the communities in the diaspora. Some examples of African Diasporic Literature and Film include, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *Shoot the Messenger* by Ngozi Onwurah *I3<sup>th</sup>* by Ava DuVernay among others

We are not oblivious to the fact that African Diasporic Literature and Film serve as a veritable tool for the display of diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of people living in the diaspora. It is pertinent to note that, the people's works usually project an extensive range of characters which by implication, represent diverse ethnicities, languages, cultural transitions, and religions. This enables them to project the complexities and prosperity of these diasporic communities. African Diasporic Literature and Film provide authors with rich experiences which include the preservation of cultural heritage, the search for identity, and perhaps, the tasks of cultural adaptation. When critically viewed from their points of storytelling, one could ascertain the fact that they provide an understanding of different cultural practices which include traditions, rituals, and cultural performances among others. This gives a better understanding of diversity which invariably deals with the empathetic nature of Africans living in diasporic communities. Consequent to the aforementioned postulation, Onuh, Martha Ene

(2016) submits that:

Diasporic Literature and Film centre on the experiences of people all around the world who leave their homelands in search of greener pastures or are forced out of such homelands for various reasons... the diasporic experience is a complex reality that amounts to double consciousness and/or identity crisis. Diasporic Literature and Film grapple with issues such as race, identity nostalgia, and alienation in their new homes. (1)

Onuh Martha's submission on the focus of the complexities of Diasporic Literature and Film is apt. This is because when people of similar cultural orientation and perhaps creed find themselves in an entirely new environment or homeland, the perception of hybridity, identity crisis, race, alienation, and even nostalgia come into question. This is also peculiar to Africans who have left their birthplace for socio-economic or political reasons. At this juncture, the need for the search for seamless adaptation takes centre stage in the themes of the literature of Africans in diasporic communities. It is important to note that African diasporic films, on the other hand, focus on the visualization of the narratives of individuals who have found themselves living in the diaspora to ensure the provision of a visual representation of their cultural backgrounds and even experiences. It is also important to note that, these films often comprise elements such as language, costume, and music among others to protect the exclusive cultural identities of the characters. Nevertheless, such film directors are usually able to explore and communicate the nuances of diasporic experiences which allow the audience to immerse themselves in the vibrant tapestry of culture.

Suffice it that, in both literature and film, the stories and characters presented suggest the multifaceted nature of diaspora. Literature and film demonstrate that individuals in the diaspora often grapple with conflicting cultural identities which perhaps seem to negotiate between different value systems and confront unique challenges that conform with their status as displaced or migrant individuals. In a nutshell, African Diasporic Literature and Film add value to a broader understanding to appreciate the complexities of African cultures as they relate to the functionalities of diasporic communities. According to Smets, Kevin (2015):

Diaspora films are films that are inspired by the contents which include immigrants and descendants of immigrants who have settled abroad for economic, political, or cultural opportunities as well as refugees of war and occupation...

Diasporic films encompass more than mere migrant status or physical displacement, they reflect aesthetics, narratives, or thematic focus on migration, displacement, and diasporic dwelling. (2)

Taking a closer appraisal of Smets' submission, it is thus apparent that the nuances of colonialism, war, globalization, and other factors are usually key to the themes of African diasporic films which project these films' synopsis as they affect African individuals in diasporic communities. It is also important to note that such films could also explore a plethora of genres, and sub-genres.

Analysis of select texts and films of some Authors and Filmmakers of African Diasporic Literature and Film.

This section deals with some select writers and filmmakers as they project the themes of African Diasporic Literature and Film. This is to enable us to take a critical study and analyze their perspectives on their various creative works and how these works have been able to impact, shape, and add value to existing knowledge, especially among Africans living in diasporic communities. One such amiable writer is the Nigerian-born Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Adichie is globally recognized for her powerful and stimulating essays, novels, and short stories. She is also a fearless public commentator. Adichie was born on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria. Her literary career began to gain momentous recognition after the publication of her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003. The publication of this novel was followed by *Half of a Yellow Sun* in 2006 which won her the Orange Prize for fiction. Adichie is well known for her strong voice on the feminist movement, cultural identity, and race among other salient issues. In 2013, She published *Americanah* which earned her accolades and awards. *Americanah* focuses on the themes of identity, race, and immigration experiences, especially among Nigerians living in the United States of America (USA)

Synopsis of *Americanah*

The novel opens with Ifemelu's experiences in Nigeria before her relocation to the United States of America. Upon her arrival in the United States of America, Ifemelu is confronted with a plethora of challenges as she navigates American culture/tradition, racism, and above all the complexities of interracial affairs. However, Ifemelu's former boyfriend known as Obinze, similarly leaves Nigeria to live in the United Kingdom. The novel interlaces their separate experiences in different countries and further explores their multifaceted relationship against the backdrop of their trips of self-discoveries. Ifemelu experiences independence and success in the United States of America. She wrestles with her own identity and tries to embrace the reality of the impact of race on her overall relationship and sense of belonging. Eventually, she returns to her fatherland, Nigeria where she is confronted

with new challenges of readjustment.

#### Analysis of “Americanah”

The novel “Americanah” is a challenging and rich novel that provides an insightful explanation of the question of race, cultural identity, and immigration. Adichie’s creative prowess explores the complexities and distinctions of being an African immigrant in Western societies, offering an important investigation of the immigrant cultural assimilation, experience, and the role of race on social undercurrents. The novel further studies the concept of “Americanah” which is a term adopted to describe someone who has been shaped by his/her experiences in America and how this identity changes and influences individuals’ relationship and their perspectives. “Americanah” addresses critical discourses about privilege, and race and how these germane issues have been able to shape and redefine the experiences of Africans living in diasporic communities. “Americanah” gives a deep exploration of race, belonging, and identity. It provides an insightful opportunity on immigrant experiences while also encouraging critical reflections on the question of culture and race in modern society.

Furthermore, another African Diasporic writer who has made a significant impact on Africans living in diasporic communities is Toni Morrison. Toni Morrison was born on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio in the United States of America. Morrison is a renowned author who is also known for her thought-provoking novels and essays that essentially interrogate the themes of identity, race, and gender-based related issues among others. One such creative work is titled “The Bluest Eye”

#### Synopsis of “The Bluest Eye”

“The Bluest Eye” was published in 1970. The novel portrays the themes of identity, race, and beauty. It adopts the tragic story of a young African American girl known as Pecola Breedlove. Pecola is an introvert and a shy young girl of twelve years. She grows up in a very hostile and segregated society. Her desire for blue eyes is borne out of her conviction that possessing blue eyes will make her beautiful, adoring, and loved especially since the fantasy of white beauty is regarded as widespread in her immediate community. Pecola is confronted with constant neglect, ridicule, and even sexual harassment because she lives with her parents who are abusive and dysfunctional. All of these inform her ultimate desire to clamour for physical transformation. Pecola’s story also provides the opportunity for the introduction of other characters who share the same story with her, although providing different viewpoints on the cruel nature and dynamics of racism. In light of the foregoing, a young black girl known as Claudio in a similar situation juxtaposes parts of the novel

with Pecola's predicament. In the view of Claudio, the idealization of white beauty which perhaps challenges the notions of beauty and self-esteem should be considered unnecessary. Furthermore, Morrison also harps on the effects of racism pointing out how it rusts self-worth and promotes self-hatred. Pecola's wish for the bluest eye is a clear reflection of her belief and submission that she is worthless of respect and love because of her race as a black person. This leads to the deterioration of her emotional and mental state thus the eventual tragic end. Nevertheless, "The Bluest Eye" relishes the harsh realities of racism and its injurious effect on young black girls such as Pecola. Morrison again, exposes the scarring nature of racism and how it impacts societal values of beauty. The novelist also raises a fundamental question about the unhelpful power of racism, and identity and why cultural reformation and empathy must be embraced to devalue and alienate the non-conformists to dominant norms.

#### Analysis of The "Bluest Eye"

"The Bluest Eyes" fundamentally explores the themes of identity, and racism, among others as essentially posited in the synopsis. These are explicitly conveyed through the activities of Pecola Breedlove. One of the main themes in the novel is the high-level nature of racism. It is a known fact that Pecola, alongside her family and even her community faces persistent marginalization and discrimination because of their race. Pecola's craving for blue eyes clearly explains how society's beauty standard could deeply be deep-seated with racism and the concept of cultural superiority. More so, she is optimistic that her desire for the bluest eyes and even blonde hair will bring her joy and acceptability in society.

Morrison's explanation of racism in "The Bluest Eye" further communicates the profound meaning of how racism is connected to abuse and violence as projected in the characters of Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father. The high degree of violence meted out by Pecola explains the disturbing consequences of racism in society.

More importantly, symbolism is also key in the analysis of the novel as Morrison can bring to bear the symbol of not just the blue eyes which connote white beauty but also the desire for acceptance and self-respect.

Morrison also employs poetic prose and lyrics to explain the emotions and thoughts of the characters she presents in the novel. Her use of repetition and fragmented narratives also add value to the entire complex nature of the novel.

Nonetheless, in the area of African Diasporic Film, a lot of progress has also been made considering the impacts these have on Africans living in diasporic communities. One such filmmaker is Ngozi Onwurah who is a British-Nigerian filmmaker and visual artist. Ngozi Onwurah was born in 1966 in Nigeria. She is popularly known for her stimulating works that deal with themes of identity, race,

and other critical social issues. Onwurah's creative works usually challenge the complexities of personal cultural identity and conventional narratives. She has directed documentaries which include "And Still I Rise", among others. Onwurah has been a very strong voice in advocating for diversity and representation in depicting the experiences of marginalized communities. She has continued to explore boundaries by offering a vital perspective on issues of social justice, race, and cultural identity as could be seen in her film titled "Shoot the Messenger".

Synopsis of "Shoot the Messenger".

"Shoot the Messenger" is a film directed by Ngozi Onwurah. The film was released in 2006 with the story revolving around a British black journalist whose name is Joseph Bede. Bede is seen to be confronted with racism, corruption, and violence while investigating a story that is inclined to racial murder. Bede is regarded as a respected Journalist in his community because of his disposition to always uncover the truth no matter the circumstances. His investigation into the murder case of the young black boy makes him deeply involved in the lives of those affected by the crime. His investigation into the murder case unravels a web of racism and corruption within the ambit of the Police Force and the government. Bede is confronted with enormous pressures from both his immediate community and the White community because of his uncompromised position to expose the truth. This makes him become the target of violence and constant threats putting his life in danger. The film also reveals how Bede is confronted with his fears and biases as injustice and corruption are continuously perpetuated with impunity. Bede eventually decides to take the risk by telling the public the truth about his investigation. "Shoot the Messenger" depicts the theme of power struggle, race, and the moral responsibility expected of Journalists in an unjust society. It also questions the unhealthy status quo and the injustice that pervades the society.

Analysis of "Shoot the Messenger".

The themes of the film include identity, sexuality, and racism. The film through storytelling and effective characterisation, projects a conscious and deep analysis of these critical themes which allows viewers to understand and confront their individual biases and understand marginalized identities and complexities. One of the major themes of the film is the theme of racism. Onwurah delves into the deep-seated systemic racism that is predominant in society. It is imperative to note at this juncture that the trial of Demba, a black man that is accused of murdering a white girl provides the rationale behind Bede's investigation to bring to bear the prejudices and racial tautness that have been existing. The film further highlights the dual standards

that Bede faces as a mixed-race journalist which makes him face rejection and discrimination from both black and white communities. This again reiterates the intricacy of racism. The identity question is another fundamental theme of “Shoot the Messenger” which is highlighted. Here also, the challenges of navigating the perceptions of others as demonstrated by Bede are further complicated by his eventual realization of his sexual attraction to men. This to him is a self-discovery that is made during the investigation.

The theme of intersectionality of identity is very pronounced in this film. It emphasizes that the different marginalized identities can intersect and compound discrimination. Bede’s experiences as a gay and mixed race expose the challenges and complexities faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities. This has challenged the norms and expectations of individuals. Onwurah’s gritty style of cinematography reflects the unease nature of Bede’s journey which vividly captures his emotional disorder and further highlights the weight of issues he contends with. In furtherance to this discourse, another African-American filmmaker and screenwriter, Du Vernay in her work titled The “13<sup>th</sup>” shares almost related experience on the discriminations meted out to African-Americans. Ava DuVernay was born on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1972 in Long Beach, California, United States of America. She is widely known for her strong disposition to critical social issues typically affecting the Black communities. She is also known for addressing gender inequality and racial questions as contained in her creative work of the “13<sup>th</sup>”

#### Synopsis of “13<sup>th</sup>”

“13<sup>th</sup>” is a documentary film directed by Ava DuVernay in 2016. This film explores a cogent historical overview of racial inequality in the United States of America (USA). The title “13<sup>th</sup>” undoubtedly refers to the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution, which abolished slavery and servitude except if it must be applied as a punishment for a crime. The film critically examines how this gap is adopted to promote discrimination and oppression against African Americans. “13<sup>th</sup>” essentially portrays the systemic form of racism that paves the way for the lop-sided imprisonment of black people and even the flagrant exploitation of the prison labour organization. “13<sup>th</sup>” central focus is primarily on criminal injustice and racial discrimination.

#### Analysis of “13<sup>th</sup>”

“13<sup>th</sup>” explains the racial bias as it is found in the United States of America’s criminal justice system. Particularly, it appraises the bequest of slavery, the war on drugs, and the Jim Crow era. It is important to note that all these have been unduly wedged on

black communities which unvaryingly leads to a high degree of confinement. The film also unequivocally exposes the profits made from imprisoning people.

The documentary is a powerful medium that exposes the deep-rooted systemic subjects that contribute to prison recidivism and racial inequality that continues to pervade the American community. “13<sup>th</sup>” sparks critical conversations that dwell on reform, justice, and race. The creative work remains a focal point for the ongoing debate about racial discrimination and the call for reform in the justice system.

### The Challenges of Traditional Notions of Identity and Promotion of Cultural Exchange

It is important to note that, the traditional notions of identity are entrenched in the complexities of a fast-growing globalized world. This is because traditional notions of identity usually project stable, fixed, and homogenous identities often tied to specific ethnic cultural, and national connexions. However, in the present society of multiculturalism, these traditional notions are being interrogated and challenged. It is important to note that one of the challenges is the geometric increase in the fluidity of identities. Suffice is the mixed heritage, global migration, and of course, global communications platforms that are blurring traditional boundaries to create more diverse and hybrid identities. Note that, this development can lead to the appraisal of fixed notions of identity and the request for more all-encompassing and stretchy contexts. Cultural exchange also addresses the nuances of conserving genuineness and avoiding cultural appropriation. It is therefore important to opine that, as cultures interact and impact each other, they must risk commodification, misrepresentation, and weakening of cultural practices. Cultural exchange should be viewed from the perspective of understanding, mutual respect, and a sense of commitment to preserve the truthfulness of the expression of cultural values.

The dynamics of power play are also integral to cultural exchange. This is because dominant cultures are usually seen to dictate the shape of the narrative and reaction of other cultures. This can create representational disparities in line with their perspectives. Authentic cultural exchange demands that the marginalized voices be accorded the platform to encourage and promote equal participation. However, the preferment of empathy, open dialogue, and the overall respect for diversity can be employed to surmount these challenges. The recognition of the changeability of identities and empathy for the complexities of cultural exchanges can encourage more inclusive and equitable spaces for people and their communities to coexist for national development. In the light of the foregoing, Ankita Dutta (2020) corroborated that:

Identity refers to the idea of how one perceives self. It is a prescription of who one is, what role one is supposed to enact as a member of society and citizen of the state, and how one is unique from others in society. The concept of the “self” and the “other” are generally involved whenever we talk about identity and identity-related issues. Societies across the globe today are dominated by discourses of identity... (393)

In furtherance to the collaboration by Ankita Dutta’s assertion, Sinn Han (2024) also submitted that:

Traditional identity explains the identity of a group of culture which includes a tradition of an individual as far as one is influenced by one’s belonging or a group of culture. Traditional identity is a part of a person’s identity or their self-conception and self-perception. This is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality, or any view of a social group that has its own distinct culture. (3)

From the submissions of both Dutta and Han, it is obvious that the notions of traditional identity are critical to individuals’ diverse cultures as these cultures shape and reshape the overall perspectives and ideologies of the works of Africans living in diasporic communities. The postulation implies that, despite displacement and the newfound environment, the traditional identity of the people will always intervene with their creative works.

The role of African Diasporic Literature and Film in challenging stereotypes and fostering cultural understanding in a globalized society

African Diasporic Literature and Film play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and promoting understanding in the contemporary global community. They point to critical works that are created by individuals who have migrated or better still, those whose ancestors have migrated from one country to another such that the different cultural practices, identities, and ideas can be harnessed (Hybridity)

It is important to note that African Diasporic Literature and Film challenge the role of stereotypes by offering nuanced portrayals of African cultures and even Communities. We are not oblivious to the fact that they provide an opportunity for marginalized voices to be heard to challenge the dominant chronicles that prolong the stereotype question. Taking into cognizance the multifaceted nature of diasporic experiences, these creative works challenge preconceived notions and provide an understanding of different cultures. African Diasporic Literature and Film encourage cultural understanding by providing a bridge between diverse cultures. They allow audiences to connect with characters and stories to reflect various backgrounds to

facilitate empathy and understanding. It is pertinent to note that African Diasporic Literature and Film encourage shared experiences, struggles, and triumphs so that in the end, the complexities and richness of African cultures are very much appreciated. Given the above submission, Avinash Kumar (2022) opined that:

Diasporic literature and film in the globalized world simply relay the expressions of people living together in the country who acknowledge that the country always has some claim on their loyalty and motions. It is not only the coexistence of multiple cultures and ethnicities but a condition to maintain individuality and self-recognition. (12)

African Diasporic Literature and Film create the platform to engage in dialogue and discussion about cultural identity and some critical issues faced by Africans in diasporic communities. African Diasporic Literature and Film provide awareness about political, cultural, and social challenges faced by marginalized African people or groups. This often stimulates conversations on issues such as identity, racism, and even assimilation. Most often, this dialogue assists in breaking down prejudice and encourages the promotion of intercultural empathy. In further buttressing the role of African Diasporic Literature and Film in challenging stereotypes, Jacob Shai (2023) submitted that:

Diasporic literature and film involve an idea of a homeland, a place where displacement occurs, and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken on account of economic, social, cultural, and political compulsions. The stereotypical nuances addressed to this development are usually challenged through these creative works as reflected in their feeling of alienation, living for their homeland, dispersed and dejection, rhythmic memory, and the protest against discrimination in the adopted country. (6)

In line with Shai's submission, it is therefore important to note that, diasporic literature and film even in the context of African cosmology can provide the paradigm of cultural pride and the provision of a sense of belonging among African Diasporic Communities. This can be achieved by projecting their stories and experiences in literature or on screen. Embarking on this creative responsibility suggests that, their works would authenticate and empower individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This could also lead to the promotion of a sense of inclusivity and the encouragement of individuals to rejoice in their heritage while also embracing their current realities. African Diasporic Literature and Film also play an important role in challenging the question of stereotypes and developing cultural understanding in a global community. This if properly achieved, can encourage and sustain inclusivity and an empathetic society through awareness, appreciation, and

dialogue for cultural transformation.

### National and Transnational Identities

#### How African Diasporic Literature and Film Blur the Boundaries Between National and Transnational Identities

African Diasporic Literature and Film play a significant part in blurring the boundaries between national and transnational identities. They project the experiences of individuals and communities who were displaced or migrated from their original countries of origin. African Diasporic Literature and Film blur the boundaries between national and transnational identities through the following:

- African issues and themes: It is important to note that, African Diasporic Literature and film usually address African themes such as assimilation, displacement, cultural adaptation, and memory. These themes would usually resonate with audiences globally, surpassing national boundaries. By interrogating these African concerns, African Diasporic Literature and Film would encourage robust conversations that deal with experiences and foster transnational connections. To this end, Marina Gold (2009) averred that:

...while the question of national identity clearly defines belonging, migration studies explore the limits and determine the parameters of membership. However, in the last fifteen years, these parameters have significantly changed, therefore, it is important to note that the world's 'citizenship' is not exercised in the same way throughout different moments of history as it relates to diasporic communities. (1)

Gold's submission is apt because the role hybridity has played in juxtaposing transnational identity is crucial to African Diasporic Literature and Film.

- Hybrid Identities: We are aware of the fact that African Diasporic Literature and Film generally portray characters who inhabit multiple linguistic, cultural, and national identities. Hybrid identities explain the complexities of identity construction in the context of transnationals. This provides individuals with the opportunity to simultaneously identify with their original homes and the country they currently live in. This addresses the question of flexibility and fluidity of identity.
- Representation and Visibility: African Diasporic Literature and Film provide a viable platform for communities who are not represented the chance to tell their sides of stories. Representation and visibility showcase the multiplicity within African diasporic communities. This will ensure the breaking away from essentialists through the understanding of national identity. With the

effective projection by these voices, issues such as barriers between national and transnational identities would have been eroded.

- Transcultural Encounters: African Diasporic Literature and Film often investigate the encounters and interactions between individuals from different African cultural backgrounds. These could lead to the blending and restructuring of cultural practices, languages, and beliefs thereby creating hybrid cultural expressions and languages. This poses some challenges of fixed identities and emphasizes the shared human experiences across borders. African Diasporic Literature and Film create room to challenge conventional notions of national identity by basically interrogating the complexities and the interconnectedness of transnational experiences. This encourages the bridging of diverse cultures to promote a more inclusive and better way of understanding the significance of identity.

### Artistic Forms and Depiction of the Complexities of Identity Formation and Negotiation within African Diasporic Communities

Artistic forms play a very important role in protecting the complexities of identity formation and negotiation within African diasporic communities. In this regard, artists would usually adopt various mediums such as literature, painting, sculpture, performance, and film to explore and communicate the multi-layered experiences of individuals or people in African diasporic communities. It is thus, important to note that visual arts which include sculpture and painting can be used to vividly capture and explain the complexities of identity by representing the synthesis of dynamics and multiple influences of cultures. According to P.V Bohlman (2016):

The multiple dimensions and contradictions that accompany the intersections of identity and the arts in diasporic communities are usually very striking. This is because an increasing number of immigrants, workers, families, and other collectives self-identify themselves as communities by participating in demonstrations and strikes with new symbols of identity emerging from the diverse aesthetic repertoires and connecting them to places of origin globally. (1)

Given the above, it is also important to add that artists are at liberty to incorporate motifs, symbols, and even imagery that reflect the heritage while also fusing other elements from the culture these individuals adopted, For example, the African culture. Consequent upon these projections, artists could also relay the complicated interplay of the aesthetic values of memories, traditions, and also, contemporary practices that model the shape of identities of Africans living in diasporic communities.

Furthermore, literature and film equally provide an effective platform for the investigation of identity formation in African diasporic communities. In this regard, filmmakers usually narrate stories that project the struggles, and transformative journeys of Africans going in between different cultural contexts and struggles. These artistic forms give reason for a deeper understanding of the nuanced discussions and also the challenges confronted by Africans in diasporic communities as they ensure the reconciliation of sense in the African diasporic communities. At this juncture, it is important to note that performance arts such as dance theatre also provide artists the opportunity to explore the complexities of African diasporic-related identities through physicality and rhythmic movement. It is concerning the above assertion that Rachel Ekuia Asamoah (2015) opined that:

Theatre has witnessed a certain vibrancy and diversity that has produced a proliferation of theatrical practices, and unprecedented forms of representation in the various artistic works. This is why the eclectic works of theatre have been in response to major shifts nationally and internationally. (1)

Asamoah's postulation provides the opportunity to further assimilate how artistic forms serve as reflective mirrors, sparking conversations and encouraging effective dialogue in the African diasporic communities. At this juncture, it is important to note that, artists' expressive ability allows individuals to explore and make sense of their disjointed identities. This, if effectively achieved, bridges the gaps between their heritage and the present realities they have found themselves. The artistic works of artists can provide a deeper insight into the details of identity formation and proper negotiation in African diasporic communities if diasporic Africans and the wider society are adequately engaged.

### Exploring Identity, Hybridity, and Fluidity through African Diasporic Literature and Film.

African Diasporic Literature and Film play critical roles in exploring the concepts of hybridity and the fluidity of identities in African diasporic Communities. African Diasporic Literature and Film research into the complex experiences of Africans navigating between multiple cultural, geographical, and social contexts. They typically project distinct characters who embody hybrid identities, blending elements that have to do with their ancestral culture with the core influence of their adopted home. In this context, it is believed that authors would usually engage with the complexities or better still, the ambiguities of these hybrid identities to portray how Africans simultaneously belong to multiple cultural communities. The literature

often includes themes of cultural clashes, the negotiation of conflicting traditions, and the search for belonging.

Film as a powerful medium can question and capture the fluid nature of identities in African diasporic communities. It is also pertinent to note that, filmmakers make use of cinematic techniques such as cross-cutting between cultures, visual metaphors, and even fragmented narratives to project the relationship of different cultural influences on the identities of characters. These techniques aid filmmakers in relaying the overall flexibility and constantly evolving nature and context of African diasporic identities. It is in the light of this development that Edward Ugbada Adi (2018) asserted that:

The concept of hybridity highlights cultural mixing and the emergence of new forms of identity. Hybridity implies the meeting or mixing of completely separate and homogenous cultural spheres. For example, to think of British-Asian or Mexican-American hybrid forms as a mixing of two separate traditions is problematic because neither British, Asian, Mexican nor American cultures are bound and homogenous. (84)

Hybridity as it reflects the role of literature and film, also sheds light on the experiences and struggles confronted by Africans in diasporic communities. The safeguarding of cultural heritage and integrating into an entirely new environment as well as the challenges of belonging to multiple communities are very crucial to this discourse. Nevertheless, the hybridity and fluidity of identities usually challenge the concept of stereotypes and create a stage or an opportunity for the vulnerable and marginalized voices in an African diasporic community so that they can share their stories and collective viewpoints.

African Diasporic Literature and Film in the context of representing hybridity and fluid identities offer an understanding of the different ways and perspectives in which Africans could navigate their sense of self in African diasporic communities. This also encourages the platform to contribute to discussions that deal with identity negotiation, cultural diversity, and the difficulties of belonging. This, if achieved, can guarantee the encouragement of empathy in the promotion of intercultural dialogue which can further stimulate growth and development.

### Empathy, Understanding and Dialogue

These are crucial parts of creating a distinct, harmonious, and inclusive society. It is believed that when people engage in empathetic dialogue, they tend to have a better and more understanding and appreciation of different standpoints, cultures, and experiences. Empathy allows people to connect to others on a deeper level, thereby

encouraging a sense of shared humanity and the promotion of mutual admiration.

It is also important to note that, through an open dialogue, individuals can exchange great ideas to broaden their prospects. This will also create the impetus to challenge assumptions. Empathy and the understanding of dialogue assist in breaking down barriers with the promotion of broad-mindedness. In the same development, Macagno et al (2022) averred that:

Empathy focuses on the experiences of others' emotions and perceptions. It is an action that underpins an individual's participation in dialogue across diversity. Empathy is the basis for intercultural dialogue. Dialogue, however, consists of inclusions such as linguistic diversity, socio-political issues, and storytelling, among other complexities of different cultures and experiences of individuals in the diaspora. (117)

The role of empathy and dialogue cannot be overemphasized as they help in addressing societal issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and ignorance. They also allow the people to confront the challenges of favouritisms, and work towards an inclusive society to displace stereotypes. Empathy and dialogue play important roles in addressing conflicts because they provide an opportunity for listening to all parties for common understanding and benefits.

More so, empathy, dialogue, and understanding are critical elements that could be adopted to shape relationships and promote acquaintances in communities. These enable individuals to build trust, encourage a sense of belonging, and strengthen bonds. These qualities promote social cohesion and harmony in multicultural societies. It is also important to note that empathy, dialogue, and understanding greatly empower people to be agents of change in promoting fairness, inclusivity, and compassion. These values promote tolerance and encourage vicarious global development where people are saddled with the opportunity to better society in their ways.

### The Role of Storytelling in Fostering Mutual Understanding and Breaking Barriers between Different Communities.

Storytelling is very critical in promoting understanding and addressing the barriers between different communities. With this, people can bridge the gaps of language, culture, and experience and the promotion of connection, mutual respect, and empathy through sharing stories. Given the aforementioned postulation, DOUNGMANI CHONGRUKSA ET AL (2010) declared that:

Storytelling is a powerful resource that could be used to develop an understanding of people who are different from them. Storytelling allows people to discover a diversity of characters with various cultural

backgrounds to have a better understanding of racial and ethnic diversity.  
(283)

This submission infers that storytelling is indeed a medium that could be adopted to promote understanding with the view to breaking barriers between communities. The deconstruction of such barriers will also bring to bear a clearer understanding of multiculturalism among different communities. Other benefits of storytelling include:

- **Shifting Perspectives:** This allows people to step into the shoes of others so that they can view the world from a completely different perspective. By so doing, people can challenge their prejudices, develop an understanding of different communities, and dismantle stereotypes.
- **Humanizing the “other”:** Storytelling has the capacity and the power to humanize people of different races from different communities. This includes projecting their desires, struggles, and shared emotions. It is important to note that when we hear and read stories from people with different backgrounds and orientations, we assume their experiences to promote compassion and empathy.
- **Building Empathy:** Usually, stories create emotions and provide the connection between the storyteller/author and the audience/reader. With the support of thought-provoking and compelling characters, obstacles, joys sorrows, societal differences, and cultural issues can be empathized.
- **Cultural Exchange and Appreciation:** When stories from different communities are told, they tend to suggest an opportunity to learn about the diverse customs, traditions, and histories of such people. This can lead to the cultivation of a sense of appreciation for the people’s diversity, cultural richness, and mutual admiration for one another.
- **Encouraging Intersectionality:** Stories with the themes of intersectional identities generate the platform for people to recognize and embrace their multifaceted backgrounds and experiences. Storytelling provides recognition of diverse communities and inclusivity where gender, race, identities, and ethnicity are sufficiently acknowledged.
- **Breaking down Stereotypes:** It is important to note that, usually, stories challenge biases and stereotypes when they are presented from the point of view of complex narratives and multidimensional characters. They ensure that humanized, marginalized groups' misconceptions are dispelled to create space and encourage effective understanding and representation. Storytelling offers the opportunity to understand the lives of others. It

promotes dialogue, empathy, and cultural exchange to break down barriers to encourage a more inclusive, united, and interconnected community.

### Discourse and Conversation about Common Experiences and Cross-Cultural links in African Diasporic Literature and Film

African Diasporic Literature and Film have the potential to spark conversations and dialogue about cross-cultural connections and experiences in so many ways. Some of these are as follows:

- Identification and Validation of shared experiences: African Diasporic Literature and Film usually interrogate emotions and African themes with a reasonable number of audiences. Identification and validation of shared experiences present stories and characters that point to human experiences of loss, love, belonging, and identity. These elements help Africans of different cultures and backgrounds locate common ground which could lead to pleasant conversations about the differences and similarities in the overall human experiences. According to Fergus Neville et al (2020), this often results to:

People who view each other as members of a common social group, seeing themselves and seeing others as united through belonging to a common category and assuming others do likewise because they see others as fellow group members. (3)

This perspective allows people in the African diasporic communities to adhere to a more harmonious relationship taking into cognisance the functionalities of cross-cultural connections as they affect literature and film among Africans in such diasporic communities. Some other ways African Diasporic Literature and film can spur dialogue and conversation about shared experiences and cross-cultural connections include:

- Representation of diverse voices and narratives: African Diasporic literature and Film offer a platform for the underrepresented voices to be heard. Representation of diverse voices and narratives projects the experiences of Africans who migrated and were displaced from their original homes. This enables them to convey their challenges, struggles, and victories among various communities to create empathy and appreciate the different cultures.
- Bridging cultural gaps: African Diasporic Literature and Film connect cultural gaps by subjecting unfamiliar customs, cultures, and traditions. This allows readers and viewers to be greeted with the perception of learning the different traditions, histories, and cultures and the understanding of the

individuals. This development if articulated properly can lead to a conversation that focuses on shared experiences and cross-cultural networks.

- Challenging Stereotypes and Promoting Diversity: African Diasporic Literature and Film subvert stereotypes and advance realistic depictions of African Diasporic Communities.

Moreover, challenging stereotypes and promoting multiplicity should be focused on multi-dimensional characters. This can be achieved with the appraisal of the challenge of monolithic depictions of certain cultures that abound in communities. It will also stimulate a wide range of conversations that deal with diversity, representation, and the overall importance of recognizing diversity in African diasporic communities. African Diasporic Literature and Film have the connection to propel dialogue and conversations about cross-cultural fusion and shared experiences in challenging stereotypes. This allows individuals to engage in meaningful and healthy conversation to tolerate and appreciate the diverse cultures, traditions, and experiences of the African people.

### Conclusion

It is indeed apparent that African Diasporic Literature and Film explore the reality of history and experiences of the African people who have been displaced from their original birthplaces and have forged an entirely new identity in different countries with different cultures. They focus on the lived reality of Africans in diasporic communities. Consequent to this, the paper has articulated issues of cultural identity, hybridity migration, the complexity of navigating multiple cultures, social spaces, and belonging among others. The research has provided a platform to understand the various challenges and experiences usually faced by Africans in diasporic communities. These include focusing on human history, rich tapestry, and the display of resilience by the Africans in the diasporic communities in line with adapting to such new environments or communities.

Findings reveal that African Diasporic Literature and Film contribute to discussions on globalization, multiculturalism, and transnational identities in the context of multiplicity and complexity. One other key finding is the fact that African Diasporic Literature and Film challenge traditional ideas of the same culture by way of displaying the richness and diversity of cultural identities. It is also found out that, culture is dynamic and can evolve and adapt with interactions with different societies. Another major finding is the fact that African Diasporic Literature and Film clearly emphasize the impact of globalization on Africans in diasporic communities as they are made to realize transnational links between different cultures. It is further

discovered that African Diasporic Literature and Film contribute immensely to the discussions on ethnicity, discrimination, and the question of race and even xenophobia. African Diasporic Literature and Film are critical for building a more inclusive and harmonious society as they encourage interconnectedness and defeat barriers between Africans from unique and different backgrounds. In line with the findings, it is thus recommended among others that discussions on globalization, multiculturalism, and transnational identities in the context of multiplicity and complexity should be encouraged to foster global unity. African Diasporic Literature and Film emphasize the impact of globalization on Africans in diasporic communities as they are made to realize transnational links between different cultures and as such, it is recommended that this should be encouraged.

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JLSN

# **The Wry, the Witty, and the Laconic: Expression and Mythology in the Poetry of Chinweizu**

**CHIKE OKOYE  
&  
IFEOMA EZINNE ODINYE**

## **Abstract**

Chinweizu's commitment to Africa's social reality is woven in literary criticism and creativity, mythology and postcolonial themes—a consciousness for social change. His notable works, such as *The West and the Rest of Us*, *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* and *The Anatomy of Female Power*, amongst others, have raised intellectual engagements and re-interrogations of monolithic constructs that challenge Eurocentrism, while extolling African identity, cultural heritage and resistance. His fearless and avant-garde methods of discourse have earned him enormous respect and a permanent position of reckoning from scholars and students of Africanism, history, literature, politics, political science, criticism and gender studies. However, his collections of poetry, *Energy Crisis and Other Poems*, and *Invocations and Admonitions*, have not received as much attention as his other works. His deft applications of wit, wry humour, eclecticism and mythology in addressing humanity and allied themes in his poetry are as engaging as they are worth studying. This paper, therefore, critically approaches his verses through contextual and textual perspectives—a fresh and stylistic (re)assessment of his poetic style and genius to tackle the question of humanity and relations.

Keywords: Wit, Wry, Laconic, Myth, Chinweizu

## Introduction

I

The ability to express one's self in a particular fashion is indicative of style. Notably, the expression of ideas of human interest is for the specific reason of “communicating ideas, experiences and information that add value to human existence and relationship” (Akporobaro,16). In fact, the audible creations of man—oral or written, are perceived as the ultimate essence of human existence. By this, we mean that the nature of medium a literary artist adopts in artistic communication imposes a unique style and form as creative matrix. There is no

mystery about this articulation which derives its aesthetic effects from literary productions wrapped in tangible and independent existence of thoughts. Very relevant is the transmission—the artistic literary quality that forms the connection of the existence. The discourse may offer a beauty of form or an aesthetic effect perceived from the pattern of articulation. This ideational perspective is a “self-imposed responsibility” foisted on the literary artist by the realities of human conditions (Emezue, 50). No doubt, any poetic style is shaped by the poet’s sensitivity to the social, cultural and political situation within a given milieu. The word ‘style’ is a tool that interprets how language shapes thoughts, thus highlighting the dialogic connection between the poet’s cultural context and the linguistic choices. The linguistic standpoint of the poet is paramount for literary interpretation—an inference which appropriates a particular manner of expression in writing or speech. Basically, literary works exhibit extra-linguistic subjectivity which does not exist in abstraction. There are often communication strategies that come up with humour and satire—a witty pattern with a linguistic monopoly that questions human conditions.

Specifically, a peculiar manner of liveliness and quickness of intellect with distinct aptness in expression falls within the ambits of wit; especially if done in an amusing way. The uncanny connection of thought and expression most often deliberately designed to delight us in its surprise and unexpectedness, is slightly reminiscent of the ingenuity present in a metaphysical conceit in metaphysical poetry – that comparison whose “ingenuity is more striking than its justness” (Helen Gardner, “Introduction” *The Metaphysical Poets*). Wit “feeds” off humour – while the latter is intrinsically funny, the former latches on as a comic form or technique and makes the situation more humorous. This is basically achieved through observations, irony, association, expansion, wordplay, punning, and so on. The spectacle of a tall person accidentally hitting the head on a ledge is inherently funny but for one to comment that “shortness is a virtue” or “do not damage the ledge” is witty. Surprises, expectations and their reverses are often fit situations for wit as the inherently incongruousness lies between what we expect and the disconnect that jolts us with its reversal. William Hazlitt has it thus in his celebrated “On Wit and Humour”:

Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be. We weep at what thwarts or exceeds our desires in serious matters: we laugh at what only disappoints our expectations in trifles. (5)

Different scholarly views further flesh out the concept; broadening and simplifying

it. Babette Deutsch's *Poetry Handbook* describes it as the "faculty that makes for metaphor by the perception of likeness in unlike things" (169). She takes off from TS Eliot's quote of Andrew Marvell on the same subject ("a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace"), and then holds that wit "is now admired as a sign of the poet's power to relate incongruities and so give a fresh understanding of complexities" (170). Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz's *A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms* simplifies it: "...in modern times, wit is limited to intellectually amusing utterances calculated to delight and surprise" (240). Wryness then, fits in perfectly as it is associated with wit. The quality of being wry in literature requires one to be cleverly humorous; often ironically and or grimly. The common ground here is the cleverness that is involved in the humour while the distinctness of being wry is found in the high propensity for the grim. Again, being laconic requires being concise to the point of seeming mysterious, and poetry being generally condensed and cryptic, becomes a natural haven for laconic utterances. A mixture of wit, wryness and the laconic appear to serve Chinweizu's intentions well, as they blend with his dispositions to life and his concerns regarding humanity and human problems.

## II

The act of making and the way one makes thoughts and feelings known, belong to the field of expression. In poetry, apart from literary techniques, such as metaphor, simile, personification, etc., which constitute elements of style, the concept of voice is a key element in the business of expression. The speaker in a poem is the persona and the persona owns the voice. According to Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandell in *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*, "...then speaker of a poem is a persona, or mask, that the poet puts on. Granted, in some poems little distance exists between the poet and the speaker" (852). Given contextual circumstances and the personality of Chinweizu, we will find out that there is little or no distance between the poet and the persona in his poetry.

The application of myth or mythology and its usage here is slightly different from the norm. From Akporobaro's explanatory perspective, myths "symbolize human experience and embody the spiritual values of a culture—those that depict humans as integral part of the universe" (188). The norm is the common view as such seen in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, which holds that myth is "a story that was told in an ancient culture to explain a practice, belief, or national occurrence", or mythology being "the myths of a particular group or culture". Another view, one which is more germane here is that which holds myth or mythology as "an *idea* or *story* that is believed by many people, but that is not true"; ideas that are believed by many people, but that are not true". Simply put, "unfounded or false notions" are the

most apt of descriptions for the idea of myth and mythology as subject of discourse. However, in whatever vein we consider it, Donna Rosenberg's position in the preface of *World Mythology*, is germane to this treatise; she says: "myths reflect human nature, with its needs and desires, hopes and fears. Myths reveal the human condition" (xiii). She states further: "The world's myths continue to inspire many creative and intellectual pursuits. They enrich the appreciation of literature..." (xiv). This is exactly what is obtainable here – we are embarking on this intellectual pursuit to see how the poet Chinweizu expresses his ideas through being witty, wry, and laconic and as usual, tackling, interrogating, and debunking certain contemporary notions, beliefs, and myths through his poetry collections *Energy Crisis* and *Invocations and Admonitions*.

### ***Chinweizu***

Remarkably, the prominence of Chinweizu is laced with a vision for social change patterned in literary criticism—a cultural consciousness that seems to eclipse his trends of orality and creative ingenuity. Not one to avoid or shy away from confrontations, Nigerian-born Chinweizu has made quite the name for standing with conviction and scholarship (albeit amid and enjoying the controversies), on otherwise testy issues most would prefer to avoid. Historian, philosopher, literary critic, mathematician, economist, journalist, Egyptologist, and of course, Occidentalist, this poet has also been described as one "...who is aware of the intricacies of social activities" and can "conceive reality from a truly revolutionary perspective" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 116). His *The West and the Rest of Us* treats the logic of western civilisation's development and the underdevelopment of the rest of the world, especially Africa. Naturally, he takes the side of the oppressed peoples, coming forth with analyses strongly based on the materialistic conception of history. He fits Africa into the construct of a conquered nation, complete with the struggle for liberation while remaining cognizant of those who are true allies and patriots on the one hand, and dictators and lackeys on the other – the latter serving the interests of Western dominions. This infamous group keeps the continent open for continual attack and underdevelopment because, for Chinweizu, Africa's problem is not really that of colour. He advocates a traditionalist cultural revival, a reconstruction of Africa and its society in order to be self-sufficient and become a global power; all these attainable through economic autarky with Japan and the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Another controversial and powerful projection of Chinweizu in his fine art of trembling veils, shaking complacencies, and questioning spurious dicta, is found in his stance against the debilitating and insidious versions of matriarchy in the sphere

of sexual politics. In *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy*, he, as a dark horse agent provocateur, cuts a provocative stance through an avalanche of wide-ranging references, that women actually control and manipulate men. For him, the apparent picture of women being oppressed and subjugated under men is a false notion which, interestingly, has been designed to look so; it being the stealth masking of the real scenario: an age-long deception that men have been too blind and too fed with to recognize that they are actually the perpetually vanquished in the ancient war of the sexes. Of course, in the face of historical and contemporary indices regarding women being the more trafficked, kidnapped, abused, suppressed, raped, etc., his position would at first glance seem inhumanely outrageous. But again and importantly, one is humbled and sobered by the sheer barrage of the intriguing intellectual rigour packaged in the treatise by an obviously pro masculinist and anti-feminist Chinweizu. Stanley Macebuh comments on the book's blurb:

Chinweizu has done it again. As with *The West and the Rest of Us*, he has taken on a difficult and controversial subject, forced it under his sardonic and demanding eye, and come up with observations that spare neither men nor women. This is hilarious reading. No one can read this brief treatise and not confess to some powerful feeling, either of vengeful excitement or of virulent rage. It is strong stuff indeed, and it should do something to our traditional notions concerning the sociology of history.

In yet another powerful and epochal text, *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature*, Chinweizu teams up with Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike to take a hard-hitting swipe at some African writers (especially poets) who are “un-African” in their works; and instead slave to emulate, albeit wrongly, Euro-modernist literary traditions of the West. In the chapter “African Poetry and its Critics”, the troika takes on the negative tendencies in the poetry of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, and the early Christopher Okigbo. For him, their Euro-modernist tendencies and aping of European modernist poetry represent and produce a “failure of craft” and describes their verses as filled with

...old-fashioned, craggy, unmusical language, obscure and inaccessible diction; a plethora of imported imagery; a divorce from African oral poetic traditions, tempered only by lifeless attempts at revivalism. (168)

These Euro-modernists are faulted in their archaic language, lots of imported imagery and attitudes, unsuccessful and ineffectual imitation (Hopkins Disease), etc. as would be expected, the stinging critique triggered strongly-worded replies and critiques and engendered a very lively critical period in Nigerian and African

literature with many critics weighing in and taking sides.

As a scholarly agent provocateur, Chinweizu, through those texts once, again, spurred on and re-interrogated stances, notions, and traditions; and it is indeed striking and remarkable the manner in which he achieves this. In his poetry, it is this unique ability of his, the special use of words (wit) which force us to re-assess and re-interrogate our views of certain conceptions, amid his laconic, wry, bold and confrontational stances daubed in self-effacing humour that we are about to be enamoured with in this essay.

### *Chinweizu and his Poetry*

#### *I*

On Chinweizu's poetry, Ezenwa-Ohaeto comments that he employs accessible diction to make messages powerfully effective (131), is concerned with the Third World struggle (124), and also incorporates sexual imagery as "also used to satirize certain attitudes in human nature" (131). He is quick to comment on a unique quality of Chinweizu's poetry: "they can be solidly informative and not merely dazzling, for they possess that rare quality of combining sense with pleasure" (125). He believes so because of the discovery that:

Chinweizu's poems also possess these qualities because they are concerned with the trepidations of colonialism, neo-colonialism and socio-economic exploitation, as the poet forges words into images, replicating the devastation derived from the history of Africa. (125)

In line with his concern for Africa and Nigeria, Ogaga Okuyade hints at an apparently evocative aspect of his poetry in the piece "The Vanished City", which "describes the evacuation of people from their primordial base to become exiles in strange and foreign lands" as a result of war – in this case, the Nigeria-Biafra War. He captures in that particular collection, *Energy Crisis*, "the traumatic experiences of war" and "the pain of chaos" (210).

Victoria Arana, in the entry for Chinweizu in *Facts on File Companion to World Poetry* provides arguably the most succinct and comprehensive overview on him as a poet. Her view is that his reputation as a poet rests primarily on his two collections (under review here) which contain a good dose of "scathing satire" and to a great extent "socially conscious" and "contentious poetry". For Arana, the verses contain "rich versions of his standard messages in prose" and often are "delightfully satirical, sometimes exploiting a carefully calibrated double entendre" (102).

An outstanding application of this double-meaning literary device is seen in the title poem "Energy Crisis", and Arana comments thus;

“Energy Crisis”, for instance, records a conversation between a woman desperate to fill her gas tank and a gas station attendant who claims he cannot do so because of the national energy crisis, which has left him depleted due to an inordinate demand for his goods. The sexual subtext is cleverly managed so that the poem seems to refer all at once to the world’s mismanagement of natural resources, to Nigeria’s cupidity and political culpability for the shortages, and to the insatiable sexuality of women.... (102)

In the second collection, *Invocations and Admonitions* he continues in his characteristic style, while introducing more acerbities. He raises questions of religious and political hypocrisy, rattles colonial recidivism, exposes the challenges of science and “makes fun of deconstructionist literary criticism” and Euro-modernist obscurantism. Interestingly, there is an antithetical balance of sorts in the poem “The Penis of a God” in which he “renders a biting critique of postcolonial African men and their notion of patriarchal entitlement” (103); as pitted against a predominance of poems that “praise a footloose and fancy-free masculinity and excoriate the possessive female, who is used and discarded in poem after poem” (102). He makes the “pompous husband” who is hooked on “foolish self-aggrandizement” receive stinging reprimand and upbraiding from the wife who sees through the entire charade.

## II

As has been hinted earlier, Chinweizu’s interesting personality and controversial stance dons a fresh and scintillating garb in the poetic genre – a unique style of expression. His poetry often adopts an assertive tone, which is vividly direct and confrontational in tackling the salient issues of colonialism, cultural imperialism, and the impinging effect of Western influence on Africa. His poetics of orality is woven in acerbities, sarcasm, satire, irony, tongue-in-cheek, double entendre, and so on, find a fitting vehicle in the ambits of wit. His wryness and laconisms as he battles time-tested myths find in wit their most penetrating and smarting barbs; yet, as he pokes spiritedly on wide-ranging human issues. His expression and handling of myths and mythology come to the fore.

In the collection *Energy Crisis*, the poem “Misencounter” opens with the descriptive laconisms: “Friday night./ Girl in semi-dishabille./Airs: Demi-aristocratic /Tanned by common sun”, followed by lines 5-9 in which the lady described above supposedly “inspects” the poem’s persona thusly: “I approach;/ Receive side-long crotch inspection:/ Nigger erotomania/ Super-fecundating

animalia/ In his genitalia” – a wry sexual objectification laced in dark humour of the persona. The tone set, the poem goes ahead to situate and with terse humour describe an encounter of airs as the aristocratic lady reels of her supposedly glorious ancestry to which the poet answers self-effaced; “I must reciprocate. Peasant courtesy demands:/ Nothing to speak of; nothing to be found/ In the records of any/ Genealogical Historical Society./ Nevertheless, I didn’t materialize a moment ago./ Priest-Uncles. Rain makers. A witch doctor or two./ A medicine man here and there./ Bone surgeon in traditional style./ Look at this arm. Does it ever look shattered?/ A psychiatrist on the maternal side,/ Several generations back, /Cured madness with emetics./ Guerilla generals against British intrusion./ All forebears. Cannibal creators” (9). This genealogical trajectory becomes more darkly comical in the light of race tensions and relations as it is presented as a counterpoint to the lady’s ancestry: “Vassar, Duke or Bennington?/ Guinea, Polack, Melting pot Roob,/ Specimen of upperclassy Wasp,/ Dropped-out Southern Belle,/ Or escaped Jewess from New Orleans? (lines 24-28)

Chinweizu is in his quintessential wryness and laconism in the six-line poem, “On Welcoming Predators” with the explaining byline of ‘In memory of Lobengula Who welcomed in Cecil Rhodes’. The poem is essentially this: “With open arms/ He welcomed a smiling tiger into his home:/ With open jaws/ The tiger welcomed him into its belly./ After all, smiled the beast,/ One good welcome deserves another”. This brief description of Rhodesia that later became Zimbabwe, is succinctly memorable and the indelible message about colonialism in Southern Africa is most felt. In comparison, “Originality?” as a terse tercet trumps “On Welcoming Predators” in brevity albeit taking on a broader philosophical issue. It plays wittily on the saying about nothing being new under the sun, except the really ridiculously unthinkable and impossible. The poem in full goes thus: “He who must do/ Something altogether new/ Let him swallow his own head’(37).

“Elegy on the Middle Way” is Chinweizu’s witty condemnation of people who sit on the fence and take the “middle way” on issues he believes they should not. The long poem is reminiscent of Jonathan Swift’s seminal “A Modest Proposal” – his cloaked diatribe against England’s oppression of Ireland. Chinweizu’s witty tongue-in-cheek attack takes off according to his explanatory byline, from “the background of Allende’s martyrdom and butchery in Chile, Isaiah Berlin’s apology for the Liberal Predicament’. In the second stanza of the poem, he condemns their posturing with disdain: “Praise the votaries of the Middle Way,/ All you downs and all you outs:/ They have the refined sentiments/ Their butcher guardians can’t afford;/ They have the rarified ease/ From where poverty’s rags have charm;” (lines 14-190 and it continues to even the swipe on the personhood of the Christian God in order to drive

home their highfalutin pretentiousness: “They would be pure where all are tainted;/ They would be perfect in a world/ Without possibility of perfection;/ A world their omniscient, omnipotent god/ Was never able to confect to his high taste,/ ... A world he abandoned to its follies/ With a promise of the fire next time” (lines 22-28). He “makes a case” for their behavior, seemingly defending them; “They are not fools with soft compassionate hearts” (line 56), and goes ahead to absolve them of the ills of cowardice, vacillation, feckless will, impotent generosity, infirmity of purpose, opportunism, etc., (lines 58-660; instead praises “their purity/ These saints of the Middle Way” (lines 69-70).

The prominence of Chinweizu’s trends of witty orality is visible in the poem "Faithful Mary Lou". Chinweizu’s deployment of satire—a form of exaggerated humour to comment on social behaviour, societal norms and the patterns of mentality people adopt to justify morally questionable way of life is very alluring. Significantly, the poem projects the poet as a satirist—a defender of societal morals. This presents a unique scenario where the subject of discussion—a woman, Mary Lou, is questioned by her husband on his suspicion of her infidelity. Her response is wrapped in wittiness—a defense mechanism borne of deceit in the wake of her husband’s criticism. In the lines below, we perceive an ironic revealing in her claims and response:

Ah only slept with his name;  
Ah only slept with his color;  
Ah only slept with his money not with him.  
Ah ain’t been unfaithful to you, can’t you see?  
(*Energy Crisis and Other Poems*, p. 26)

The lines above have raised issues of criticism with a reasonable assessment that is obvious. In fact, very remarkable is the use of irony and satire which smells of absurdity and nonsensical justification wrapped around three cogent reasons for her actions: name, colour and money—a perspective she has adopted to shield her conscience from active reprimanding of her soul, a perpetual guilt. Her defense is an indication of loss of morality—a deliberate act that exposes irrational behaviour as a patterned hubris. The general undertone visible in Chinweizu’s lines captures materialism and excessiveness as the penultimate force of bonding in relationships. This mindset reels in a perfect imagery of moral compromise devoid of sincere human soulful connections. The poem also captures certain gender dynamics in Mary Lou’s mentality and behaviour. The subtlety of her actions exposes character ambiguity—an ambiguous pattern of thoughts and way of survival that exhibit contemporary female assertiveness in the euphoria of feminism. With a form of

imbued colloquial tone of expression in Mary Luo's voice and the use of personalized pronoun, the readers are drawn into the persona's world—a mindset presented in vivid jarring pattern that highlights the need for societal reflection on human values. Chinweizu's poetic lines smell of sarcasms—no wonder he clearly presents the view that if individuals should find his poems accessible, engaging, titillating or pleasing, he would be glad. In his words, "I should be extraordinarily rewarded the expenditure of social resources incurred in publishing" this literary piece (*Energy Crisis*, viii). The humour in his tone is indicative in his pattern of thoughts and the richness in the use of words. In fact, in an interview with Ezenwa-Ohaeto in July 1991, Chinweizu has revealed that his poems cover various topics on monologue, dramatic exchanges between personas, parables, satires, elegies, laments and invocations" (*Daily Times*. "Interview with Chinweizu", 14).

No doubt, there is sense in Chinweizu's artistic sensibility. His apparent use of self-contradictory expressions is a deliberate attempt to project his poetic pattern. The poem, "The Cross Roads" reveals an intentional humour for awakening consciousness and self-realization marked by shedding illusions captured in the euphoria of "charmed crossroads"—multiple roads that breed chaos because of lack of direction. No wonder the "Exasperated travellers exchanged/ Vague, comforting ignorances" (*Energy Crisis...2*) with the harsh realities confronting them. The credibility of the poet's views is drawn from the igniting humour and counterintuitiveness that underscore the importance of awareness, assertiveness and action in the journey of liberation. It seems the lines resonate with an unwholesome approach noting the undiscerning attitudes the poet points out in a satiric style.

Chinweizu's pattern of Orality presupposes an intelligent approach arising from emotions and aesthetics of literary depiction. There is always a substantial ridicule and humour in his tone—a freshness with absurd analogies of human thoughts and experiences. In the poem entitled "The Spring Memories", the persona is befuddled by memories of broken love—a stored agonizing memory which creates "sharp wound of separation" (*Energy Crisis...4*). Here, the persona reflects on a specific mode of imagination which is derived from his failed relationship. He assumes a conscious position to lead the audience into his emotion for appropriate understanding of the sad memories he has about his lover. In a monologue he laments: day after day your face churned/the waters of my craving/ left me thrashing like a hooked shark" (*Energy Crisis...4*). One does not overlook the linguistic resources with a manipulated artistic end—a tool fashioned in fishing out imagery that exploits his emotive elements. He laments:

Yes! My heart is withered

The tremors have dropped from my caresses  
And my passions are spinner now  
As abandoned lumber (Energy Crisis....5)

Evidently, the persona has recounted his experiences in a high flown manner which provides a satiric content aimed at social control. For obvious reasons, the persona has been exploited for his love and is battling the enormity of his problem. A peculiar trend is seen in the poet's choice of words in the titles of his poems—a target that gives credence to his artistic manifestation and creative stimulus. There is complementarity between his choice of words and his insight into human behaviours. Titles such as “A Chronicle of Matrimony”, “Faithful Mary-Lou”, “On Welcoming Predators”, “Faculty Party”, “In Praise Song of the New Notable”, “They Do not Like Anger”, “Epitaphs of War”, “The Return of the Flies”, “Elegy on the Middle Way” and other poems are imbued with underlying such satiric irony that makes the readers ponder on the reasons behind the poet's lamentation. There are evidences of implied ironic trend and satiric ideology that speak for the oppressed people. Most of the poems speak of human betrayal, cowardice, destruction, infidelity, disbelief, deceit, falsehoods and sorrow, etc.

Chinweizu's commitment to accessibility in his long historical collection, *Invocations and Admonitions* (1986) is recognizable. In *Invocations and Admonitions*, Chinweizu prays in the traditional way and seeks ancestral guidance as he embarks on “exile” in the poem “Invocation on a Day of Exile”. The lines resonate with the solemnity befitting supplication, but elements of religious myth are also seen. Lines such as “My *chi* is alert/ And my seed shall not go to waste” (39-40), “I shall stride forth on exile's road/ Ofo and Ogu in my hands!” (67-68), and “I have said yes;/ My *chi* will also say yes!” (78-79) feature the guardian spirit and personal god, *chi* and the totem staffs of righteousness and justice, Ofo and Ogu of Igbo ontology. In Igbo traditional religion, the belief holds sway that with those appurtenances one can neither come to harm nor be subject to blame or injustice; but in reality that often trumps the obvious myth, causalities occur regardless of one's mytho-religious beliefs and fortifications effectively rendering such constructs mythological. Wit once again appears in the poet's plea that the “Love God” in “Invocation to the Love God” not to send deceptive wolves-in-sheep-clothing kinds of ladies his way in the lines: “Sugar and spice and everything nice/ May be what little girls are made of;/ but bitters and ice and clamping vice/ That's what that dazzler of eyes/ Was chock-full-of” (line 14-18). The wit continues as he prays against fisher women, the always needy, the gold-diggers, termagants, feminists, nags, pious prigs, virtuous madonnas, etc., and the bland ones especially, described as purveyors of the view that

“thou shalt neither demand orgasm nor enjoy it!” (line 40). He also prays against the miserly ones: “Thou shalt demand on pain of neuroses,/ The minimum daily dose prescribed/ By pundits of normality” (line 44). These prayers are tongue-in-cheek, ridiculous, and funny. Another “invocation”, this time to the hapless meal of salmon about to be devoured by the poet and the girlfriend, shows the fish being addressed with mock concern and empathy: “Like you, we too have strayed,/ My girl and I, from our home grounds./ Let us assemble, you and us,/ Wanderers all, at the twilight hour;/ Let us gather and make merry/ At the altar of that god, Stomach,” (lines 17-22). Wit and myth run all through “Good Friday: Admonition from the Cross” as the poet makes mockery of Christ’s predicament on the crucifixion cross. He uses the thief to sum up on the Christian religious myth of a divinity who is killed with common criminals as he speaks in reaction to Christ’s cry of forsaking: “Don’t shame your fellow gods/ By moaning and groaning.../ And if you please, dear man-god,/ Keep quiet and grant me peace/ To compose my soul before it starts/ Its sojourn down in hell” (lines 30-36).

In “The Penis of a God”, the poet assumes the character of a chief’s wife and summarily dismisses the superiority myth of the husband’s “chief and head of the home’s” myth, starting with “O chief! O husband of mine!/ If you think you are a god/ ... Don’t sit here on earth among us,/ Don’t sit here/ Eating, drinking, shitting, farting, fucking,/ ... And still expect us to treat you as a god” (lines 5-13); and hitting the crescendo with “I’ve never seen the penis of a god,/ But I’ve seen yours! (line 15). She delivers the crushing coup-de-grace with the final lines: “Go go go go go away!/ Hang yourself from some fine tree,/ Like Sango did;/ Then we’ll treat you like a real god!” (31-34). “The Vow” starts with the knowledge that the poet’s childhood friends are all wealthy and influential, but he had all along channeled all his energies to pleasures. Hear him: “I am lost to my wastrel ways:/ To give pleasure to those few women/ Who focus on my roving lust;” (lines 8-10). In his normal witty ways, he answers his spirit-double that questions his lifestyle thus; “I shall indulge my pubic charities;/ I shall loll in the laps of damsels;/ I shall not be diverted from bottle, bosom and prattle,/ Till white hairs and wilted limbs/ Compel it” (lines 20-24). The wry wit here on choice Epicureanism is accentuated by the underlying laconism.

“Professor Derrida Eshu” finds the poet at his sarcastic best. His wit, armed with wry and laconic barbs seem aimed at the Nigerian Nobel Laureate in Literature, Wole Soyinka with whom he had had literary spats. He caustically and severely critiques Soyinka’s poems as obscurantist among other negativities in his *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* and this link is played upon by adding Jacques Derrida’s surname. Derrida is the Algerian-French philosopher whose theories (especially literary) are regarded as difficult to understand. The “Eshu” surname is a

reference to a Yoruba god of mischief; and this is a more concrete connection to Soyinka's person through his ethnicity. The first lines present poetry as stuff not meant to be enjoyed: "It is not a thing for enjoyment, my dear boy./ It is complex, uncommon stuff..." (lines 1-4); comparing it to some sort of radioactive physics: "(probed) with seismoscopes and diving rods./ It must then be packed in heavy water" (lines 5, 6), to be ultimately "fed into computer banks" (line 11) for further processing. All the later analysis according to the Professor Derrida Eshu, "Must be solemnly interpreted by holy mouths/ When they gather in solemn conclave/ In some dark, unlit cave./ That's how it is done, my boy". He ends it in the professor's own words: "If you, or just anybody can understand it/ It isn't a poem at all – declared the Great/ Professor Derrida Eshu" (lines 13-20). Another biting and witty attack is directed at monks and nuns and their vows of chastity and celibacy and in a wry, laconic manner concludes the six line poem with the question, "But will somebody please tell me/ Why nunneries, monasteries and orphanages/ Are so often found together? (62). A deft blow is aimed at erstwhile colonizers of the African continent and their self-serving logic in the couplet "Colonizer's Logic"; and it simply goes: "These natives are unintelligent - / We can't understand their language" (63). The laconism above is admirable as the absurdity of the logic and mindset is laconically reduced with accompanying wit for effective pungency in delivery.

### ***Comments and Conclusion***

For the mettle of his person and contributions of his academic enterprises (albeit almost always controversial and thought-provoking), and for someone who after a disagreement with his dissertation committee of the State University of New York at Buffalo, walked out on them, got his manuscript published as *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers, and the African Elite*, came back to SUNY armed with the book a year later, demanded for and was awarded his PhD in Political Science in 1976, at least an aspect of his literary prowess requires study – as he dominated an era of Nigerian (and African) literary criticism. His influential *Toward the Decolonization* marked him as a literary force and his two poetry collections attested to that; with the second, *Invocations and Admonitions* winning the 1985 Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Poetry Prize. In spite of all these, there is scant critical material on his poetic oeuvre and this is regrettable given his unique style as has been seen.

The uniqueness of his style and expression could be attributed to percolated condensations of elements from his areas of academic training: the broad thoughtfulness of philosophy, the symbolic and cryptic praxis of mathematics, the enviable access to and bulwark of information of journalism, and the fervent

indignation at the core of black orientalism – all these accentuated by his natural eccentricity. The results will naturally tilt to curt acerbities but when gilded and marinated in wit individuated with wryness and the legendary terse brevity associated with the historical Laconians and ultimately poeticized in verse, it becomes really worthy of critical stylistic interest.

This perspectival article adopts a close textual reading that highlights select instances of foregrounded applications of wryness, wit, and laconism either singularly or in any type of mix, in some of Chinweizu's poems. They have been seen in their roles in portraying and accentuating his style of expression and his views and handling of certain conventional myths; mostly debunking them. He plays down on emotions and brings up to scrutiny a myriad of thorny issues through wit for closer inspection with a more sober and balanced view. He largely succeeds in this and we plough through the verses smiling wryly for the greater part of the experience.

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# Of Jeremiahs and Jeremiads: Protest, and Hope in Tanure Ojaide's *The Endless Song*

IKECHUKWU EMMANUEL ASIKA

## Abstract

This paper examines protest and hope in Ojaide's *The Endless Song*. Tanure Ojaide's stature as an accomplished and canonical African poet is incontrovertible. However, the critics of Ojaide have mostly quarried his poetry vis-à-vis his Niger Delta connectedness ignoring other larger spectrums embodied by his poetry. This article, seeking to cover this gap, contends that Ojaide's poetry transcends such territorial confinement to a broader engagement with the dynamics and convoluting pulse of his society. Published in 1989, *The Endless Song* inaugurates Ojaide as a patriotic poet charged with the responsibility of re-directing his society through his satirical verses. Deploying sociological theory as a theoretical anchor via a textual analysis of the primary text, the study foregrounds Ojaide as an 'angry poet', whose poetry is emblematic of protest, jeremiads, and revolutionary calls to save the soul of a nation going awry. Further, against this backdrop, the paper conjectures that Ojaide's protest and revolutionary poetry engenders a sense of hope and optimism crucial to nation building. The study places Ojaide in the proper mapping as a national poet whose poetry transcends beyond Niger-Delta tirades to offers perspectives that challenge the perpetuation of the ethics of national disintegration and engender viable togetherness in Nigeria.

Keywords: Protest, prophecy, revolution, jeremiads, nationhood, hope, society

## Introduction

Poetry from its origin has been an act of social instruction that beams unflinching cursory eyes on societal mores and values. Poetry is tied to life and the emotions of the human soul and in tandem with this interconnectedness that Fidelis Okoro contends that there is a natural opposition between life and poetry. Poetry, he argues, is the search for the missing electrons in the atom of the soul. Poetry is logic; the world is illogical. Poetry is imaginative reasoning; irrationality rules the world. Poetry is the search for order; the world [for the poet] swims in the ocean of

disorderliness, socially, politically, morally, and economically (xii). Poetry, like a force, besieges the mind, takes hold of the senses, and controls the writer's thoughts and emotions, and such a writer is only freed after he must have purged out his innermost feelings with fine blended poetic lines that unravel the turmoil in his soul. Poetry, therefore, has remained a tool for societal reformation, re-education, and re-orientation needed to guarantee progress, socio-political stability, economic expansion, and peaceful coexistence that are hallmarks of an ideal and viable society. Okoro further conjectures that:

The poet, a sharp knife in one hand, a microscope in the other, is granted his inalienable right to cut portions of life for scrutiny. It is still abominable in most parts of the earth to beat a child and tell him not to cry. Poetry is a kind of crying, mostly public pain in the poet's shoes. Poetry is that loud mouth in the wilderness crying "they have beaten me again". It is the cry of the wounded soul looking for solace in the face of the few dimples and the many pimples of life. The human condition is both a friend and a foe to the poet... Painful beauty, that's what poetry is (xi).

This simply translates that poets will continue to occupy the enviable position in societies as town criers, seers, diviners, social crusaders, and patriots, who must at all times, even against their collective wishes and freedom, pay the ultimate poetic prices for a better and harmonious society. A poet, who abandons this noble cause is akin to the proverbial foolish man who abandons a title-taking ceremony to keep a date in some exorcist's shrine and such a poet deserves to resign his position or risk the humiliating encounter of being stripped of his poetic mantles.

Tanure Ojaide ranks among the celebrated Nigerian poets whose numerous poetic offerings, in the form of collections have earned them a place in the hall of fame of African literature. Ojaide is popular as a poet-activist on Niger Delta and little wonder the larger chunk of scholarship available on his poetry quarry on Niger Delta concerns and protest. Onwuka, Ubah, and Isaiah affirm that: 'in contemporary criticism on Nigerian literature, Ojaide is often categorized as a Niger Delta poet and activist in the mold of Ken Saro-Wiwa, and his poetry [is] nearly always appraised from the perspective of his advocacy for the Niger Delta struggle and social reforms in society at large. Consequently, critics have praised his vocalization of the tension engendered by the exploitation and neglect of his immediate Niger Delta community and commended his poetry for its capacity to gauge the pulse of the region and that of Nigerians altogether' (1). Understandably, the Delta is Ojaide's root, which he admits to being the very essence of his being and it is only natural that much of his poetic tears flow from the Delta he loves. Tayo Olafioye captures Ojaide's strong affinity and bond thus:

My roots thus run deep into the delta area. Its traditions, folklore, fauna, and flora ... This area of constant rains, where we children thought we saw fish fall from the sky in hurricanes, did not remain the same ... my Delta years have become the touchstone with which I measure the rest of my life. The streams, the fauna, and the flora... Even when I wander outside to many places I have experienced, the land of streams, the iroko tree, antelopes, anthills, and so much life remains indelible in my memory ... Home remains for me the Delta, where I continue to anchor myself. (3)

The concern for the Niger Delta environment is of great importance to Ojaide, and his numerous poetry collections exist to bear testimony to this fact. There is a plethora of unavoidable images of “Delta” and “Iroko” accompanied by a pictorial rendition of the rest of the flora and fauna of his region under constant abuse and pillage by the oil merchants and invaders who did not only destroy his peace but altered the future of his people. Abiola Irete attests that “judging from the distinctive tone of his poetry, and from the resourceful use of imagery drawn from his background, Tanure Ojaide can be considered one of the finest poets in Nigeria at the moment” (blurb).

*Endless Song* ranks among Ojaide's popular poetry collections. Published in 1989, it is not surprising that the poetic thoughts of the poet are still valid over three decades of publication. Sad enough, the economic cum political gimmicks and the myriads of socio-political issues that bothered the poet and provoked his 'tearful songs' in the collection are far from being over, thus, a clear justification of its relevance is explored in this paper.

#### Sociological Theory: A Theoretical Justification

This study adopts sociological literary theory as theoretical anchor for the study. Sociological theory is concerned with the relevance of literary works to mirroring and engaging societal issues and problems, with the aim of proffering valid solutions to them. The theory is rooted in the idea that literature is a product of the society. It looks at literature from the point of view of social issues and its relevance to society. Sociological theory sees a literary work as nothing but a product of several real aspects of the society of a writer. The experience a writer writes about is the experience of the society. In the views of Kofi Agyekum “Sociological Critics argue strongly that literary works and social context are inseparable. The social milieu is embedded in the works of artists. In effect, it is the social context that serves as the raw material for the production of literary works. The social setups and the institutions in the society at any point in time combine to exert some major influence

in the works of the artists. Sociological critics focus on the values of society and how those values are reflected in the literary works. Sociological critic study the economic, political and cultural issues expressed in literary works because they reflect the true picture of what exists in the society. (129) In the opinion of Oguntuase, Adefemi, Obura, Oluoch and Amateshe, Kisa, “literature of any kind is expected to mirror and refract society so that corrections and adjustments can be made to social and communal lives where and when necessary” (54). Abram Anders submits that the work of art is to be situated as a response to a situation that is essentially social; literature serves a therapeutic role in so far as it diagnoses and dissolves maladaptive social categories and orientations (20). Affirming the validity of the theory to the present study, Oguntuase, Adefemi, Obura, Oluoch and Amateshe, Kisa, conclude that “protest literature, the kind in which Tanure Ojaide engages, is intended to react to real socio-political and economic issues confronting society. This sort of literature goes a notch higher by proffering solutions to the problems identified, thus serving a therapeutic role. (54). The theory, therefore, is concerned with the way and manner the writer responded to the social issues around him at whatever point in the history of society he writes about. This approach shares a lot in common with the Marxist theory of Karl Marx and Engels though there are peculiar core areas of concentration in the two approaches. The theory is valid in our interrogation of protest and hope in Ojaide's poetry, *The Endless Song*.

#### Protest and Hope in Ojaide's *The Endless Song*

In Tanure Ojaide's collection entitled *The Endless Song*, we witness a radical departure from the usual environmental concerns that had been the bane of Ojaide's poetry to a robust engagement with the dynamics and nuances of the polity of the nation. Akin to the dispositions of Prophet Jeremiah, Ojaide assumes the role of a prophet and crusader, wielding the poetic sword, to preach to his generation. In an angry pose, the poems are laced with indicting words directed both at the inefficacious leaders and the entire populace whose chain of reactionary actions galvanizes the cyclic pendulum of doom. Many of the poems in the collection attack the very institutions of society and decry the decays that remain a clog in the wheel of our desired development, even as he leaves a warning on the impending doom accruing from our negligence and inhumanity.

In one of the poems from the collection titled “In the Beginning,” Ojaide, in a sort of nostalgic evocation, attempts to recreate the faded pictures of the past, as it were, before bizarre sequences of events thwarted the dream of a nation. The poet regurgitates a sad reality and opens a wound in the hearts of the citizenry by reechoing the awareness that right from her conception, the country is gifted with

abundant human and natural resources enough to raise a contented generation and lift her from the ashes of a third-world country. The country was destined to assume, not in mere speculations, but in reality, the giant of Africa. The poet recalls:

In the beginning /the land bloomed with bounties, so much  
to make a contented heritage: /rivers to swim in a drought-prone world,  
a landmass of comfort to our number, /forests to provide our daily needs.  
We had the luck of the sow in fertility, /the immunity of the chameleon  
in our lives;  
our men possessed the energy of the bull  
and our women the sleek beauty to the antelope;  
we were like the iroko tree, tall and erect (14).

In a manner reminiscent of David Diop's "Losers of Everything", the poet recalls the good old days, the days of fruitful harvests when the land bloomed with bounties, rivers flourished, forests fertile and agile and our men and women were what we have always desired they be. These imageries can be juxtaposed with the memorable images of Diop's poetry—'a laughing sun, the women that were lovely and lissom, the children that glided over the mighty rivers and the motherly moon that accompanied the dances with the frantic rhythm of the tomtom of joy and carefree life amid fires of liberty.' Both are evocative imageries of loss as evident in Diop and Ojaide's poems. While colonial hegemony robbed Diop of his peace and provoked his satirical poem, Ojaide's "In the Beginning" signposts the affliction orchestrated by individuals, government and establishment who are destroying what they ought to protect. A surface reading of Ojaide's lines suggests some romantic viewpoint, but a critical quarry reveals a glaring truth that points to the very tangent the ugly rain started beating us, the unfortunate historical disconnect that thwarted our destiny as a nation and saw our lofty dreams, hopes, and destinies obliterating:

Later the rivers washed away our charm,  
the land of our birth wounded us with its size,  
the forests haunted our lives with demons;  
we trampled upon each other in assemblies,  
and our height blinded us to the earth/we ought to libate with sweat.

There is something Yeatsian about Ojaide's poetry and typical of Yeats' "Adam's Curse", the poem exudes a sense of guilt and suffering symbolically of the biblical fate of Adam and Eve after their disobedience which led to the loss of the Garden of Eden, the paradise, and marked the beginning of the sufferings of mankind on earth. Like Milton's "Paradise Lost", the title, "In the Beginning" affirms a deeper sense of loss accruing from sin: disobedience, greed, avarice, and over-ambition that cost

Adam and Eve the paradise with exacerbated generational consequences. And just like it was pronounced on Adam to suffer and tilt the ground with sweat for his daily bread, so also were the consequences of our past errors which condemned our generation to 'libate with sweat.' Ojaide unconsciously alludes to this biblical fall of man as expressive of the fall and failure of Nigeria as a nation. Just as the fall of Adam brought pain, suffering, and death to man, so do our actions usher in great pain and torture to the citizenry as 'the land of our birth wounded us' and 'the forests haunted our lives with demons'. In the scene of disorder and chaos that ensued, 'we trampled upon each other in assemblies.'

While Diop blames colonialism for the loss of true African heritage and destiny in his "Losers of Everything", Ojaide in "In the Beginning" casts aspersion on our actions and inactions that over time degenerated and condemned us to a comatose state. As a result of leadership failure over time, which culminated in our failure to manage our surplus resources, the resources soon grew thin and lean. In the face of the rat race for survival and the entire paraphernalia of our present-day society—the height that blinded us to the earth' obviously conspired together to deepen our present woes as a nation. In this regard, the poet believes that as we ponder on our travails, cry for our hard times, 'hear old songs, 'see marks of a departed wake that flourished in the same land that can barely hold us' and 'wonder why the season should treat us as some despot his subject, mindless,' we should always recall our collective errors for: 'Those who see the *oghriki* tree in the rain forest' know and perhaps remember, 'that there was once the center of a town given up by men who failed their praise-names' (14). The poem leaves a lesson that though we cannot undo the past, we can only look forward to possible remedies in the present.

In the poem titled "No Prescription Cures a Country Nobody Loves", the poet traces the core problem of the nation to lack of love and our sheer pretense in that regard. One recalls that one of the greatest commandments of Jesus Christ as explicit in the Book of Matthew 22: 39, emphasizes that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Saint Paul writes: "...And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." It is this love that the poet locates as fundamental to our numerous problems as a nation. Since we do not love the country, it becomes problematic to continue to prescribe doses to cure the nation's ailment as the poet declares that 'no prescription cures a country nobody loves.' The poet recalls an emotional and heart-warming encounter he had that was to him the very definition of pure love:

Years back I saw a nameless schoolgirl from Ojojo, Warri,  
surrender her recess-rice coin to a beggar, one

smear'd with a biting indifference of passers-by  
even the ant knows the other's stronger need  
and bring the millennium closer to a spiteful lot (8)

The driver, who just rescued his van from some treacherous touts, stops to plant a red flag and finds what the poet describes as 'a fellowship that deserves universal membership.' Ojaide's poetic outbursts easily find striking balance and allusion to some biblical illustrations. Two biblical allusions readily come to mind: the woman that gave her widow's mite as presented in the synoptic gospels of Mark 12: 41-44 and Luke 21: 1-4 and the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, as gleaned from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. As the gospel of Mark specifies, the two mites, which the widow cast in the offertory box are the Greek lepta and together they are worth a quadrans which is the smallest Roman coin. The widow's mite, a small bronze coin from ancient Judea, minted during the Hasmonean dynasty of 140-37 BC, which was worth 1/64 of a denarius in Roman time and about 1/8 of a cent in contemporary time, is very insignificant, yet in the context and the manner, it was offered, made it worth even above thousands of Euros in modern times. In Ojaide's poem, the gift of this nameless schoolgirl as the poet describes, reflects, and is tantamount to a small contribution which one willingly gives but by and large is all one could afford. The poor schoolgirl in the poem, without any supervision or cajoling, surrenders her recess-coin to a beggar who the poet laments that he has been 'smear'd with the biting indifference of passers-by.' This is where the parable of the Good Samaritan becomes apt in explaining this rare show of a schoolgirl. While different calibers of people from all walks of life may have passed the beggar, the schoolgirl stopped by to offer her 'widow's mite', her recess-coin which invariably suggests she would go all day hungry. This show of unpretentious and unrequited love catches a spot in the heart of the poet as he explains that 'this rarity gladdens the heart.' The poet goes further to lament thus:

And these do not make history or network news,  
these do not earn national award,  
these are not sermonizers behind glided lecterns;  
they do not crow on rooftops. (8)

This poem satirizes the rest of us—the rich, the politicians, and the well-to-do even the clergy among us. There is a sense of hypocrisy and sheer pretense in our daily lives. The social media space is agog with pictures and videos of politicians and wealthy people giving their support and alms to the poor. It oftentimes makes headlines in the network news. Even religious men and women, who should know better, join in this

bandwagon of vain praise. In recent times, when the nation and the world are tormented by the deadly coronavirus pandemic, it is all in the social media space, news of people giving out palliatives to the less privileged in society. This is outside the orbit of those who received the palliatives and later used them to advance some selfish political goals. Some of the palliatives were locked up in the warehouses and others were sold in the market to the poor people for whom the palliatives were meant to cushion the effect of the suffering during the heat of the pandemic. It is against this prevalent trend and background that the enormity of the schoolgirl's hallowed act, which won the heart of the poet, wounds our conscience and seeks to engineer us to a change of attitude and conform to the way we ought to live. The poet avers that:

Their gestures are magical in their silence  
the ant builds monument without fanfare  
the very ant that knows the other stronger need. (8)

Ojaide's poem speaks directly to our souls and the truism of it all stares mockingly in our faces. We do not love the country for if we do, we could have demonstrated it in the little areas, places, and positions we are fortunate to be in. None of us is willing to make the required sacrifice to save the soul of a dying nation. The poet questions:

Has it ever happened here that the priest offered his blood  
to stave off the vesuvial scourge he foresaw,  
has it happened here before that the sharer forgot himself  
to raise the spirit of the eighty per cent lowlies?

Sad enough, the cycle of oppression, exploitation, looting, crime, corruption, mismanagement, rape, and abuse of all manner of evil, defines our nation and the reason is not far-fetched: 'No prescription cures a sick country nobody loves.'

In "Beyond this Day" Ojaide depicts the scene of disorder, chaos, and near anarchy that characterize our modern-day society and warns of the far-reaching consequences of our actions for our future and that of the generations yet unborn. The poem, characteristic of Yeats' "Second Coming" in style, and theme, echoes the very pessimistic tone that characterized Yeats' poetry and defines modern poetry at large:

O the shadows of the tyrants we raise in our blood  
jostle us in daily walks out of our senses. And  
we move into the cult-house to invoke the god  
of our desired mountains, lose ourselves  
in the dance at the sight of one possessed;  
we are in service of brute for livelihood,  
damned with inordinate desires (10).

In Ojaide's "Beyond this Day", our modern woes compound as our secret indulges, inordinate desires, brute means of livelihood, and our mad pursuit of vanity and survival taint our world and worry the poet deeply. Reflective on Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much with Us", the dangers of a materialistic world make the future look gloomy and predictable. There is a building sense of pessimism, a prevailing sense of unseen danger, and greater anarchy that looms over the earth. Just like in Yeats' "Second Coming"—we turn and turn in the widening gyre, the falcon unable to hear the falconer; things falling apart and the center unable to hold, culminating to mere anarchy loosed upon the world, and the vast image of Spiritus Mundi slouching towards Bethlehem to be born, all characteristic of the pessimistic and the ironical conceit of modern poetry—so we witness in Ojaide's "Beyond this Day" a replicable show of shame and disorder: 'So many stand on tiptoe on stools mounted on tiled egos/ without getting to the peephole of fresh insights.' And 'there are no dreams of a different world to change lives/deeply rooted in the thirsty genes of nomads.' In the condescending disharmonious manner, 'so many lose sight of the clearing beyond hilltop/ in the debilitating despondence after the mirage. (10) In the same sense of slow but progressive ascension of pessimism and uncertainties witnessed in Yeats' "Second Coming", Ojaide's "Beyond this Day" progressed to unveil in full glare, the pessimistic dispositions and struggles in the innermost turmoil of the poet as he rhetorically ponders:

Who knows if we are so near, in the dark,  
in our outskirts of a misted destination?...  
Lord, are we worthy? We are not worthy of our blood,  
not worthy of an hour's grace, already sentenced.  
And these inquirers incarcerate us in easy fashions (10)

Interestingly too, just like Yeats ends with a degree of pessimism and inevitable chaotic future mired with the symbolic birth of the Anti-Christ, 'the vast image out of Spiritus Mundi' (Second Coming line 12) Ojaide ends with deep-rooted pessimism and an apocalyptic vision of his society whose future is beyond mortal knowledge if we do not remedy our ways:

Only the God we do not know knows what lies in wait  
if there is no cushioning from the karmic rocks;  
the crows will spot us in their patrols before  
before the police arrives with warrants to bury the dead.  
When will the cramping lots of our hearts be emptied  
of their garbage to be free of that life that ends  
with cars, mansions, and bodies dressed for consumption? (10)

The poet ends with a sense of irony familiar in modern poetry, as he emphasizes that 'only the God we do not know knows what lies next.' It is sheer irony, cynicism, and anti-climax, that in our present-day society we constructed more churches than industries, yet are filled with hypocrisy, immorality, and inhumanity. Nigeria, like many other African countries, has a very peculiar case in this regard, as we have hijacked the practice of religion and tend to be holier than the Western world that brought us Christianity. Christianity, though it has permeated a greater portion of our society, the true Christ-like nature is still alien in our daily profession of Christianity. The poem also tilts towards an absurdist view of life with a reinforced vision of vanity which is the end product of all men's aspirations and toils as echoed in the book of Ecclesiastes 1:2 that 'vanities of vanities; all is vanity'.

In "The Vision" Ojaide's revolutionary and protest became more vociferous, as we hear a clarion call for war and violence in response to the prolonged oppression and exploitation that militate against the desired peace and progress of our nation. The poet expresses a belief that we will not always continue like this and the poem foretells the imminent end of our oppression and with it our oppressors:

The leopard that haunts us will die,  
maybe in our lifetime, maybe not;  
time plies the ambush with an invisible hand (3).

Ojaide subtly echoes that belief and willpower alone cannot end oppression and calls for revolution as the inevitable pathway to freedom. The poet believes that the peace, freedom, and the prosperous society we seek, can only be won through violence and reprisal attack:

We have to incur debts to buy new weapons  
or mend our broken ones,  
then go to the bush to prove our mettle (3).

This struggle, the poet believes, will be worth every of its salt for no 'wanderer complains that the road to his love/is not wide enough for his restless feet.' With a series of rhetorical questions, his poetic thoughts are made manifest: 'What giant says the earth is not hard enough/for his soles to support him/yes, what head is too small for desires?' The poet urges that we should not be carried away with any present comfort we muster since 'It is not the habit of the hunter/ to blind himself with drinks.' And 'like the prepared hunter who toils in silence after its prey,' we must

have a clear vision of our dreams, the future we desire and pursue it with our blood and ends with his unwavering belief that: 'As for the leopard that haunts us, it will surely die, the ambush taut. (3) This study argues that in these lines are enshrined

the subtle hope for the future if only we could be honest and patriotic enough to determine the kind of society and future we desire and have the nerves to pay the ultimate sacrifice to achieve that.

In “We Keep Watch Over Them” which is the last of the poem we shall consider here that reinforced Ojaide's protest pose and revolutionary tirades, we see the torture and oppression we have been subjected to in various ways but with a sense of stoicism, resistance, and heroism and it's this near-martyr attributes that endear the poem and engraves the message in our hearts:

From the scaffold of pain we keep watch over them,  
from the perilous precipice of misery we keep watch over them  
from the exposed post of lowliness, cold and clammy,  
from the slums of existence we keep watch over them (5).

There is a realization that we are not a bunch of ignorant and docile fellows and the poet appeals to the courageous side of our existence, that rebellious spirit ready to fight for justice, fairness, and lasting peace and prosperity. The poet engineers us for the spirit of oneness and solidarity:

When they savage us, we withdraw to cabal;  
our experience over the ages help us through  
our women know how to march naked at twilight  
and rid the land of tormentors,  
our men know how to bury despots with their paraphernalia;  
we always regroup in the shadows of our fallen warriors (5).

The poet foresees the emergence of a class of selfless and patriotic men and women armed with the weapon of truth and justice and the unquenchable will, unbreakable resolve to act right, to fight and defend for the sake of the future, posterity, and the generation yet unborn. Ojaide depicts these new heroes with 'metals in their will', heroes, who when they meet hardships, do not breakdown before their torturers, patriots, who do not groan despite their daily stabs of hunger and refuse to give in to those who live on the blood of the poor and the sweat of the strong (5). The poet, therefore, urges the people to identify on that side of the revolution, aware that it is time to stand together, tall, strong and firm, and fight against oppression, exploitation, looting, dehumanization, and injustice. Ojaide engineers the masses to pick up arms and engage in some protest and revolutionary measures to fight their poverty, desolation, frustration, suffering, backwardness, and perpetual loss, to salvage and free their nation heading to dock safely at the harbours of a failed state. He reechoes that:

The matchet is fan, /the rifle our swagger-stick in the dark;

we know what distance to go in silence/ before unleashing thunder,  
we know how to lead our prosecutors away/ in the night of their power.  
Our will has become our god, and/ from the iroko tree aloft our hearts  
we keep strict watch over them. (5)

Amidst this debacle of failure and chaos, Ojaide ends his poetic offerings with a sense of hope and optimism. The poet is optimistic that the masses will someday rise to reclaim their country. The masses, armed with only their will, a will that 'is like the iroko tree rooted in our hearts,' a will that 'survives whatever storm ravages us' will take back their land and determine their future for themselves. The poet ends that on that day after the fight has been fought and won:

we can hold to ourselves  
and laugh cynically at our tormentors;  
we know more than the beasts terrorizing us  
that they will fall into a deep hole  
as they cavort in our streets. (5)

In the Book of Jeremiah 29:11, the prophet Jeremiah left a message of hope that has inspired generations of Christians, a message that beams as the hallmark of his prophetic utterances. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" Like the prophet Jeremiah, who, despite his message of woes, left a beacon of hope, so did the poet-prophet, Ojaide. Allyssa Roat notes that: "...Jeremiah's most lasting legacy may be one of hope. One of the most oft-quoted verses in the Bible, Jeremiah 29:11, has offered hope to believers for centuries... Jeremiah preached a lot of doom and punishment. However, his message was ultimately one of repentance and restoration. God was quick to remind his people that although there would be consequences for their sin, He still had a plan" (1). Similarly, Ojaide, amidst his tirades and jeremiads, inspires hope for a new nation. It is the hope that the nation shall someday rise from the ashes of exploitation, corruption, and oppression to embrace a call for a collective struggle towards the liberation of the dying soul of a nation.

## Conclusion

It is no longer in doubt that Nigeria, as a nation, is crumbling with visible signs of impending demise. Ojaide emerges, from the enclaves of the oppressed region of the Niger Delta, to wield the sword of poetry with which he condemns and sermonizes to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'. Ojaide may not have been a prophet in the religious sense of the word; yet, the paper argues that his poetry exudes certain

prophetic dispositions and remarkably pairs him, in some striking resemblances with Prophet Jeremiah in the Bible. Described as an angry and weeping poet, Jeremiah, in a similar manner is known as the 'Weeping Prophet'. Jeremiah, a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah in the Old Testament, right before Judah ultimately fell to Babylon and was led away into captivity, was sent by God to a crumbling nation to warn of their impending demise – a warning they didn't heed. (AllyssaRoat 1) A fearless poet, Ojaide's poetry has continued to serve as a protest and revolutionary tool to engineer the masses for a positive change, even as it inspires hope, confidence, and a patriotic spirit needed for new nationhood.

Three decades after publication, the protest and revolutionary visions of Ojaide in *The Endless Song* seem most relevant and apt in our present-day society as the socio-political, economic, religious, and even academic and ethno-cultural spheres of the nation, appear more worrisome and worthy of more engaging discourses than ever. The nation is comatose as untold hardship, hunger, inflation, and the rising cost of living leave economists with gloomy faces on the grim future of the nation. Insecurity, Fulani herdsmen menace, banditry, kidnapping, ethnic tensions, and sentiments, unjust killing, and religious violence, all seem to have reared their ugly heads more determined than ever. The socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria is increasingly worrisome and at no time in history have Nigerians wished to emigrate from the country and denounce their citizenship more than now. Daily, corruption, and unemployment curves rise. The EndSars protest of the recent time is only a demonstration of that long-awaited march and revolution chanted by many poets and patriots alike. In all, a more organized revolution is inevitable in this country and it is at this point that the poetic visions of Ojaide, his jeremiads make meaning and significant sense.

The revolutionary poetry of Ojaide, against all encumbrances, sustains a dying hope and optimism in a new nation. This frail hope is masked in his lamentations and jeremiads. It is this hope that inspires the dreams of tomorrow's survival, but this is not without a price tag—the masses will need to come together, their broken spirits glued together by hope, and walk on that long-enduring but inevitable path of protest and revolution, that seemed the only pathway to their promised land, a march Ojaide believes is long overdue.

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JLSN

# **Affective Literature as an Inclusive Art Form**

**JUDE AIGBE AGHO**

## **Abstract**

In this essay, I am largely concerned with the propensity of literature to affect the psychology of readers because of the emotion that it embeds, and I argue that literature generally is affective since it is constructed to entertain, teach, and provide pleasures to the reader. It can only achieve this meaningfully if it embeds emotions that can make the readers respond in diverse ways to express how they are affected: through anger, grief, laughter, joy, sorrow etc. It is the capacity of a literary work to generate these emotions that underlines its significance and ultimate success. New Criticism, Formalism and the later poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches to criticism censure in varying degrees contentual signification and put their stresses on the formal profundities in a text such as language and the figurative dimension of language, the apt and adroit depiction of setting, characters, and narrative techniques as ways of conveying signification, but emotions are best represented and felt through the content and message that a literary work conveys. An aesthetically flawed literary work is one that fails to fulfill the basic functions of literature through entertaining and pleasuring the readers. The capacity of literature to be affective inheres in its ability to conventionally function as explained above. Every successful literary work must in essence be affective and this underlines the inclusivity of the term as it relates to African literature.

Keywords: affect, affective, literature, African literature

## **Introduction**

The word 'affective' used adjectivally characterizes emotion, especially the capacity of the emotion to affect in an overpowering manner anyone so affected. Therefore, 'affective literature' is any creative literary work that affects the emotions of the readers, either positively or negatively, manifesting or eliciting the emotions of anger, rage, annoyance, or laughter, joy or lightheartedness from readers and audiences. *Google* explains that the term 'affective' “refers to the emotional qualities

of a work of literature” and proceeds further to aver, “If a piece of writing is affective, then it 'affects' the reader. They are moved by the content and experience some kind of emotions in relation to it”. The extent and relevance of the emotions of a literary work on readers, earlier characterized as subjective, have become the cornerstones of modern literary theories which seek to explain signification in literary discourses from the purview of the readers. Indeed, the American critic, Stanley Fish has given the name 'Affective Stylistics' to his form of reader-response criticism. Earlier, the New Critics, W. K. Wimsatt Jnr and Monroe C. Beardsley (in *The Verbal Icon*, 1954) drew attention to the limitations involved in judging a literary work based on its effects on the emotions of the readers because of its subjective nature. In fact, the two most important testaments of the New Critics typifying grave errors resulting from not distancing oneself from the emotions in a text and viewing a text from the intentions of the author are the 'Affective Fallacy' and 'Intentional Fallacy'. It is important also to distinguish between the terms 'affect' and 'effect' in relation to our discussion of the subject at hand. 'Affect' used as a verb means 'to produce an effect upon', as in 'the weather affected his mood'. Effect is usually a noun 'meaning a change that results when something is done or happens'. 'Affect' as a word, in the context of our discussion, characterizes the ability of a literary work to emotionally affect its readers and it leads to the emotional outbursts earlier outlined, while the outcomes of the process typify the 'effects', in this case, joy, anger, rage, laughter, lightheartedness, satisfaction, discontentment, sorrow, despair, pity and what have you, that the emotions in literary works can elicit from the readers.

Literature, on the other hand, typifies creative writing imaginatively woven by writers to explain nature and other personal or societal experiences but made to look real and capable of happening. The novel especially relies on realism to define its mode of existence, it is based on lived experiences, hence its possibility to take on a true-to-life appearance. Talking about the centrality of imitation to the creative process, Jean-Pierre Durix says, “The relation between art and imitation has always been a basic concern in any study of the creative process” [45]. This mimetic connection is particularly important in conceptualizing literature as a reflective and imitative art and informs the marked difference between Plato and his former student Aristotle in their conception of the mimetic quality of literature. While Aristotle exalts the profundity of the literary creed in structuring the concept of the tragic hero and tragedy as a dramatic art, Plato dwells on the negative dimension of literary emotion in his banishment of literature from his ideal Republic because of its negative influence on the morality of the youths. Peter Widdowson in his book, *Literature (The New Critical Idiom)* provides some illumination on the conflicting views of these early theorists on the issue of mimesis [pp 28, 29].

Properly conceptualized, therefore, it is impossible to divorce literature from emotions, since it is imaginatively created and is the product of a writer's emotions in his musings about life and society. Although the New Critics identify the emotion in a text as subjective and advise readers to move beyond it to achieve objectivity in judging a literary text, a creative work that is devoid of emotion is truly not literature strictly speaking. The capacity of a literary work to affect the emotions of the reader is what makes it literature, therefore, any literary work that is incapable of stirring the emotions of the reader, whether a poem, play or novel would be deemed to be deeply flawed.

The above fact deserves further probing. The conventional functions of literature are to please, entertain and educate the readers. In the western conception of literature and how it offers pleasure, the way a thing is said matters more than what is said. This formalist conception of literature epitomizes the later perspectives of critical approaches to literary criticism such as Structuralism and Deconstruction where contentual signification in a text is undermined at the expense of the form, so much so that the author of a text is presumed to be dead and non-existent, while the text created by the author is subjected to critical scrutiny. In this context, what pleases the readers are the boundless possibilities opened by the writer's use of language, the deployment of imageries and the figurative essence of the language used as well as the adroit depiction of setting or background and the use of scintillating narrative techniques in a literary text. The way a writer blends all these formal accessories to make meaning coincident in a narrative is particularly seen as the true essence of literary perfection and not necessarily the profundity or profanity of the message. From the Anglo-Saxon era through the Neo-Classical, Shakespearean, Romantic and Victorian eras of mainstream English literature, this appears to be the perceived mode of influence, and the way literature entertains. The only exceptions may be in dramatic literature, especially tragedy where the purgation of the cathartic experiences of a tragic hero can have immediate effect on members of the audience, which may result in pity and empathy for the tragic heroes' fates and in comedies, which can result in laughter, lightheartedness and so on.

In the African context, contentual signification more than the artistry of the author of a literary text is important in gauging the degree of influence of the entertainment of a literary work on readers. Here, a literary work 'affects' the readers' emotions if it is deployed to proffer solutions to the social problems bedeviling the society. Any African writer that pays attention only to his craft at the expense of message in his literary work may not be taken too seriously. It is not important whether the writer is a critical realist or revolutionary writer, the degree of his influence on the readers is valued to the extent that the work provides solutions to

endemic social problems such as poverty, corruption of the political class, deficits in governance, military incursions into the political space and other such aberrations in the society. The art for art's sake or basically formalist tradition has no place here, and this is the reason for the failure of experimental literary works such as Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboy* or even Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, three otherwise very fascinating African novels detailing the same or similar issues found in Chinua Achebe's precolonial and neocolonial novels, for example. I am, no doubt, aware that the very extreme to this societal expectation can gag a writer, especially if he has no solutions to advance to the problems of his immediate society. The very best of African writers are those who have used their creative works to rage against the injustices in their society and have successfully carried through their self-imposed duty of being the spokespersons or mouthpieces for their immediate society.

It is therefore clear from the foregoing that what makes literature affective is the degree of emotion that it embeds and the capacity of it to affect the psychology of the reader. A piece of literature might make the reader feeling sorrowful and cry, feel joyful, filled with rage, jealousy, peace, or even fear. Some writers are incredibly capable when it comes to triggering readers' emotions and sometimes making them feel all these emotions within the span of a few pages. In African literature generally, there are certain experiences such as the experience of colonialism and its desecration of the people's culture, the double-faced personality of African political leaders who fought to put an end to colonialism, but were too quick to orchestrate another form of it in postcolonial Africa, the civil war in Nigeria and the opportunism of the war profiteers and the aftermaths of the war, the repressive regimes of the military, the irony of the discovery of oil in Nigeria, which should be a blessing and not a curse to the people whose domains are so endowed etc.; that elicit several emotions from readers. In the next section of this paper, some of these experiences will be discussed to unravel how they affect the emotions of readers in representative texts or in the writings of specific African writers. Since we will not be engaged in full and total exegeses of specific literary works because of the largely exploratory scope of our presentation, we will adopt a largely metacritical stance which will give a pride of place to sundry views and opinions about the texts or writers discussed.

#### Affective Literature in Africa: Textual Discussion

Judged against the negative representations of Africa and Africans in white colonial literature, dubbed literature of empire, which by so doing, provided a validation for the colonial onslaughts Africa and its peoples experienced during the colonial period of Africa's evolution, Chinua Achebe's very important novel, *Things Fall Apart* and its sequel, *Arrow of God* would be seen as God sent; a timely intervention to disprove

and puncture the claim of the European sense of cultural superiority over the Africans. Against the clearly biased representations of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and other colonial novels written by such writers as Rider Haggard, Graham Greene, and Joyce Cary, Achebe's novels about the African past were conceived and designed to, as I said in another context, "set right these distortions about the culture of the African people, and therefore, they embody within their constitution an unconcealed protest bristling with anger" [Jude Agho, 2011, 9]. No African reader of the works of these European writers would not be emotional and express rage, truculence, and sorrow at this hideous cruelty. Although clearly showcasing the vibrancy of precolonial Igbo people and the despoliation of their culture by colonialism and its operatives, this cultural mandate became:

the embodying vision propagated in the early novels of some other Anglophone writers, such as Onuora Nzekwu, John Munonye, Obinkaram Echewa, Ngugi wa Thiong'O and Ayi Kwei Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* and his other historical novel, *Healers*, where the divisive and contagious effects of the white man's culture on the African culture is highlighted. [Agho, 2011. 9-10]

Achebe himself had variously expressed his rage and distraught at the monstrosity of white colonial writers "who project the image of Africa as 'the other world', the antithesis of Europe and, therefore, of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" [3]. As he says further, "I will not accept just any traveller's tales solely on the ground that I have not made the journey myself. I will not trust the evidence even of a man's very eyes when I suspect them to be as jaundiced as Conrad's" [11]. The burden of this authorial responsibility is put on African characters and protagonists as diverse as Okonkwo, Chief priest Ezeulu, Njoroge, Waiyaki and others who clearly serve as bulwarks to the colonial incursion into Africa. Conrad's depiction of Africa as 'the heart of darkness' in his novel of same title and his portraiture of Africans as cannibals who are not humanized with basic attributes such as speech and language cannot be acceptable to any African reader of the novel. The image of Africa and Africans in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* follows the same pattern. Johnson, the African character, colonial servant, and court clerk in the novel, is dubious, always a spendthrift, an excessive debtor, and simply a scoundrel. This depiction, borne out of a racist stance, cannot but incense any African reader of the novel as it did Achebe when he first encountered the novel. The obvious effect of this negative portraiture is expressed in such emotional responses as rage, anger, and sorrowful discontentment, which orchestrated the beginning of protest as a thematic touchstone in African literature, which has been dubbed by Charles Nnolim as a 'weeping or lachrymal

literature' [4].

The pauperization of the African masses in postcolonial Africa against the promise of independence by the African political class has further deepened the truculent or reactive character of African literature. Independence which was the aftermath of the agitations of the political class, the labour movements, market women and student bodies and other activists to upturn the colonial administration in African nation states has largely remained ineffectual as it only birthed neocolonialism, another form of colonialism now headed and superintended by African political leaders and the elite class. No African writer has written in support of this otherwise unfortunate transformation. Arthur Ravenscroft was the first scholar to use the term 'post-independence disillusionment' to characterize the new ethos in governance in neocolonial Africa, which has given free reins to corruption, graft, greed and rapacity, false lifestyles and the concomitant poverty, festering crimes and criminality and the general impoverishment that they have given rise to. In literary works which embody these aberrations, the image of governance presented by the writers is generally bleak, negative, vacuous, and highly irritating and democratic structures, where they exist, reflect a travesty of true democratic ideals. Claude Wauthier presents a trenchant critique of a range of novels in Africa that embody some of these aberrations. According to him:

In all these novels, the oligarchy to be found at the top of the party hierarchy is depicted as vulgar, sensual and uncultured. The luxury of ministerial offices and official residences is blatant and extravagant, cynicism is the order of the day, drinking to excess frequent, and power is simply a way of getting rich. The new image of the African woman as greedy, snobbish, and immoral replaces the venerated mother figure. [320]

The postindependence novels and other literary works of this period are cast in this mode as exemplified by the novels of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Meja Mwangi, Festus Iyayi, Helon Habila, Biyi Bandele-Thomas, Adebayo Williams, Ben Okri, Kofi Awoonor, Sembene Ousmane, Wale Okediran and many others where we find the varying emotions of rage, anger, pity and fear freely exhibited by fictional protagonists who are the authorial vehicles employed by the writers to draw attention to the sordid state of things in postcolonial Africa and are the agents of change envisioned by the writers to enforce change and transformation in Africa.

The military establishment and the armed forces in several post-independence African nation states got peeved by the misdemeanors of the political class with their crass leadership styles and corruption and this prompted the

beginning of military coups and counter coups in many African nations, ostensibly directed at ameliorating the pitfalls of African politicians in governance. Although conceived as corrective, military incursions in political processes and leadership have largely failed, often with the military becoming worse than the politicians they remove from government. Detested most are the repressive styles of governance of the military, the oppression of civilians and the clampdown on the press, which is generally seen as 'the fourth estate of the realm'. Again, police/military brutalities on defenseless citizens and general highhandedness are constant insignias of military rule. There is no African literary work that has presented the military in governance from any patronizing perspective. African writers as diverse as Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Abubakar Gimba, Odia Ofeimun, Helon Habila, Wale Okediran, Tanure Ojaide, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and many others who have portrayed the military in power in their novels, short stories and poetry collections have emphasized these draconian postures, eliciting from their readers the emotions of anger, fear and even pity for brutalized characters and protagonists. Thus, whether in power or reflected in literature, military rule induces fear in people, which can also provoke rage and anger. Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* provides glaring vistas of these emotions as well as Odia Ofeimun's poetry collections, especially *The Poet Lied*, *Go Tell the Generals* and *I Will Ask Questions with Stones if They Take My Voice*. In these works, and many others, we find protagonists and personas who are battle-ready to confront the monstrosities of police/military brutalities and highhandedness, thus displaying fearlessness and forthrightness about their avowed missions. Hamzah in Abubakar Gimba's *Sunset for a Mandarin* and Ikem Osodi and Chris Oriko in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and many others display these emotions in their confrontations with military leadership.

No readers of literary works set in the Niger delta where the exploration of oil has led to the pollution of rivers and seas, thereby causing untold economic hardships to the inhabitants, would be unaffected by the large-scale exploitation of the people and the destruction of the flora and fauna of their aquatic habitats. Here, the availability of oil and gas which ought to be great blessings for the people have only brought misery, underdevelopment, and curse, judging by the despoliation and wreckage that oil exploration has brought on the people of the Niger Delta. As I have shown in an essay entitled, "Celebrating the Diversity of African Literature," writers within the region "acting as the unacknowledged voices of their peoples, have mainly churned out and continue to churn out protest literature" [24] to bring this exploitation and the misery of the people to the attention of the readers with a strong evocation of the emotions of anger and rage at the neglect of government and its collusion with multinational economic interests and sorrow at the large-scale

suffering and misery of the local inhabitants who continue to strive to make a living in the degraded and polluted environment. In tracing the trajectory of the near tragic and monstrous experiences of the impoverished Niger Deltans, Chinyere Nwahunanya points to the unfolding manifestation of a subversive literary culture that essentially owes fidelity to its social environment starting from “the quietist works of the early Okara, Clark and Amadi lamenting the despoliations of the Niger Delta environment” to other works by contemporary writers such as Tanure Ojaide, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Nnimmo Bassey, Kaine Agary, Ogaga Ifowodo, G.G. Darah and others which have become confrontational, “exhibiting a combative spirit associated with the literature of protest” [xix].

Added to the above are the large gamut of literary works that have become eternal mirrors of the civil war in Nigeria and the experience of apartheid by our South African brothers and sisters. These unfortunate experiences caused the death of many people and have been so well documented by writers. The Biafran/Nigerian civil war was prosecuted within the late sixties and early seventies in Nigeria between the leaders of the eastern region and the Nigerian military government and at the cessation of hostilities between the perpetrators of the war, millions of men, women, and children had died, making the war take on the toga of a genocide against the people of Eastern Nigeria. For writers of Igbo origins who have written extensively about the war and even from the accounts of the war generals on both sides, emotions have been given free reins and this has become one major site of high-density affective literature exposing sorrow, misery, fear, sympathy, rage in one breadth. These are the emotions that any reader of war literature would normally come across. From the early poems of Christopher Okigbo whose life was cut short during the war to the novels and plays of Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Eddy Iroh, J.P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Chimamanda Adichie and many others who have written about the war, the experience and its aftermaths would continue to generate in readers varied emotions.

In three separate essays: “Resistance, Liberation, and Aesthetics in the Early Novels of Alex La Guma”, “Anger and Beyond: A Study of Some South African Plays” and “The Context of 'Disalienation': The Revolutionary Imperative in the Later Novels of Alex La Guma”, I paid great attention to the discussion of the overpowering effects of the indignities of apartheid, especially on the Black and the Coloured populations in apartheid South Africa as reflected and portrayed in the literature of apartheid South Africa. As a result of the prevalence of these indignities such as racial discrimination, violence, and restriction of the rights to life, freedom, movement, and association to the Black and Coloured populations by the white perpetrators of the apartheid policy as a way of undermining their humanity, the

resort to protest to assert their humanity became necessary. Even in the literary representations of these indignities in short stories, poems, novels and plays, protagonists and personas are shown protesting against the monstrous posture of the operators of apartheid and depicting a strong resolve to confront the policy squarely. Indeed, even the option of guerrilla insurrection and physical battle gained momentum as Alex La Guma, for instance, espouses in his novels, *In the Fog of the Season's End* and *Time of the Butcherbird* or even in plays such as Gibson Kente's *Too Late* and Lewis Nkosi's *Rhythm of Violence*. One can only imagine the degree of the suppression and oppression of the Africans and the restriction of their freedom by reading Athol Fugard's play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* where he presents a pitiable and heart-rending account of a character taking on the name and personality of a dead man, just so that he could move freely within the restrictions imposed on Black Africans with the pass law in apartheid South Africa. Other South African writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Dennis Brutus, Lauretta Ngcobo, Can Themba, Oswald Mtshali, Bessie Head, Andre Brink, and many others operated within the orbit of this protest literary tradition. The expression of protest through sorrow, rage, resistance, and anger affects emotion and the pervasive presence of it in much of apartheid South African literature characterizes the literature as truly affective.

The appearance of female writers on the African literary scene has foisted a feminist/womanist tradition of writing where the writers articulate the ills associated with male domination and the harrowing experiences of women in the hands of men at the home front and generally within the patriarchal system entrenched in the traditional African society. While some of these harrowing experiences are grossly odious and inhuman such as widowhood rites, for example, the experiences of barren women and the unqualified preference for male children and the disdain for female children who are nurtured only for reproductive roles in marriages are particularly decried. This relegation of women to the background also extends to their sequestration from political empowerment. Novels, plays, and poems portraying these experiences have emotional effects on not just female readers alone, but on any reader who hates injustice, discrimination and valorizes fairness, peace, and good neighbourliness among and between both sexes. As expected, the body of works produced under this tradition of writing internalizes a rhetorical vehemence defined by protest expressed variously through sorrow, anger, defiance, hatred, resentment, and other moods depicting truculence and resistance. The above experiences emblazon the writings of female writers as diverse as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Mariama Ba, Ifeoma Okoye, Ama Ata Aidoo, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga and so many

other female and male-patronizing writers.

It is clear from the exploration of literary works and the preoccupations of African writers above that African literature generally is affective and owes fidelity to its social environment and that what makes literature affective is the quantum of emotion that it embeds and the capacity of it to affect the psychology of the readers. Although emotions are subjective and can stall a critic's quest for objectivity in his critical enterprise, literature cannot be impactful if it does not affect the emotions of readers. Truly, any literary work that is unable to affect the emotions of the readers is a flawed work, aesthetically speaking. Whether from the art for art's sake or basically formalist conception of literature emblemized by much of western literature or from the deeply sociological critical perspective emblemized by much of African literature, the capacity of a literary work to affect the emotions or psyche of the readers determines its acceptability and eventual success. Every writer must therefore strive to make his or her works 'affective' to guarantee the continuous patronage of readers. Therefore, 'affective literature' is essentially an inclusive label to typify literature that functions in accordance with its mandate to please and entertain. A writer's work is not written for himself/herself, but for the readers and if it fails to please and entertain, it would have failed as literature. Therefore, the degree of success of a literary work inheres in its capacity to affect the emotions of its readers, deriving from the emotions that the writer has painstakingly infused in the work to please and entertain the readers. This is, therefore, the proper and conventional mandate of literature.

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# **Representing Trauma in African Diasporic Literature: An Example of Adichie's *Americanah***

**OLADIJI, OLAYEMI ALANI**

## **Abstract**

In contemporary times, the subject of trauma is perhaps one of the most globally discussed subjects and as such, maybe the verb "traumatize" has become a mere cliché in both spoken and written discourses across the globe. In fact, it is apparent that exposure to trauma is majorly at the individual level, implying its non-exclusiveness to a particular society or some societies. This means that trauma is a global issue, though, might be perceived variably by different individuals. However, since Literature as a tool for mirroring the society does not do this at the broad societal level only, but also dwells on issues or phenomena that pattern personal experiences of individuals across different societies, several writers, in the past and present times, have studied the subject of trauma in their various writings. In this regard, this paper explores the representation of trauma in African Diasporic writings, drawing copious illustrations from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. By employing the Trauma theoretical approach, this paper attempts a psychoanalytic study of the tough feelings of being an African immigrant, dealing with moving, facing racism, and clashing with new cultures. It also studies how trauma affects personal identity and resilience of an individual, adding to our understanding of these experiences. This study further looks into the areas of cultural and historical gaps, as it unveils some differences between the Third World and the West, as well as shows how literary techniques are beautifully employed in the illustrative text, for the representation of trauma.

Keywords: Trauma, Diaspora, African, Literature

## **Introduction**

Africa is a continent with rich cultural, historical, and ethnic heterogeneity. It has been a focal point for various scholarly disciplines, including History, Anthropology, and Literature. Scholars often explore Africa's complex narratives, traditions, and the impacts of historical events on its societies. However, over the centuries, massive

migration of the African citizenry to other developed continents has been a recurring trend, even though the combination of whatever they carry along remains their identity as Africans—the colour and the culture, among others—which of course are very difficult to navigate or change. In fact, it becomes apparent that many of these African emigrants have lost a sense of what they could become in the ambits of the continent; they probably have lost all hope, as many of them migrate without counting the cost of survival in a strange land, in every sense. According to Fielder (2018) in his research report, "Every year, hundreds of thousands of people from Sub-Saharan Africa leave their home countries with the desire and goal of building a new existence in the European Union. In order to do so, they accept the risks connected to irregular migration." This points to the fact that some of these African migrants are fully aware of the risks strung to their decisions, while others may not. As such, the need to project the possible ugly outcomes of migration to the Western world becomes another major catalyst for Diasporicism in African Literature.

Diaspora refers to the dispersion of a community from its original homeland to various locations globally. Scholars study Diasporic communities to understand how migration, displacement, and cultural interactions shape identities and contribute to the broader tapestry of human experiences. According to Safran (1991), the definition of Diaspora is encapsulated in some 'basic characteristics' of Diasporas. He believes that diasporas are characterized by "dispersal from an original 'centre' to two or more foreign regions", "retention of a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland including its location, history, and achievements" and "the belief that they are not — and perhaps never can be — fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate." Thus, Diasporic literature focuses on these issues, in relation to the affected community or communities of people.

In the context of Africa, Diasporic literature encompasses literary works produced by people of African descent who have experienced migration and dispersion. It explores themes related to the impacts of historical events such as slavery, colonialism, racism and cultural dislocation on individuals and communities. Scholars analyze these texts to uncover the complexities of identity, trauma, and resilience within the context of the African diaspora. While the study of African Diasporicism could examine many other issues associated with it, this study focuses on the representation of trauma in African Diasporic writings, taking beautiful illustrations from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) quoted in Jayne Leopard (2018), trauma is "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. However, a person may experience trauma as a

response to any event they find physically or emotionally threatening or harmful.” Corsini (2002:1019) says that trauma is "the result of a painful event, physical or mental, causing immediate damage to the body or shock to the mind." He further notes that "psychological traumas include emotional shocks that have an enduring effect on the personality, such as rejection, divorce, combat experiences, civilian catastrophes, and racial or religious discrimination" (Corsini, 2002:1019). These various definitions explain how critical the subject of Trauma is as far as humans are concerned. Meanwhile, the emotional and psychological responses of traumatized people to Trauma include denial, anger, fear, sadness, shame, confusion, anxiety, depression, numbness, guilt, among many others (Jayne, 2018). This suggests that many people are prone to experiencing such ordeals, as thousands continuously engage in activities, make deals, and take decisions that leave them vulnerable to the sting of trauma. Therefore, it becomes crucial for everyone to remain vigilant against the factors that contribute to trauma, each in their own capacity.

### Trauma Studies

The Trauma studies became prominent between early and mid 1990s. It has its root in the post-structuralist criticism of the 1970s. Trauma studies actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric and the New World's views and structure that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world (Craps and Buelens, 2014).

According to Damjana Mraovic-O'Hare (2022) in his summary of *Trauma and Fiction*:

Trauma studies examine the way in which psychological trauma is represented in language and explores ethnical, cultural and political implications of individual and collective traumas manifested in literary texts... Trauma literature, on the other hand, is defined as texts that are influenced by trauma studies and in which a traumatic experience is presented through a series of stylistic innovations such as disrupted causative and temporal narration, iteration and characters' doubling. Trauma fiction authors explore a wide range of issues such as race, feminism, violence and post colonialism.

This explains the central concern of Trauma studies which is representative of Psychological Trauma and the role of memory in shaping identities, both personal and collective. Cathy Caruth (1996) says, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, it is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma." This means that trauma could be perceived collectively and could be regenerated as long as life continues to exist. It also suggests that history and trauma are interconnected

experiences that go beyond the boundaries of individuality. For instance, Adichie's *Americanah* does not only centre on Ifemelu's experiences, but also exposes us to the complexities of being an African in a foreign land; that is, how personal narratives intertwine with the socio-political contexts. So, the author employs these characters to embody the traumatic experiences of Africans in the Diaspora to reveal how personal stories intricately interlace with the collective history of a people, thereby helping us to understand the historical and societal trauma of African individuals in the Diaspora.

### Trauma and Literature

The nexus between trauma and literature is a significant one. Literature is a tool that projects the socio-cultural, economic, political, historical and even religious realities of individuals and communities of individuals. This denotes that literature does not only explore the innermost experiences of an individual, but also propagates cultural values, teaches moral lessons, entertains its audience, and addresses ills of a society, among its several other functions. However, in relation to trauma, literature analyses the mental health or psychological state of an individual or a group of people through literary studies. It becomes a social tool or platform for obtaining new, fresh, and sharp knowledge about the subject in question, Trauma. This implies that while trauma is an inherent part of every human and societal experiences, literature enhances our understanding and reflection over it.

Meanwhile, the Literary Trauma Theory becomes inevitable, as far as the study of the interface between Literature and Trauma is concerned. The theory seeks to identify 'Trauma texts', that is, texts, that employ intertextuality, repetition, fragmentation, and language manipulation to create meaning due to extreme traumatic stress," (Morrissey, 2016). Explicitly, literary trauma theory looks at how certain texts use tools such as repetition of words, breaking up of a narrative, and playing with language to show the impact of really tough experiences. While these "Trauma texts" try to mirror the confusion and deep emotions that come with trauma, the various uses of these literary tools enable authors to connect their readers to the challenging effects of traumatic events in a more meaningful way. In a similar way, this paper intends to add to the streams of topics on Trauma in African Diasporic Literature; how the topic is reflected and how its representation in the literary works helps us to understand our individual and collective experience in contexts. Meanwhile, scholars like Amy J. Scholz believes that colonialism left a legacy of deep trauma and intergenerational pain for indigenous people, the effects of which are felt even till this day. This paints a void picture of the lasting trauma from colonialism on indigenous people with the term "Legacy" leading us to examine the

lasting and inherited consequence of historical Trauma.

***Americanah*: The Trauma of Navigating Cultures as an African Immigrant**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is probably one of the best African writers of her time. She is renowned for her compelling storytelling and exploration of themes, such as identity, gender, and post-colonialism, among others. Her notable works include *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. Both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are set against the backdrop of the Nigerian civil war and while the former examines the infliction of trauma in a religious family environment, the latter dwells on the impact of the Nigeria civil war, especially the lasting psychological impact on the affected race.

*Americanah*, her third novel explores the themes of Trauma in different contexts—that of immigrant experience. Through the adventures of Ifemelu, a Nigerian protagonist in the novel, Adichie captures the agony of an African Immigrant in the United States. Ifemelu's struggles become an internal exploration of the human spirit, caught in disparate worlds, where the collision of identities leaves an indelible mark on the soul. The emotional fallout of displacement, masterfully depicted by Adichie, reverberates throughout the novel.

The character portrait of Ifemelu in the novel exposes our emotions to the weight of Trauma from displacement, identity clash, and battles against different prejudices. It makes the reader imagine the pain of falling out of place in a new country, dealing with who you are and facing unfair treatment because of how you look. Trauma, as displayed in the novel, is not just one big thing; it is like a mix of emotions—feelings lost in a new culture, dealing with hurtful moments every day, and trying how to figure out who you are in a complicated setting like America.

At the first conscious encounter of racism, Ifemelu is reawakened to her racial identity as a black person; something she has never had to worry about while she is in Nigeria. This is evident in her remark when she says: “I came from a country where race was not an issue. I did not think myself as black, and I only became black when I came to America.” Ifemelu's personal encounter with racism was when her boyfriend, Curt, takes her to the spa to shave her eyebrows and the woman tells her, “we don't do curly here” (p. 293) until Curt intervenes by threatening to inform the authorities.

In *Americanah*, characters struggle with the deep wounds of identity. Ifemelu, tired of being defined by race, faces the burden of representing something larger. Obinze, displaced in London, loses his sense of self like a man without a shadow. The journey to find oneself in America, as depicted, is aching and seemingly never-ending. The struggle of being both African and black, yet not fitting neatly into

these categories, is evident. Obinze's experience, as an American, underscores the trauma of conforming to societal expectations. These stories reflect the profound challenges of identity, shaped by race, displacement, and societal norms. The novel *Americanah* delicately paints the arduous and ongoing process of self-discovery, capturing the transformative, yet sometimes painful, nature of the journey.

Ifemelu's relationship with Curt sparks surprise among white people due to their racial differences. The trauma she faces is evident in the looks of astonishment and anguish from others, questioning why a white guy like Curt would choose her, an ordinary black immigrant. Ifemelu is aware that her black skin disqualifies her, and the constant scrutiny becomes piercing, making her weary of needing protection as evident in the novel:

...they looked at her with surprise, a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not, and in their expressions was the question "Why her?" It amused strangers on the street, who would see her hand clasped in Curt's and instantly cloud their faces with that look. The look of people confronting a great tribal loss. It was not merely because Curt was white, it was the kind of white he was, the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete's body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money. (p. 292)

The word "usage" in the passage above vividly conveys the societal reaction to Ifemelu's relationship with Curt. Such instances as "looked at her with surprise," "shielded expressions," and the question "Why her?" highlight the perplexity and judgment from onlookers. The description of strangers clouding their faces with a look "of people confronting a great tribal loss" introduces a powerful metaphor, suggesting a collective sense of discomfort or displacement. The careful selection of words crafts a nuanced portrayal of the complexities and biases woven into societal perceptions. This shows the traumatic experiences of Ifemelu and that which is collectively experienced by Africans in cross-racial affairs.

For Ifemelu, the way that race in America intersects with romantic relationships is very important. While in America, she has long-term relationships with a white man and a black man, but she feels that she neither really understands her experience as an African woman. This is especially true when she is in a relationship with a white man and, as described in the quote above, feels at once happy and loved, but also misunderstood and dismissed by others and by Curt himself. She says:

When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and

your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don't talk about it. We don't even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we're worried they will say we're overreacting, or we're being too sensitive... But we don't say any of this stuff. We let it pile up inside our heads and when we come to nice liberal dinners like this, we say that race doesn't matter because that's what we're supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable. (Ifemelu, p. 359)

The way the words are used in this statement effectively shows the complicated feelings of being in interracial relationships and the internal struggles the speaker goes through. By saying things like "race doesn't matter when you're alone together" but admitting that "race matters" outside shows the difference between private and public views. The repetition of "we don't talk about it" highlights how feelings are kept quiet because of the fear of not being taken seriously. The speaker is afraid to share their problems with their white partners because they worry about being seen as "overreacting" or "too sensitive," showing how tough it is to keep frustrations to themselves. The speaker's inner thoughts, like "you know what we're thinking," reveal the hidden complexities and annoyances often present in interracial relationships. Using strong language, such as "why the heck should it ever have been illegal anyway?" expresses the intense emotions tied to the historical background of interracial relationships. In simple terms, the language of the passage effectively describes the emotional struggles and external pressures people face in interracial relationships, giving a detailed picture of how race affects personal and social aspects of life.

Another thing worthy of note is the cultural and historical disparities between the Third World and the West. Obinze indirectly touched this in his statement by linking these aesthetic choices to the country's history and the current moment in its economic development when he says:

But of course it makes sense because we are Third Worlders and Third Worlders are forward-looking, we like things to be new, because our best is still ahead, while in the West their best is already past and so they have to make a fetish of that past. (Obinze, p. 539)

The implication that "our best is still ahead" for 'Third Worlders' suggests a hope for progress and improvement, while the statement about the West, "their best is already past," implies a sense of nostalgia or perhaps a cultural trauma associated with a perceived decline. The notion that in the West, there is a need to "make a fetish of that past" suggests a fixation on historical achievements, possibly at the expense of

adapting to the present or looking toward the future. This fixation might be seen as a form of cultural trauma, where a society is overly attached to past glory and struggles to embrace change. This is realised in Ginika's statement thus: "*You could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They'll believe all kinds of shit about Africa.*" (Ginika, p.160). Trauma is subtly represented through the exploration of names and nicknames, particularly in Ifemelu's experiences as an immigrant. The necessity for Ifemelu to adopt the name "Ngozi Okonkwo" to find work illegally in the United States reflects the traumatic challenges faced by illegal immigrants, where they must conceal their true identities for survival. The act of using a false name is not only practicality but also a symbol of the erasure of one's true self, contributing to a loss of identity—a form of psychological trauma.

In addition, the observation by Ginika that people are "gullible about names" and will believe anything about Africa speaks to the broader societal ignorance and stereotypes surrounding immigrants. This lack of awareness or consideration for the cultural significance of names contributes to a sense of detachment and dehumanization for those experiencing the trauma of immigration. The humor mentioned in the quote serves as a coping mechanism, masking the deeper and darker theme of the challenges faced by illegal immigrants and their struggle for identity in a foreign land.

Another aspect of trauma which is characterized by the need to impress your new community and assimilate with a different culture or society out of fear is seen in the conversation between Auntie Uju and Ifemelu when she (Ifemelu) tries speaking Igbo to Dike, Auntie Uju's son:

Dike, I mechago?" [Have you finished?] Ifemelu asked.

"Please don't speak Igbo to him", Auntie Uju said. "Two languages will confuse him".

"What are you talking about, Auntie? We spoke two languages growing up".

"This is America. It's different" (Adichi, 2013: 109)

The conversation between Auntie Uju and Ifemelu highlights the struggle of African immigrants in the Diaspora to navigate their identities and cultures in a new environment. Auntie Uju's insistence on only speaking English to her son is a reflection of the pressure many immigrants face to assimilate and conform to the dominant culture in their new country. This suggests a fear of being perceived as different or not fully belonging in the American society. This fear can stem from a desire to protect one's children from discrimination or a belief that assimilation is necessary for success in a new country. But, the implication is, prioritizing English

over Igbo, one may feel a sense of erasure of one's own culture and identity, which can be a traumatic experience for immigrants in the diaspora.

In the story, Ifemelu's narrative shows that hair transcends mere aesthetics, it becomes a symbolic battleground where cultural identity, societal expectations, and discrimination collide. Auntie Uju, Ifemelu's aunt, tries hard to blend with the American lifestyle:

I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional. (Auntie Uju, p. 146).

Here, the pressure to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty and professionalism, exemplified by the advice given by Kemi to remove braids and relax hair for interviews, is nothing short of an indication to loss of identity. Auntie Uju's experience reflects the broader struggles of many characters in the novel, emphasizing the political nature of hair in the context of societal norms. This is evident here:

She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be... And, of course, there was also Obinze. Her first love, her first lover, the only person with whom she had never felt the need to explain herself. He was now a husband and father, and they had not been in touch in years, yet she could not pretend that he was not a part of her homesickness, or that she did not often think of him... (p. 4)

Ifemelu's decision to move back to Nigeria is tied to an intricate sense of homesickness and loss. The choice represents an attempt to anchor herself in a place where she can establish roots without the constant urge to uproot and escape. The ache of loss she feels, as if something has been taken from her, is not only about the physical place but also about a significant emotional connection.

Within this context, Obinze, her first love and lover, becomes a poignant element of her homesickness. Despite the passage of years and the fact that he is now a husband and father, Obinze remains an integral part of her emotional landscape. The unfulfilled connection with him, the longing for a past that cannot be recreated shows a psychological pain of loss. Her thoughts of him become a source of homesickness, as she sifts through their shared history, seeking understanding and grappling with a love that has transformed but remains indelibly linked to her sense

of belonging.

In *Americanah*, the narrative techniques employed by the author effectively depict the trauma experienced by the protagonist, Ifemelu, as she navigates the complexities of being an African immigrant in the United States. Through the use of character representation, multiple perspectives, flashbacks, and cultural signifiers, Adichie delves into the emotional and psychological impact of Ifemelu's traumatic experiences, including discrimination, cultural alienation, and personal identity struggles.

Although Ifemelu is the principal character around whom all the actions revolve and a major representation of Trauma in the novel, yet, the novel also employs other characters like Auntie Uju, Obinze, Ginika and many other characters in showcasing how traumatic past of Africans continues to shape their present reality in America. Through flashbacks to Ifemelu's childhood and early adulthood, readers gain a view into the deep-rooted pain and dislocation she carries from her homeland to the United States, highlighting the lasting effects of trauma on her sense of self and belonging.

Adichie incorporates cultural signifiers, such as language, food, and social customs, to illuminate Ifemelu's quest for healing and reconnection with her African identity. The protagonist's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment is intricately woven with symbolic elements that signify resilience, cultural pride, and the longing for a sense of rootedness in a foreign land.

The interplay of narrative techniques in *Americanah* underscores the profound impact of trauma on individual identity and resilience within the Diasporic experience. By engaging with the complexities of Ifemelu's narrative, readers gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by African immigrants in navigating cultural barriers, confronting racism, and reclaiming their heritage amidst a backdrop of historical injustices.

Through Adichie's masterful storytelling and thematic exploration of trauma, resilience, and healing, *Americanah* offers a poignant and insightful portrayal of the enduring legacy of historical traumas within the African Diaspora, as well as the strength and resilience of individuals striving to find their place in a world marked by cultural diversity and interconnectedness.

## Conclusion

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents a detailed exploration of the trauma and complexity faced by African immigrants navigating cultures, particularly in the context of race, identity and belonging. Through Ifemelu's journey, the novel highlights the emotional toll of adjusting to a new cultural

landscape, where perceptions of race differ from her experiences in Nigeria. This trauma is not only rooted in external challenges—such as racism and the pressure to assimilate—but also in the internal conflict of self-perception and identity. Moreover, *Americanah* sheds light on the resilience of immigrants as they navigate these cultural spaces, while also addressing the ways in which identity is reshaped by the forces of displacement and belonging. The novel invites readers to consider the deeply personal impact of immigration and cultural negotiation, offering a profound commentary on the African immigrant experience.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how past injustices continue to influence African communities and how writers of African descent use literature to navigate and articulate these experiences. The study reaffirms the significance of African Diasporic literature in shedding light on the enduring effects of trauma, while also emphasizing the power of storytelling as a means of resistance, healing, and identity construction.

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# **An Exploration of Tradition and Modernity in Hausa Wedding Songs**

**FATIMA ISA WASAGU**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the evolving themes found in contemporary Hausa wedding songs, highlighting their cultural, social, and religious significance within the Hausa community. Utilizing a combination of free and literal translations, the analysis delves into key themes such as the integration of religious elements, self-praise, modern trends, communal celebration, gender roles, and farewell rituals. The contextual theory is used as its theoretical framework. The findings reveal how these songs serve not only as a reflection of traditional values, but also as a response to contemporary influences shaping marital practices. The emphasis on communal joy underscores the importance of kinship and friendship, while the guidance offered regarding gender roles illustrates enduring expectations within the marriage framework. Additionally, farewell songs capture the emotional complexities associated with leaving one's family, illuminating the bittersweet nature of marital transitions. Overall, this study underscores the dual role of Hausa wedding songs as both cultural artifacts that preserve historical practices and dynamic expressions of identity that celebrate the interplay between tradition and modernity. By examining these musical narratives, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the rich cultural fabric of Hausa society and the symbolic significance of their wedding ceremonies.

## **Introduction**

Hausa wedding songs are traditional songs performed during wedding ceremonies in Hausa culture. They express love, marriage and family values through their lyrics and symbols. These songs are used to celebrate the couple's union, to express the joy and happiness of the occasion, and to offer advice for a successful union. In recent years, there have been a number of new trends in Hausa wedding songs, reflecting the changing social and cultural landscape of Hausa society. The modern trends in Hausa

wedding songs often combine traditional musical elements with contemporary influences to create a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere that resonates more with the younger audiences. Their lyrics also often focus on love, marriage, and the joy of wedding festivities.

There is no doubting the fact that life is dynamic and so are culture and tradition. Over the years, Hausa culture and tradition have witnessed a wide range of changes from the mode of dressing, eating, to the way and manner ceremonies, rituals and festivals are performed. Wedding is one of the most important cultures of Hausa people and one very important feature of Hausa weddings is the songs that accompany them. Traditionally, these songs were heralded by claps and beating of calabashes for music, but those traditional folk songs have gradually been replaced with some other forms of songs and entertainment. The recent trends came with new innovations where musical accessories are different from the traditional ones. Previously also, those wedding songs were monotonous and applicable to all brides. Songs like *Ayye Mama*, *Ayyaraye Daure Jure* and so on, are classic examples of those monotonous wedding songs. Now, apart from the use of modern musical instruments which also gave birth to new dance steps, there is also the personalization of these songs, where you find singers singing for a particular couple, their families and friends.

This shift that saw the gradual phasing out of the traditional folk wedding songs could be said to have started when singers like Barmani Coge, Uwale Mai Amada and a couple of others began singing at wedding ceremonies, closely followed by male singers and dancers like Mande Marafa mai ‘Yantsuntsu, Mai Asharalle, Fati Niger, Sa’adatu Ta’annabi, up to the recent male dominated forum of singers like Ado Gwanja, Nazir SarkinWaka, Nura M. Inuwa, Ali Jita and so many others. This paper focuses on the analysis of wedding songs sung by this new generation of singers and how they tend to incorporate into these songs, some values and traditions that are fast becoming extinct. This new generation of singers usually use technology empowered instruments, such as pianos and computers to produce their music.

One cannot talk about the Hausa people without talking about their culture. The elements of culture and tradition of Hausa people are quite numerous, because they consist of all the things that the Hausa people do and all those things that they have been used to doing because they were inherited from their forefathers. According to Bunza, the Hausa culture began experiencing some changes from when the Hausa man started interacting with non-Hausas or foreigners to Hausaland, as well as people of different religions that differ from the traditional religion of the Hausa man. Due to this, one can look at the Hausa culture through three different

perspectives: pure traditional culture, culture that has been mixed with religion, and culture that has been mixed with modernity.

Hausa culture and tradition go hand in hand with its literature, especially its oral literature, which is naturally where literature started. It is through this literature that one can deduce the actual traditional way of life of the Hausa people and that is why scholars see literature as a picture or mirror through which one can see the culture or way of life of a certain people. Different people have different cultures; that is, the way they live, their social hierarchy, their thinking, as well as their beliefs, and it is only through their various literatures that one can see and differentiate between them.

The traditions associated with marriage could be said to have started since when the Hausa man was living his life in accordance with his traditional religion or *Maguzanci*, as asserted by Abdullahi (2008) After the coming of Islam however, according to Ibrahim, these traditions saw some changes where those that did not conform to Islam were discarded, while those that were seen as okay were retained. Such are the ones now referred to as the culture and tradition of the Hausa man. However, after interacting with non-Hausa who come from far and near Hausaland, cultures began to intermix and the Hausa culture saw the infiltration and acceptance of foreign cultures. So many new things were added to the culture and some of the traditional ones which were inherited from the forefathers were discarded. This also resulted in the modernity now being experienced, which is threatening to send the traditional Hausa culture into extinction.

Traditional Hausa folklore includes folksongs, folktales, riddles, myths, legends, proverbs and some forms that are performed during marriage ceremonies, naming and funeral rights, and some other ones that relate to leadership and system of daily living, as previously explained. In the presentation of marriage ceremony, songs are performed which portray the actual way of life of the Hausa people, and it is through these songs that the perception of the Hausa people towards marriage, rights and duties of the spouses, are depicted just like in the songs *Wakar Aure*, *Wakar Jere* and other regular songs like *Ayye Mama* and *Ke kika ce Kina So*, all in Alhassan et al (12-14).

Gusau (2014) is of the view that Hausa culture and tradition paved the way for the emergence of folksongs because it is through the observation of the nature of the happenings, the thinking of the people and the creatures in the environment and the general way of life of the people, that spurred and inspired those people who form songs, especially wedding songs. Scholars however, made the assertion that Hausa oral songs originated from the time Hausa people started hunting on land and in water, up to the time they started farming and other economic activities.

One cannot say precisely when songs started, but it is for sure one of the ways through which a Hausa man portrays his bravery, happiness, enjoyment, as well as his sadness. The Hausa wedding song as a subgenre of folksong is held in high esteem, as it is within the songs that a lot of lessons are taught to the bride and the general society, as it makes more sense than just sitting the bride down and explaining things to her. Songs help in easy comprehension and retention of lessons embedded within them.

Before the emergence of the use of calabashes, songs were heralded by claps, but subsequently, after the calabashes, various types of drums such as *duma* and *kalangu* emerged. Since the Hausa society is also a dynamic one, the traditional mode of songs and musical instruments are gradually being phased out and replaced by other modern instruments such as pianos, drums, guitars and other modern and foreign instruments, so that they can flow into the new trend of songs. It is in line with this observation that we find it necessary to explore these modern trends in the Hausa wedding songs.

### Hausa Wedding Songs

Women in Hausaland have different types and forms of songs that they sing or present in their different day-to-day activities and this applies to both young girls and older women. The small girls usually start with songs that are performed during moonlight games or on a particular spot chosen for such games which is referred to as *dandali*; such songs are called *wakokin gada* or *bojo*. Apart from these, there are other different forms of songs that both young girls and women perform in different places or during different occasions like ceremonies, festivals or other traditional events or rituals, or particular events like weddings, religious events, such as *Sallar Takutaha*, while supplicating to God for rains, *Tashe* during Ramadan (the Islamic fasting period); and even while performing their house chores so that they keep entertained or use the songs as a medium through which they send their heartfelt messages of joy or sorrow.

In most cases, women present their songs to entertain or to admonish the bride on the things that relate to a girl's life right from when she is in her father's house, up to the time of marriage, where she is taught how to live peacefully with her husband, his family, her in-laws and other people around her. She is also admonished on how to carry out her chores and other day-to-day activities. Sometimes, it is the stage songs that are converted to wedding songs during wedding ceremonies. There are, however, some songs that are composed specifically for the wedding. For instance, songs that depict a tinge of sadness due to parting with the bride, which otherwise are referred to as farewell songs – songs like *Ayye mama* and others are

good examples.

In those days, these types of song were performed just like the *gada* songs; that is with clapping and dancing. As time went by, things like calabash, mortar and any other item that could be beaten to produce sound, were used for music for more entertainment.

### Modern Hausa Wedding Songs

Hausa women wedding songs have witnessed quite a number of changes due to how time is fast changing and progressing, as well as due to mixing up with other people's cultures and traditions. Prior to now, as earlier mentioned, songs were introduced and performed alongside clapping as musical accompaniment. With time, the use of some other items, such as calabashes and the likes to produce music, emerged. This type of music was traditionally done indoors by women who also used sticks to beat the calabashes for better sound. Subsequently, some women decided to use this type of music and singing as a business through which they earn their daily bread. According to Usman in her thesis on Barmani Coge Mai Amada, on how she started singing with calabash music, the singer said she did not inherit the business, and neither did she learn it from someone. She said she was just at a wedding ceremony where she noticed that the women were sitting quietly and looking sort of bored, so, she instantly thought of entertaining them and so asked for a calabash which she started beating and singing at the same time. The women felt happy and entertained and even showered her with gifts. Since then, she started being invited to weddings or naming ceremonies to entertain people. Her husband objected at the initial stage, but since she was always bringing home goodies, he had to let her be. It was later on that she got other women to assist her in beating the calabashes and echoing the chorus. With the advent of modernity, these songs began to change in style, where women were previously at the forefront in that business, men have now gradually taken over. These new sets of singers, that is, the males, now go to studios to record songs, using modern musical instruments and sell them in the form of CDs or Mp3s. Sometimes, people who can afford it even invite them to come and perform live during their weddings. Others would prefer to give the singers a list of names comprising those of the bride, the groom, their parents, friends and relatives, so that they compose and record songs specifically for them. This group of singers shall be the main focus of this paper.

### Theoretical Framework

The paper aims at exploring the contexts of modernity and tradition, as embedded in the songs. For this reason, the contextual theory will serve as the theoretical

framework for this research. The contextual theory focuses attention not only on a material of folklore, but also on the event in which a tradition is performed or communicated. The advocates of this theory put a lot of interest in the cultural, sociological, psychological and linguistic environment in which a particular folklore material is produced. The folklore material is thus viewed from its context in language, behaviour, expression, communication and performance.

The oral-formulaic theory of Parry and Lord, for the first time in the long history of folklore scholarship, attached great significance to the context of folklore texts, attention to context as it were, was a byproduct of their main quest: to search for the formulas that singers learn and memorize to continue the tradition of the art of story-telling. Thus, despite the significance this theory attached to the context of epic singing traditions, oral-formulaic theory remains primarily a text-oriented theory. However, one should not lose sight of the emphasis this theory laid on studying context which eventually gained momentum and appeared in the form of a separate and forceful theoretical tool known as the “Contextual Theory”.

### Methodology

The data for this paper was collected through Moving Picture Expert Group Layer 3 (MP3s). Free and literal translations would be adopted in translating the original Hausa songs into English. The former allows a translator to use his/her own initiatives to bring out what may be regarded as the actual message from the source language, while the latter allows a translator to substitute a word or sentence from the receptor language. The verses of the songs selected are composed by a number of singers; namely, Ali Jita, Nura M.Inuwa, Ado Gwanja and Umar M. Shareef. The titles of the songs are: *Ga Amarya* (Here is the bride termed as Jita) by Ali Jita, *Ina Amarya* (Where is the Bride termed as Inuwa) by Nura M Inuwa, *Sabuwar Amarya* (New Bride termed as Gwanja) by Ado Gwanja, and *Babbar Rana* (The Great Day termed as Shareef) by Umar M Shareef.

### Analysis

In this section, the verses from the various songs that talk about the same themes are presented in their original Hausa version alongside the English translation and discussed together.

#### 1. Religion

Na sa Ubangijina mai duniya  
I pray to Allah, Lord of the worlds  
Sarkin da shi ke mini lafiya

The King who keeps me healthy  
 Ya ba ni baiwa ga ta kun jiya  
 He bestowed me with this gift  
 Gare shi sai dai inyi godiya  
 My gratitude goes only to Him  
 Alhamdulillah Sarki daya  
 All praise be to Allah, the only Lord  
 Roƙo nake ka dadan juriya  
 I pray to Allah to give me more strength  
 Waka ta auren so zan biya  
 I intend to compose a song for love marriage  
 Sunnar Ma'aiki mai juriya  
 The Sunnah of the resilient Messenger  
 Manzonmu shi yayi gwagwarmaya  
 Our Prophet who struggled to see  
 Muke ta numfashi duniya  
 That we survived on this earth  
 A yau wafanda su suke kwaikwaya  
 And today, he's being emulated  
 Miji da mata sun zama ɗaya  
 The husband and wife have become one  
 (Shareef)

Abunda Rabbana ya hukunta  
 As ordained by our Lord the most high  
 Da namiji shi zai auri mata  
 Man it is that marries the woman  
 Sunna ku je ku raya  
 Go on and uplift the sunnah  
 (Inuwa)

The religion and culture of the Hausa people are intertwined. Islam encourages people to always remember and mention Allah in all their dealings. This is also a common practice with the Hausa written songs, which gave roots to the modern oral songs, where songs begin with a doxology. Nowadays, these modern songs are usually written before they are sung. The mention of “sunnah” reflects the cultural and religious context of Hausa weddings, where Islamic traditions and values play a significant role. Sunnah is the way of life of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, (peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him). The mention of Sunnah, therefore, indicates that the union follows Islamic tradition and also highlights the religious significance of the occasion. The verses underscore the significance of upholding cultural practices and principles in the marital relationship.

## 2. Self-praise

*Kin ji jita na kada a babbar harka*

Listen to the guitar being played at the grand wedding

*Kin ji ganga tamu munyi mai albarka*

Listen to the beats of our blessed drums

*Ni kidana bai rufe ma kowa kofa*

My music is for all generations

(Jita)

*Ya amarya shigo shigo da kawayenki*

O dear bride, come in along with your friends

*Ku taho ku iske Gwanja mawakinki*

Come in and meet Gwanja, your singer

(Gwanja)

*Da tamburana na buga ina kidi*

Ni Shareef Umar mai wakar gidan kidi

(Shareef)

*Har nayi abunda zai sa ki burga*

I'll make you stand out

*Bikinki duk gari sai ya dauka*

Your wedding will be the talk of town

*Da an ganan a ce ba ki tamka*

When they see me they'll know that you're special

*Ni ne nazo da kaina*

I came to the wedding in person

(Inuwa)

Another traditional aspect taken up by modern songs is the act of self-praise and mentioning of the singer's name within the songs. This is also as a result of following the culture of writing the lyrics first before singing. However, the traditional act of mentioning names at the beginning or end of a song that was done as a result of

following the Islamic or Arabian way of writing written songs, is not the sole reason for doing so now. These singers usually do it for the sake of informing and inviting them for further references. It serves as a sort of advertisement. Sometimes, they even read out their phone numbers in case anyone wants to contact them. This act of mentioning names is evident in the verses above.

3. Modern trends  
*Yau ga amarya nan ga angonta*  
The bride is here, so is the groom  
*Yasa hannunsa ne ya rike ta*  
Coming in hand in hand  
(Inuwa)

*Ga amarya ku ganta gimbiya mai kunya*  
Here comes the bride, beautiful and bashful  
*To ku duba, ga ta nan da angon nata*  
Here she comes, along with her groom  
(Jita)

*Ya amarya shigo da kawayenki*  
O bride, come along with your friends  
(Gwanja)

Traditionally, the events that surround wedding ceremonies do not entail any event where both the bride and the groom come out amidst the gathering of people to dance or just stand for people to stare at them and admire them. This is a modern trend where events such as *Kamu*, Luncheon, Dinner, are featured along the long lists of events slated for the ceremony. During such events, the bride and the groom usually come in after almost all the guests have been seated, in what they term as the grand entrance of the couple. This is very much different from what is known traditionally. The Hausa bride is supposed to exude modesty, bashfulness, and be self-effacing, contrary to what is seen today where brides come out with tight-fitting dresses and see-through veils that do not cover anything. The groom would hitherto be angry and show his jealousy if anyone complimented the beauty of his bride; but nowadays, it is the opposite.

## 4. Communal Celebration

*Dangi da kawaye, abokai*

O relatives and friends

*Ku zo muyi murna*

All come let's celebrate (Shareef)

*Murna da karuwa in ta samu*

As we rejoice and celebrate

*Farin ciki ku zo ku taya mu*

Come you all and felicitate with us

(Inuwa)

*Duk sanadinki an tara al'umma*

All have gathered solely for you

*To shiga taron gida ya kankama*

The celebration is at its peak, come and join

(Gwanja)

*To yara-yara, manya-manyai sai kun taka*

Old and young, all come and dance

*Mai kudade yau a hannu sai ya jefa*

Those with money must spray it today

(Jita)

Hausa people value the ties of kinship, friendship and neighbourliness very much. Whenever there is a celebration of any kind, relatives and friends come together to show their joy and happiness with the celebrants. The verses emphasize the communal aspect of weddings. The participation of "old and young" and the call for everyone to dance, highlight the importance of shared joy and unity. The act of spraying money, a common practice at Nigerian weddings, further emphasizes the communal wealth and generosity. The core is the joy and excitement surrounding a wedding.

## 5. Advice on gender roles

*Tilas amarya sai kin biyayya*

O bride, you must be subservient

(Inuwa)

*Za tayi wa Ango biyayya*  
 She'll be subservient to the groom  
*Waje na girki bata da sanya*  
 She'll not delay in cooking meals  
 (Shareef)

*Eh, ni dai nasiha zan ba ki*  
 Yes, I have come to advice you  
*Ko in miki shawara daukar daki*  
 Or to admonish you will be better  
 (Gwanja)

Wedding ceremonies are usually avenues where pieces of advice are given by almost everyone. The singers are not left out. The advice givers usually try to point out specific gender roles and offer examples where such roles are practiced. The verses above offer practical advice to the bride on how to navigate her marriage successfully. They offer specific advice, particularly for the bride, on the need for being obedient, as well as a good cook, as a typical Hausa wife is expected to be. The emphasis is on respect and obedience, which contribute to maintaining social order. Sometimes, even the groom is not left out in this line of advice. He is also advised on how to live with his new wife, how to take care of her and a host of other things. They are both advised on moral behaviour, how to settle their scores, as well as how not to involve other people in their private life. They are generally advised on how to live a successful married life. Examples of verses that advise the groom are:

*Ya rike ta, kai miji kula da amarya*  
 The husband it is, who takes care of the bride  
*Gode Allah, ango sai ka dinga sana'a*  
 Get a job and always thank God  
 (Jita)

Here, the groom is reminded of his responsibility as the husband to wholly take care of his wife, hence the need for him to have a job or a business so as to have the financial means to take up that responsibility.

6. Farewell

*Yau Amarya, za ki kwana babban daki*

Today you are going to sleep in the big room  
*Sallama dai za kiyi wa dangin naki*  
 Say goodbye to your relatives  
*Sallama dai za kiyi wa Mama taki*  
 Say goodbye to your mother  
*Kun yi bai-bai addu 'a ake yi don ki*  
 You're leaving today, everyone is praying for you  
*Daina kuka, ke amarya ba a raki*  
 Stop crying o' Bride, be brave  
 (Jita)

*Bankwana muke miki, more zamanki lafiya banda zama a firgici*  
 Today we say farewell, enjoy your marriage and live in peace  
*Ke da iyayenki, ke da kawayenki, da mawaƙinki, kuyi bankwana*  
 Bid farewell to your parents, your friends, and your singer  
 (Gwanja)

Wedding ceremony in a Hausa society reaches its peak on the day the bride is to be taken to her groom's house. It is on this day that the bride cries her eyes out, because of the pains of leaving her family behind. She also cries because of the sad goodbyes that are happily sung on that day. Traditionally, the songs are sung as the bride's entourage leaves the bride's father's house up to the time they reach the groom's house. These songs are known as farewell songs in Hausa land. They are labeled so, because the theme of farewell predominates in these songs. Nowadays, farewell only comes up as a theme in the songs which are also sung at various events lined up for the wedding, not necessarily on the day the bride is to be conveyed to her new home. In conclusion, this analysis illustrates the rich complexity of themes found within contemporary Hausa wedding songs, demonstrating their significant cultural, religious and social implications. The use of both free and literal translations facilitates a deeper understanding of the nuances embedded within the original Hausa verses, allowing us to appreciate the intricate relationship between language and meaning.

The exploration of themes such as religion, self-praise, modern trends, communal celebration, gender roles and farewell, showcases the multifaceted nature of Hausa weddings. These songs not only serve as a reflection of the traditional values and beliefs inherent in the Hausa culture, but also highlight the shifts brought about by modern influences. The intertwining of religion and culture, particularly the emphasis on Islamic traditions, highlights the profound impact of spirituality in the

lives of the Hausa people.

Moreover, the evolving practices surrounding weddings—such as the grand entrance of the bride and groom—illustrate a dynamic cultural landscape that balances respect for tradition with contemporary expressions of identity. The emphasis on communal celebration illuminates the collective joy that accompanies such significant life events, reinforcing the importance of kinship, friendship and neighborliness in Hausa society.

Furthermore, the advice on gender roles and the expectations placed on brides and grooms reflect the enduring norms that dictate marital relationships, emphasizing the roles of respect, obedience and care that both partners are encouraged to uphold. Lastly, the poignant farewell songs highlight the emotional weight of marriage transitions, capturing the bittersweet essence of leaving one's family to start anew.

As we delve into the lyrics and meanings, it becomes clear that these songs are not merely entertainment; they are vital cultural artifacts that preserve historical practices, convey moral teachings, and foster communal bonds. The evolution of these musical expressions signals the continual interplay between tradition and modernity, making them a compelling subject for further study in the realms of anthropology, linguistics and cultural studies. Through this paper, we gain a greater insight into how the Hausa wedding songs encapsulate the essence of their society, celebrating both the continuity and transformation of their cultural heritage.

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# **Class and Disability as Environmental Issues in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Love of an Angel***

**CHIAMAKA AMALACHUKWU UGOKA**

## **Abstract**

Over the years, African literatures have showcased various unbearable problems seen in the environment. Among the represented ill-treatment is degradation of living and non-living beings in the surroundings. This inhuman devastation that is being meted out to both humans and non-humans is caused by man. Apparently, one of the reasons for this ill-behaviour is the amount of valuable material possession the person has to his or her name. This, in turn, incapacitates the individual in the environment. Hence, there is environmental injustice. To avoid examining previous studies, this research investigates class and disability as environmental issues in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Love of an Angel*. Subsequently, class is the system of placing individuals into groups, that the yardstick for placement depends on the individual's level of socio-economic status, occupation, education, lifestyle, income, accumulated assets, among others. On the other hand, disability is a cultural construct about human bodies, human economic status, human position, human identity, to mention but a few, that the cultural construct ends up handicapping the individual. Thus, this makes them have slight or no chances of survival to attain a good standard of living, owing to the cultural construct that yields inordinate behaviours of human in the environment. Moreover, disability literary theory that fights against human action, which disembodies individuals in the environment is used to underscore this qualitative research. This study unravels that the family environment Olachi finds herself in (that is, Mrs Chendo's household) disables her through a class system that perpetuates human degradation. However, it is crucial to note that the literary writer uses class to represent environmental disability.

**Keywords:** African Literature, Class System, Disability Studies, Eco-Critical Studies, Family Environment

## **Introduction**

One of the functions of literature is to bemoan attitudinal vices in the environment.

Hence, these nebulous actions are caused by man, the actions in turn, derail or obstruct the healthy living of both human and non-human nature in the environment. Ekwueme-Ugwu affirms that environmental injustices have become a recurring situation represented in African literatures of the twenty-first century (130-131). Consequently, this is to fight against dominance behaviours of man towards both living and non-living being in the environment. These inhuman dispositions are exhibited according to where the society has categorized the individual. The portrayal of this abusive action is because of the individual's background, which is known as class. According to Oyekola and Oyeyipo, class is an arrangement of people according to the societal system of arrangement (133). Mouser asserts that it is economic categorization of individual in society (1-2). In view of this concept, class is the ordering or the placement of individuals, according to their earnings, that disadvantages those that their earning is meagre. In other words, those from poor or low socio-economic background are being subjected to unkind treatment in the environs by man. This disfigures their social identity, which makes them experience social disablement, which is disability. According to Davidson, disability is the attitude exhibited by social organization that restricts activities of some people in the vicinities (6-7). Sandahl and Auslander assert that it is social exclusion meted out to categories of people in the surrounding because of the society's unwillingness to accept their class (7-10). Conceptually on this study, disability is societal-generated behavior that creates barriers in the environment.

In alignment to the above stated opinions, different academic researchers on environment and disability have shown the inter-relatedness of both studies. On the one hand, eco-critical writer Egya displays that the viewpoints of environmental criticism is not limited to one environmental concern because eco-critics like Cajetan Iheka, Fatima Fiona Moolla, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Rob Nixon, to mention but a few, have incorporated all issues of post-coloniality into eco-criticism (1-11). In the introduction with sub-title "Itineraries of African Ecocriticism and Environmental Transformations in African Literature" of the special edition of *African Literature Today* 38, with the theme "Environmental Transformations". It was revealed that since the publication of "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses" and Anthony Vital's "Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and Life & Times of Michael K", eco-critical writings have moved tremendously to encompass other emerging issues in the environment (Iheka and Newell 1-10). Gulfishaan and Durafshaan note that any literary portrayed matter in the environment is the sole aim of eco-criticism (504-505).

On the other hand, Emmanuel proposes that literary depictions of disability highlight other environmental issues. (77-81). Another scholar reveals that fictional narratives of disability are used to actualize positive change in the environment (Lara 3). Davis in his research concluded that all literary works, whether devoid or not devoid of impaired character, always depict imaginary society that is beclouded with disablement (44). Through his investigation, Yaro discovers that disability representations often address pressing issues prevalent in independent nations, including dominant-subordinate dynamics, male-controlled communities, leadership ineptitude, and economic struggles (39).

Apart from portraying inter-relatedness, these previous studies have shown that there is a gap that needs to be filled in research. This is to determine how barrier creation faced by individuals from lower class handicaps them in the environs they find themselves. In lending more credence to this study, individuals who subject their fellow human beings to suffering because of their class, disable the victims. This exploitative activity of man disables life in the environment. African literary writers have represented this disheartening situation in order to exterminate its practice. Thence, this qualitative study uses the disability literary theory to analyse class and disability as environmental issues in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Love of an Angel*.

#### Review of Related Literature

Scholars have deliberated on class. Mouser elucidates that social location is among the factors that form class (12-13). Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is among the factors necessary for class formation, socio-economic status determines the social location of a class, which also helps to contribute to issues in the environment. Oyekola and Oyeyipo argue that class is not based on ascription, but achievement (133). Apparently, it is based on achievement because it is determined by acquired possession. Moreover, Davidson states that disability focuses on the social aspect of disablement (6). Subsequently, this is among the tenets of disability literary theory. Sandahl and Auslander affirm that it treats how societal laws and structures incapacitate individuals in society (8). Consequently, it leads to environmental issues. In addition, Ekwueme-Ugwu elucidates that dreadful activities of man towards man and nature have become an environmental issue (131-134). Similarly, it disables them in the environment. Olughu notes that eco-critical study helps to reveal abnormalities seen in the environment, which in turn, become environmental issues (1-2). However, disability study also reveals environmental issues.

In addition to the above, Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Love of an Angel* is yet to receive much critical attention by literary critics. Ujowundu in his essay titled

“Man’s Inhumanity to Man in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika’s *Love of an Angel*”, asserts that the novel treats man’s inhumanity to man which is exhibited through selfishness, greed and hubris (161-172). This notwithstanding, the novel also discusses environmental subordination meted out to individuals. Chukwumezie, T. M. E. in his blurb, emphasizes that the literary work tells of the sufferings a girl child faces in life. Consequently, the sufferings disable them in the environment. Nzerem, T. A. N. added to the blurb by saying that African fiction unravels the bad experiences children face in life. Moreover, the bad experiences disable them in the environment they find themselves. In another blurb by Egbuta, Ikechukwu Otuu states that the story showcases daily struggles. However, it showcases the daily struggles of man in the environment. Again, Nneoma Otuegbe’s blurb asserts that literary art delves into narrating the realistic travails of children who are not living with their parents. Furthermore, these travails lead to environmental issues. Another blurb states that the creative oeuvre calls for sober reflection of man to re-examine their attitudes towards others. Apparently, the creative oeuvre advocates environmental consciousness (Abba A. Abba).

#### Class and Disability as Environmental Issues in *Love of an Angel*

Literary writers and critics have treated ecological degradation, which focuses on depletion of nature in the environment. This is due to the fact that human beings see themselves as lords over everything on earth and as being beyond criticism. This mental inclination therefore instigates man into portraying selfish desires in his relationship with the environment. Subsequently, this inhuman treatment gravely disables man, fauna, flora, air, water, among others, in all ramifications. Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika in *Love of an Angel* represented the adverse effects of unguided human disposition on the existence of living beings in the environment. Olachi, a girl child, finds herself in an environment that plunders her. This becomes an unbearable dehumanization for her. Obviously, the environment is Mrs. Chendo’s household where Mrs. Chendo and her children subject Olachi to disability because of her class. Its outcome becomes detrimental to her healthy living in the environment.

In Mrs. Chendo’s household, she is not allowed to enjoy the free gift of nature from God. This is seen when she “. . . always wakes up as early as four-thirty in the morning to do the unending house chores” (10). This unending house chores end “. . . when the whole family must have slept off peacefully and soundly” (11). Olughu demonstrates that mistreatment of man and nature by man fosters an unsafe environment (32-33). Even the small time fashioned for her to sleep, she does not enjoy nature that “After eating the take-and-don’t-kill-me-with-eyes-size of food, she is made to rest her body and soul in the kitchen” (11). This is because “Often she

spends sleepless nights trying to ward off the strange sized types of rats playing chess and hide and seek game in the kitchen” (11). It becomes a lucrative activity for the rats that they “... soon grew to like her company. Even a newly born . . . [mouse] seems to anticipate meeting her and enjoy her weaning chase all around the kitchen” (11). Hence, human degradation. Chim elucidates that ecological inquiry has evolved into a multi-disciplinary research focus, now examining social vices that hinder both human and non-human nature within the environment (43-44).

This disability is born out of the forced class which is poor class that she is categorized into by Mrs. Chendo’s household, which, in turn, creates human degradation. This does not allow her to watch the odyssey movie showing on the television in the living room. She quickly “... left the room for the safety of her skin. If she was ever caught peeping into the television, she would have bought a free ticket to her grave” (7). The enforced disability on her through class that yields human degradation “... made her body more mature like that of an eighteen-year-old girl. The suffering has a way of adding six more years to her actual year any time you come across her” (9). Whereas she “... was a young girl of about fourteen years old ...” (9). Mouser explains that the experiences of people from the upper class differ from those of the lower class (1-2). This human degradation is at such an extreme level that they give her rags as clothes to wear, which are tagged Miriam clothes. Nevertheless, there is “... nothing like Miriam clothes but pieces of rags, worn-out and tattered clothes made from [Mrs. Chendo’s] out dated wrappers” (48). Also, “At her age, she still cuts her hair with a razor blade.... She derives pleasure in pounding her face just to disfigure her beauty” (9-10). This human degradation that disables her in Mrs. Chendo’s house due to her class, makes Mrs. Chendo to give her “. . . a standing order, to finish all the loaves of bread, which she always sells at market. It was an abomination for her to return home with a single loaf of bread” (10). Hence:

One needs to see her struggling under the scorching sun, bare-footed with a weary and tattered body drenched with sweat all in her bid to finish the loaves of bread she took to the market. This made her pass with a nauseating body odour. Olachi almost put her legs on thorns daily just to complete the sales of about sixty-to-eighty loaves of bread she carries to the market every day. She lurks in all the corners of the streets and markets in order to see what providence has in store for her and to make a good sale. (10)

This human degradation being meted out to her “... baffle some of the close neighbours on why she was being subjected to such cruel pains and injustices when her aunty, her so-called benefactress has enough to keep any large family going” (10). The human degradation she experiences because of her class incapacitates her in all the times of the day. After all, upon her encountered stress in selling bread, she

comes back home to face another stress. The environment disables her freedom of expression or speech that she cannot tell or beg Mrs. Chendo to rest for some time. On one occasion, she comes back home after selling loaves of bread, she is not able to come back home on time because “It had rained earlier in the day and that prevented her from selling her goods at ease, yet the thought of what will happen to her at home made her wander farer into the streets” (11). Luckily she “... did manage to finish her sales, but that was late in the evening” (11). On that fateful day, the house chores are enormous for her to complete on time. She has to “...boil *ede* for her and get it ready for soup. There is also *ora* in the fridge she said you should ‘kpaccha ya’ .... Mummy said you should fetch water and fill the tank outside and then wash all the clothes she kept outside” (12-13). She also has to clean the whole house. These environmental issues remind her thence:

... where she had held her mother’s wrapper in the village stream, playing the goddess of the river. She saw herself splashing water with her fellow children and laying bare their bodies to the hot sun that seemed only to smile at them. She saw the freedom, the freedom of a thousand doves in the air, the freedom of the insects, the crickets in the forest, the freedom of the jumping frogs, the freedom of the fishes in the river. Such freedom she will never experience again. Her lips widened as if to laugh but it ended up in solemn and heart-touching tears. (17)

In addition to the human degradation that disables her due to her class, Junior and Nwabunnaya also leave the “... living-room as scattered as the hair of a dirty old woman, left-over foods were littered all over the floor. Nwabunnaya and Junior were playing volley ball in the living room scattering everything as they play” (12). She did not finish the house chores before Mrs. Chendo came back from work, due to the enormity of the house chores. She finishes other house chores except the clothes she is washing that includes Mrs. Chendo’s progressive women uniform, she will wear the next day for their meeting by 9 O’ clock and the kitchen she will clean, which she purposely decides to clean after dinner. When Mrs. Chendo comes back from work and notices that she is still washing the clothes. Hence:

With a little pounding on her face, she turned over the whole bucket of water on the young girl’s body. Providence was on her side to escape the iron-bucket directed towards her head. It was made to smash her useless skull as Mama Junior often describes it. The iron-bucket covered her head. Before Olachi could remove the bucket that covered her face, Mama Junior was almost through with her music practice and drum beating exercise on her body. The iron-bucket really dealt with her face. The beating was nothing compared with the pains all over her head. (15-16)

She is not satisfied with it and still thinks of what to do to her “Skin her alive? Set her ablaze? Break her waist? Cut off her breasts? Thrash her like a beast? Hang her? Tie her to a stalk?” (16). Still pondering on how to subject her to disability, she thinks of putting “... pepper in her anus and private part; after all, she had done that on two occasions. That was the day the soup got sour under her care and the day she lost her money! Who cares? Nobody!” (16). Oyekola and Oyeyipo unravel that class makes some categories of individuals encounter poor quality life (133). Finally, she decides that Olachi should sleep outside the house by telling her “I don’t want to see you inside the house until these uniforms are dried” (16). Whereas she “... had another uniform why would she be so heartless to make her sleep in the cold just to dry the other one?” (59). Siebers reveals that social environment handicaps individuals through oppression (4). This human degradation of sleeping outside enables the wind to use her as a football that “It was when she heard the rattling noise of her teeth and the rhythmic beat of her heart that she lets out a loud cry” (8). The next day Olachi enables “... dumbfounded ... [when] .... The woman wore a new red wrapper, exactly the progressive women uniform” (59).

Class and disability that are environmental issues for Olachi, yield human degradation but “The thought of schooling made Olachi listen attentively. That was the only reason she agreed to come to the city, for her father and her younger ones” (50), which becomes a mirage. Rather “She was confronted with unending house chores that sapped all her energy in her veins and made her an empty sack” (51). Ekwueme-Ugwu expresses that literary works also represent realities of despoliation caused by actions of man to both living and non-living beings (132-133). The day she asks Mrs. Chendo when she would start school instead she “... introduced [her] into the bread business .... You will start selling bread until you make enough money to start school. My business is bad and cannot accommodate your schooling” (53). Being degraded “Everything she did with the best of her knowledge [in that environment] seemed to be the worst thing she could ever do before her demi-god” (51).

The disability emanating from coming from the poor class makes her receive “... the flogging of her life the day Mama Junior came into the kitchen and saw a dark flame staining the corner of her pot” (51). Angrily, “... she gave her a push that landed her head on the wall. Olachi was still there mopping like a rat dashed on a concrete floor, when from nowhere *koboko* was raining all over her body” (51). Even when she explains “Mummy I am sorry. I didn’t mean to light it this ... high ... I am still getting used to ... it” (51). Mrs. Chendo “... continued until her strength was exhausted. Even Olachi too was tired of crying” (51). She is the one that cooks all the food to be eaten in the house “... but all she could eat were leftovers after the family had eaten

drunk to their satisfaction” (52). Asenath and Santhanalakshmi unravel that eco-critical studies concentrate on eliminating societal created barriers that disrupt environment and human harmony (1286). This human degradation also handicaps her freedom of speech in Mrs. Chendo’s household. Even when it is not her fault, she is blamed for it. One day, she puts water on the gas cooker to boil and goes out to buy bread and eggs for breakfast. The children are in the living-room when she goes out to buy bread and eggs. On her way back, she finds Junior in the kitchen, who has mistakenly pours the hot water on his left leg. Olachi, at the sight of that, quickly applies first aid on him by pouring egg and salt on his leg. Mrs. Chendo, without listening to her excuse that “... he was playing in the parlour when I left, I don’t know how he came to the kitchen” (53). Mrs. Chendo who has been subjecting Olachi to disability because of her class, tells her “How will you know? When all in your mind is evil, but before you will kill any of my children, I will kill you first.” With that, she made for the remaining hot water and spilled it over Olachi’s legs” (53). Lipenga discloses that the present state of an environment like war, marginalization, victimization, discrimination provide a disabling environment for the people (62-64).

Consequently, on the day hoodlums steal the money she earns from selling bread, Mrs. Chendo rejects her submission because she comes from a poor background. Moreover, Mrs. Chendo assumes that she has misused the money, spending it on frivolous things like hair styling. In the middle of the night, she locks the room and carries the “... hot surface of iron touched Olachi, she had leaped off like a wild pig, shouting on top of her voice . . . .” (55). Mrs. Chendo realizes that “. . . she was done with her body but still could not extract anything from her, she gave up her struggle” (56). Barnes pointed out that violence is associated with disability because it destroys human enablement in the community (25). The human degradation subjects to her because of her class which, in turn, disables her in the family environment reminds her of the former environment that has no environmental issues. Thus:

She saw herself in the forefront with the *nza*, that white horse tail, doing what she knew how best to do. She saw the laughter on her face, and laughed out tears. She saw herself in a circle on the floor with her brothers and sisters, doing justice to a huge pile of *fufu* and *egusi* soup. They will throw the balls of *fufu* up and down before eating it. It was all fun. She saw the whole family round their father listening to his sweet folktales about the tortoise and the squirrel, the tortoise and the dove, the tortoise and the lion. She remembered how she had laughed and fallen on her father when she learnt that the tortoise fell from the height and broke his shell. She had laughed when tortoise was taken away by his creditor. (60)

In her hunger to return to an environment untainted by human degradation, she "... wished she could still recognize her way . . . [to her family] but like one doomed with a spell, she had forgotten even the name of her town. As she thought about her childhood freedom [she experienced in her family environment], hot tears rolled down the more" (60-61). Subsequently, this human degradation because of her class that disables her, is not meted out to her only by Mrs. Chendo but by her children too. Junior and Nwabunwanne do subject her to disability in Mrs. Chendo's household. For instance, Junior tells her, "Mummy said you should stop talking to us. She said that you are smelling, hum. Junior mocked her by closing his nose" (13). Davidson notes that individuals who are subjected to disability by the society, encounter barrier that creates social limitation in the environment (4-8). Oliver, his first son is not left out, he has been trying various means to have her. He renders fake apologies and gives Olachi packet of rice and chicken, which "... he added a substantial amount of Indian hemp that was to make Olachi lose all control" (62). Then he zooms off to play video games in the living room. This is to await when she will enter his trap. Being that Olachi has not eaten the whole day, "After a while, the aroma of the food took no time to seduce Olachi" (62). He invests his cassava inside her. This affects her that she did not go out to sell bread. She cries all day when she wakes up and realizes she has been deflowered and nothing can be done again. Mrs. Chendo comes back from work and "... again put pepper in her private parts" (64) for not selling bread. Oliver a consoler indeed consoles her and makes his way again by investing his cassava in her and "That became a daily routine" (64).

This human degradation arising from environmental issues lead to pregnancy and being disabled because of her class, they reject her and the baby. Mrs. Chendo under the guise of taking "... you to the village to meet your father and apologize to him, and then we find out the marriage protocols and see if we can proceed" (98). All these promises are from the pit of hell. In addition, the dress, shoe and wig given to her are to cover her evil intentions. Sandahl and Auslander expiate that disability is the way the people in environment interact with the individuals around them that creates environmental disablement and not a physical condition (8). Mrs. Chendo drops her in the middle of nowhere with the one thousand five hundred naira she throws on her feet. Then tells her thus:

I picked you from the gutter and in the gutter I want to drop you. My son will never ever marry a cheap whore like you. So from here you can find the way to your village and go and deliver the stupid thing in your womb. Let me never see you in my house again, or that will be your last! Well you will never ever locate me. We are four states away from where I live. (102)

The disability the family environment has bestowed on her because of her class, which creates environmental issues that yields human degradation, becomes a heavy burden to remove. Snyder and Mitchell contributed by saying that communities beclouded with class and racial thinking or actions weaken man's enablement in society (111). At last, in all her efforts to overcome the effects of environmental issues being meted out to her by Mrs. Chendo because of her class, which in turn, disables her, and create human degradation. Neither did she see her family again nor Mrs. Chendo's household. She is being degraded to death by motor-car accident. St. Albert's Hospital the masses rush her to couldn't restore her back to life because she has lost so much blood and "... she had no medical attention from the way the baby sat precariously in her womb" (233). The narrator in his story reveals that Mrs. Chendo's household or family environment has been environment that creates environmental issues for people from lower class which in turn disable them. People "... like Miriam, like Isabela . . . ." (63) . . . and Enuma" (47).

### Conclusion

The textual illustration of this essay has shown that Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Love of an Angel* explores class and disability as environmental issues. In other words, how class disables individuals becomes an environmental issue. Moreover, this qualitative research incorporates disability literary theory for its investigation. The analysis of this study reveals that the disability enforced on Olachi through class, creates human degradation. Thus, Mrs. Chendo's household, in other words, family environment becomes an environment that handicaps individuals from the lower class, which in turn, creates environmental disability.

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# **Child Narration and Trauma in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation***

**ADAOBI OLIVIA IHUEZE  
&  
IKE BLESSING CHIDIMMA**

## **Abstract**

This study examines child narration and trauma in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN). Through the voice of innocence, child narrators serve as powerful literary devices for confronting harsh social realities, while their traumatic experiences, shaped by violence and exploitation, offer a deep exploration of psychological distress. The perceived innocence and vulnerability of children grant them a unique narrative authority, allowing them to expose controversial truths with a degree of immunity. Using trauma theory as an offshoot of psychoanalytic theory, this study draws on the insights of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. Caruth's perspective emphasizes the complex, elusive, and delayed nature of trauma, while Herman highlights the process of healing. The analysis reveals that the child protagonists in both novels endure extreme psychological and physical abuse at the hands of their superiors, making them both victims and witnesses to violence. Their narratives not only reflect personal suffering but also serve as mechanisms for emotional catharsis and societal critique. This research contributes to the broader discourse on child narration and trauma theory, offering fresh critical perspectives on how literature portrays the psychological effects of war and abuse. It underscores the effectiveness of child narration in exposing uncomfortable societal truths and advocates its continued use as a literary tool for social commentary.

**Keywords:** Child narration, trauma, innocence, immunity, social realities

## **Introduction**

Literary criticism is an evolving discourse, as literary works continually generate new meanings based on readers' interpretations. Once a text is created, the critic functions as an intermediary between the work and its various interpretations. Northrop Frye (1957) highlights this role, asserting that "Literature has been a

marketable product, its producers being the creative writers and its consumers the cultivated readers, with the critics at their head. From this point of view the critic is ... the middleman” (19-20). This perspective highlights the dynamic nature of literary criticism, which enables scholars to analyze texts through different theoretical frameworks. This study examines Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) and Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN) through the lens of child narration and trauma theory, addressing a critical gap in scholarly discourse. By exploring the status of the child, the literary technique of child narration, and the psychological concept of trauma, this study demonstrates how both novels depict the exploitation and suffering of children in violent environments.

A child is typically understood as an individual who depends on parents, guardians, or society for survival and well-being. Legally, a child is recognized as a person below the age of majority. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2007) defines a child as "... every human being below the age of 18" (1). This definition situates both Birahima (*Allah is Not Obligated*) and Agu (*Beasts of No Nation*) within the category of childhood, reinforcing their roles as victims of war and social neglect. Childhood is often associated with innocence, honesty, vulnerability, and an unfiltered perception of reality. As noted in UNICEF’s *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2007), “The child is therefore recognized in his or her fundamental dignity and individuality, with the right to be different and diverge in his or her assessment of reality” (79). Recognizing childhood as a stage of vulnerability justifies global efforts to protect children from harm. Lansdown and Vaghi (2022) emphasize the need for such protections, stating, “... in recognizing that no form of violence against a child is acceptable, and asserting their fundamental human right to protection, these protection rights acknowledge the imperative for respecting the human dignity and integrity of the child” (291). This protective notion extends to literature, where child narrators serve as a means of exposing uncomfortable social realities, while evoking empathy from readers.

Child narration is a deliberate literary technique that employs a child protagonist to tell a story, offering a raw and often unfiltered perspective on complex social realities. African authors frequently use this approach to portray traumatic events with emotional intensity and honesty. Makokha (2019) observes that “Child narrators are an interesting choice because of the degree of emotions they inject in a story, which gives it an earnest tone and makes the reader want to empathize and sympathize with the narrator” (5540). The perceived innocence of child narrators allows them to serve as powerful conduits for examining war, oppression, and trauma. Orhero (2022) argues that “... child narrators are used agentially to represent

subalternity and that the child narrator's conception of reality is an important space for articulating the author's vision and politics" (2-3). This suggests that child narrators not only evoke sympathy, but also serve as significant figures in literary discourse, enabling authors to critique sociopolitical issues, without directly confronting them.

The effectiveness of child narrators is further supported by their reliability as witnesses to history. Orhero notes, that the child narrator is central to the construction of identity in fiction. Equally, Englund (2021) asserts that "The sheer number of ... novels featuring child narrators suggest that authors have deemed the child protagonist the more effective medium for commenting on and critiquing past and present developments" (890). Moreover, child narration fosters a universal appeal, making these stories accessible across cultures. Maksimovic (2018) explains, "... regardless of current age, gender, nationality, culture, or ideology, everyone was once a child and can, therefore, more easily relate to child narrators" (8). This universal connection strengthens the emotional impact of narratives told through child protagonists.

Additionally, child narration can serve as a strategic device that shields authors from potential backlash. Seraphinoff (2007) notes that "A child can, among other things, create a degree of distance between the adult author and his or her message that serves to lessen hostility to that message" (2). Thus, child narrators function as both emotional and political instruments in literature, providing an alternative lens for societal critique. Therefore, the exploration of child narration in these texts can be analyzed through trauma theory.

Trauma theory provides a crucial framework for analyzing the experiences of child narrators in *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) and *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN). Scholars such as Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, and Judith Herman have significantly contributed to the understanding of trauma and its lasting psychological effects. Sigmund Freud's work *Studies in Hysteria and Beyond the Pleasure Principle* links trauma to life-threatening events such as war and accidents. He describes traumatic neurosis as "A condition... which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life" (Freud, 1959, 6). Freud emphasizes that traumatic memories persist in the subconscious and manifest through dreams and recurring anxieties. He argues that victims continuously relive their traumatic experiences, making them unable to separate from the horrors of their past. Freud's association of trauma with accidents aligns with Roger Luckhurst's (2008) argument that trauma as a concept emerged with railway expansion in the 1860s, when doctors diagnosed "railway shock" in train crash victims.

Cathy Caruth builds on Freud's ideas, suggesting that trauma is characterized by a paradoxical state of knowing and not knowing. In *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), she argues that, "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event... but rather in the way that it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1996, 4). Caruth views trauma as amnesiac and contends that fiction provides an effective means of bearing witness to it. She asserts that trauma victims may initially forget their experiences but later suffer flashbacks and nightmares that force them to relive their past. Cathy Caruth (1996) also emphasizes that "Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (58). This stance is critical in understanding how child narrators in war narratives process and recount their experiences. Given their limited understanding of the world, their narratives often mix innocence with brutality, creating an unsettling yet profoundly moving account of trauma.

Judith Herman (1997) expands trauma theory by emphasizing storytelling as a therapeutic tool. She argues that "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (Herman, 1992, 1). Herman suggests that repeated trauma, particularly in childhood, shapes personality and fosters repression. She states, "Repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality" (Herman, 1997, 96). Her concept of "narrative cure" suggests that storytelling helps integrate traumatic experiences, facilitating recovery. She concludes, "The reconstruction of trauma is never completed, but when the 'action of telling a story' has come to its conclusion, the traumatic experience truly belongs to the past" (Herman, 1997, 195). This accentuates the transformative power of narrative in processing and overcoming trauma, reinforcing the significance of storytelling in trauma literature.

The experiences of Agu in *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN) and Birahima in *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) reflect the theories of Caruth and Herman. Both characters endure horrific traumas as child soldiers, witnessing and committing acts of violence beyond their comprehension. Their fragmented recollections and emotional detachment illustrate how trauma disrupts their psychological development.

### Significance of Child Narration in *Allah is Not Obligated* and *Beast of No Nation*

The use of child narration has become a prominent narrative strategy in contemporary African literature. However, this technique is not exclusive to African writers. Renowned English and African American novelists such as Charles Dickens and Richard Wright have employed child narrators in *Great Expectations* (1860) and *Black Boy* (1945), respectively. The use of child narration in literature serves a dual

purpose: first, it provides an intimate and unfiltered on events, and second, it presents these events with an authenticity that an adult narrator might compromise. Since children are often perceived as naïve, innocent, honest, and impartial, their accounts are imbued with a sense of credibility and emotional weight. This shows that the authorial use of child narrators/protagonists offers an intimate understanding of children's experiences in contexts of socio-political crisis. This standpoint aligns with the portrayal of child protagonists in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, (BONN) where child narrators vividly recount their traumatic experiences. This also portrays that African authors use child narrators to disclose the grim reality of cruelty, harshness, parental (particularly paternal) egocentrism and extraordinary bruising of the vulnerable child's experiences. This claim is reflected in the narratives of Birahima and Agu, who provide firsthand testimonies of the brutality and exploitation they endure. Thus, the function of child narrators in *Allah is Not Obligated* and *Beasts of No Nation* extends beyond storytelling; they serve as vessels for articulating collective trauma, allowing the reader to witness the psychological and emotional impact of war on the most vulnerable members of society.

One key characteristic of child narration is the display of innocence and inexperience. Child narrators often lack the refined perspectives of adults, leading to an unconventional and sometimes crude storytelling style. In *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO), Birahima uses multiple dictionaries to explain words, assuming that his readers may be just as unsophisticated as he perceives himself to be:

To make sure I tell you the life story of my fucked-up life in proper French, I've got four different dictionaries so I don't get confused with big words. First off, I've got the Larousse and the Petit Robert, then, second off, I've got the Glossary of the French Lexical Particularities in Black Africa, and, third off, I've got the Harrap's. The dictionaries are for looking up big words and checking big words and particularly for explaining big words. I need to explain stuff because I want all sorts of different people to read my bullshit: colonial toubabs, Black Nigger African Natives and anyone that can understand French. (AINO, 2000, 2).

Similarly, in *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN), Agu feels the need to clarify the meaning of certain expressions he learns from the rebel soldiers. His explanation of the phrase "zero zero one" illustrates his attempt to make sense of his surroundings, "We are waking up and walking around stretching our arm and leg, and we are all hungry. Nobody is eating. Everyone is doing zero zero one. I am not knowing what this is meaning before I am soldier, but now I am knowing that it means no breakfast, no lunch, only dinner" (BONN, 2005, 90). This limited linguistic sophistication

reinforces the authenticity of child narration, as the narrators struggle to comprehend and communicate the horrors of their reality.

Another significant feature of child narration is the moral struggle that young protagonists experience. Unlike adults, who might justify or rationalize their actions, child narrators often wrestle with ethical dilemmas in a way that highlights their innocence. In *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN), Agu is coerced into committing murder, yet his conscience torments him. Thus, he says:

I am starting to crying and I am starting to shaking. And in my head I am shouting NO! NO! NO! but my mouth is not moving and I am not saying anything. And I am thinking, if I am killing killing, then I am going to hell so I am smelling fire and smoke and it is harding to breath, so I am just standing there crying crying, shaking shaking, looking looking” (BONN, 2005, 18).

His fear of divine punishment reflects his moral consciousness, reinforcing his portrayal as an untainted victim of war. Similarly, Birahima’s candid admission of his own ignorance highlights his childlike innocence “I suppose I should apologise for talking right at you like this, on account of how I’m only a kid. I’m maybe ten, maybe twelve (two years ago, grandmother said I was eight, Maman said I was ten) and I talk too much” (AINO, 2000, 2).

Child narrators often provide an unfiltered perspective, revealing truths without reservation. Their bluntness and lack of emotional restraint make them effective literary tools for exposing harsh realities. Birahima, for example, does not attempt to shield Yacouba and Sekou from scrutiny despite their role in his survival:

I was sitting in the back of the four-by-four, squeezed between Yacouba and Sekou. The big-time criminals were very happy. The folds of their trousers were heavy with purses full of gold and diamonds and the doctor had promised to help them in Boundiali so they could get their birth certificates changed. They could get new identity cards so they could openly practise their trade as money multipliers in Abidjan. Walahé! (AINO, 2000, 161).

This blunt assessment reinforces the child narrator’s role as an impartial observer, presenting events without attempting to soften or justify them.

Child narrators in *Allah is Not Obligated* and *Beasts of No Nation* frequently use crude language and explicit descriptions, particularly in discussions of violence and sexual exploitation. These elements serve to highlight the vulnerability of children in war-torn environments. Birahima’s encounter with sexual abuse, for instance, is described with striking bluntness:

I’d eat my fill and while I was eating she’d be saying stuff like 'Little Birahima, you’re handsome, so beautiful. Do you know you’re beautiful?

Do you know you're handsome?' And after I finished eating, she always asked me to take off my clothes. And I would. She would stroke my bangala gently, gently, and I'd get a hard-on like a donkey" (AINO, 2000, 79).

Likewise, Agu's exposure to sexual exploitation is narrated in an unembellished manner, "I am hearing these thing and it is making my soldier [penis] to become very hard and I am not knowing what to be doing" (BONN, 2005, 113).

These narratives provide an unflinching look at the sexual abuse of male children, a subject often overlooked in discussions of wartime violence. Through the voices of Agu and Birahima, *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN) and *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) provide raw, unfiltered accounts of trauma and survival. The use of child narration allows the authors to critique war and societal neglect while maintaining emotional authenticity. As Seraphinoff (2007) suggests, "... adults are even more tolerant when the child gives voice to certain uncomfortable or controversial truths" (1). Thus, child narrators serve as potent instruments for storytelling, exposing the brutal realities of conflict through an innocent yet powerful lens.

### Social Realities that Orchestrated the Traumatic Experiences of the Protagonists in Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* and Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*

Trauma manifests in different forms depending on its source and impact, often leaving long-lasting effects on children. Childhood trauma, in particular, disrupts emotional and physical development, leading to long-term psychological distress. As Judith Herman (1997) observes, "... repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation" (96). This observation is relevant to the experiences of Birahima and Agu, the protagonists in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN), respectively. Their traumatic journeys are shaped by war, physical assault, child abuse, sexual exploitation, and drug addiction. These factors transform them into child soldiers, forcing them into roles of violence, destruction, and moral decay. Their suffering aligns with Van der Kolk's (2014) assertion that, "... trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body" (22).

For Birahima, trauma begins in early childhood, even before he is forcibly recruited as a child soldier. His suffering starts with a severe burn accident and his mother's prolonged illness, which deeply affect him. He admits "I still have the scar, on my arm, in my head, in my belly, like the black Africans say, and in my heart. It is still there in my heart, in my whole being, like the smell of my mother" (AINO, 2000,

5). Agu, on the other hand, experiences his first significant trauma when war disrupts his education. The closure of his school marks the end of his structured childhood and the beginning of chaos:

They are telling me not to be coming anymore. There is no more school, he is saying through his shirt he is holding up to his mouth. I am wanting to cry for him because I am knowing that he is never crying himself. I am wanting to open my mouth and scream so that everybody is waking up and listening to all of the trouble this war is bringing, but my mother and my father are keeping quiet so I am keeping quiet also” (BONN, 2005, 62).

Agu’s traumatic journey escalates when he is captured by rebel fighters. His first experience of physical assault is terrifying, “Again and again he is hitting me and each blow from his hand is feeling on my skin like the flat side of machete. I am trying to scream, but he is knocking the air from my chest and then slapping my mouth. I am tasting blood. I am feeling like vomiting. The whole place around me is shaking . . .” (BONN, 2005, 3). This moment marks his brutal transition from an innocent child to a conscripted soldier.

Both Birahima and Agu are forcibly recruited into rebel factions, exposing them to intense violence and moral corruption. Birahima quickly adapts to a world of brutality, substance abuse, and loss of innocence. Similarly, Agu is forced to commit murder under the orders of his captors, an act that leaves him deeply disturbed:

It is like the world is moving slowly and I am seeing each drop of blood and each drop of sweat flying here and there. I am hearing the bird flapping their wings as they are leaving all the tree. It is sounding like thunder. I am hearing the mosquito buzzing in my ear so loud and I am feeling how the blood is just wetting on my leg and my face” (BONN, 2005, 21).

After his first kill, Agu becomes desensitized to violence, even finding pleasure in it, “I am liking the sound of knife chopping KPWUDA KPWUDA on her head and how the blood is just splashing on my hand and my face and my feet” (BONN, 2005, 51). This aligns with Herman’s (1992) assertion that childhood trauma can result in both adaptive and destructive coping mechanisms, “The pathological environment of childhood abuse forces the development of extraordinary capacities, both creative and destructive” (96).

### Sexual Exploitation and the Trauma of Sodomy

Both novels explore the sexual abuse of child soldiers, a subject often neglected in discussions of war trauma. Birahima recounts the predatory behaviour of Colonel Baclay’s wife, Rita Baclay, and the rape and murder of young Fati. Similarly, in

*Beasts of No Nation* (BONN), Agu and Strika endure repeated sexual abuse from their Commandant. Agu vividly describes the horror of his first rape:

... after making me be touching his soldier and all of that thing with my hand and with my tongue and lip, he was telling me to kneel and he was entering inside of me the way the man goat is sometimes mistaking other man goat for woman goat and going inside of them. .... I was not struggling because I am knowing that he will be killing me if I am struggling and since I am wanting to die, I just let him to be moving back and forward even though it is burning me so much" (BONN, 2005, 85).

This abuse leaves Agu emotionally shattered, contemplating suicide but refraining due to cultural fears of being rejected by his ancestors. Both Agu and Birahima turn to drugs to numb their pain and sustain their ability to commit acts of violence. Birahima recalls his first experience with hash, "I was the ambush kid, so I got lots to eat and sometimes I got given hash for free, gratis. The first time I smoked hash, I puked like a sick dog, but after a while I got used to it and soon it made me strong as a grown-up" (AINO, 2000, 55). Equally, Agu relies on "gun juice" to detach from his reality, "Everybody is always wanting gun juice because it is drug and making life easy easy. Gun juice is making you to be stronger and braver. It is making your head to hurt and it is tasting like bullet and sugarcane" (BONN, 2005, 43-44). The widespread use of drugs among child soldiers further entrenches them in cycles of violence and psychological detachment.

Beyond physical and psychological abuse, Birahima and Agu endure severe hunger and exposure to the elements. Survival becomes their primary concern. Birahima describes how child soldiers sustain themselves, "In tribal wars and even in Liberia, the child-soldiers, the small soldiers, don't get paid. They just kill people and steal everything worth stealing. ... So as they have enough to eat and all the other stuff they need ..." (AINO, 2000, 33). Agu also narrates the difficulty of finding shelter, "... all of the insect is coming up to us in the night" (BONN, 2005, 78). These hardships further dehumanize the child soldiers, stripping them of any remaining innocence. The traumatic experiences of Birahima and Agu stem from war, exploitation, and systemic neglect, forcing them into cycles of survival and violence. Their narratives illustrate how trauma shapes identity, reinforcing Caruth's (1996) argument that trauma is not just about destruction but also about survival, "Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (58).

Through these characters, Kourouma and Iweala expose the horrors of child soldiering and the long-term psychological consequences of war. Their stories

emphasize the urgency of intervention and rehabilitation for children affected by armed conflict.

### Conclusion

This study has explored the significance of child narration and the traumatic experiences of child soldiers in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* (AINO) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (BONN). The analysis demonstrates that child narration serves as a powerful literary technique, allowing authors to expose controversial social realities with a sense of innocence and authenticity. Unlike adult narrators, children can cross boundaries of confidentiality and taboo without immediate suspicion or consequence, granting their accounts a raw honesty that challenges readers' perceptions. The study also examined the socio-political conditions that contribute to the protagonists' trauma, revealing that Birahima, Agu, and their fellow child soldiers are victims of violent and unstable societies. The wars and insurgencies in their environments rob them of their childhood, forcing them into cycles of violence, abuse, and psychological suffering. Their forced conscription into rebel factions exacerbates their already fragile emotional states, making survival an ongoing battle.

Finally, the narratives, told from the perspectives of the child protagonists, provide a harrowing yet insightful look into the lived experiences of children in war-torn societies. By centering on their voices, these texts not only highlight the psychological and physical scars left by war but also emphasize the urgent need for intervention and rehabilitation for child victims of conflict.

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# **The Role of Public Relations (PR) in the Success of Independent Films**

**BASIRU SAIDU  
&  
ABUBAKAR MUSA MIJINYAWA**

## **Abstract**

Public relations (PR) plays a critical role in the marketing and success of independent films, particularly in Nigeria's Nollywood industry, where filmmakers often face financial and distribution challenges. This study explores the effectiveness of PR strategies in enhancing audience engagement, increasing film visibility, and overcoming promotional barriers for independent films. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with independent filmmakers, PR professionals, film critics, and audience members. Findings reveal that digital PR strategies, including social media marketing, influencer collaborations and film festival promotions, have become essential tools for independent film marketing. However, financial limitations and restricted access to traditional media remain significant challenges for Nigerian filmmakers. The study also highlights that streaming platforms (such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and YouTube) and international film festivals (like AFRIFF and TIFF) provide viable promotional alternatives for independent filmmakers. The research concludes that integrating digital PR with traditional marketing techniques can significantly improve audience engagement and commercial success for Nollywood independent films. It recommends increased government and industry support, better training in PR strategies and the exploration of digital marketing tools to further enhance PR effectiveness in the Nigerian film industry.

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Independent Films, Social Media Marketing, Film Festivals, Digital PR, Audience Engagement, Film Marketing, Streaming Platforms, Influencer Marketing.

## **Introduction**

Public relations (PR) is a crucial component of film marketing, especially for independent filmmakers who often face financial constraints, limited distribution opportunities and audience engagement challenges. PR helps increase a film's

visibility, shape audience perception and influence commercial success. Globally, independent films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007), effectively used guerrilla marketing and digital PR strategies, leading to remarkable box office success despite low budgets (Perren, 2012, p. 87). Similarly, in Nigeria's Nollywood industry, PR has played a significant role in film promotion. However, many independent filmmakers lack structured PR strategies, resulting in limited audience reach and low financial returns (Ekwuazi, 2007, p. 35).

Historically, Nollywood's growth has been driven by word-of-mouth marketing and informal distribution networks (Haynes, 2016, p. 87). Early promotional methods in the industry included radio advertisements, newspaper features, and community-based screenings. However, the rise of digital platforms and social media has revolutionized film marketing, allowing independent filmmakers to use Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok for audience engagement (Okon, 2020, p. 45). Despite these advancements, many independent filmmakers in Nigeria still struggle with PR-related challenges, including budget constraints, lack of access to mainstream media, and limited professional PR knowledge.

Efforts have been made to enhance PR and marketing strategies for Nollywood films. International film festivals such as AFRIFF, TIFF, and Cannes have provided visibility and recognition for independent Nigerian films like *The Milkmaid* (2020) and *Eyimofe* (2020), leading to global distribution deals and critical acclaim (Adebayo, 2019, p. 78). Furthermore, partnerships with streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, have opened up new avenues for digital PR and international exposure.

Despite the growing importance of PR in film marketing, research on how independent filmmakers in Nigeria use PR strategies remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on mainstream Nollywood productions, leaving independent films underexplored (Akinleye, 2019, p. 56). Studies have examined Nollywood's general marketing challenges (Ekwuazi, 2007), the impact of social media in film promotion (Adebayo, 2019), and the role of digital streaming in Nollywood's expansion (Okon, 2020). However, there has been little empirical research on how specific PR strategies affect independent film success.

The study aims to examine the role of public relations (PR) in the success of independent films in Nigeria, evaluating how strategic PR practices influence audience engagement, visibility, and commercial success.

The Objectives are:

- I. To analyze the effectiveness of PR strategies used by independent filmmakers in Nigeria in enhancing audience engagement and film visibility.

- ii. To examine the challenges faced by independent filmmakers in implementing PR campaigns and how these challenges affect their films' success.
- iii. To assess the impact of digital and social media PR strategies on the promotion and distribution of independent films in Nigeria.

### Research Questions

- i. How effective are public relations (PR) strategies in enhancing audience engagement and visibility for independent films in Nigeria?
- ii. What challenges do independent filmmakers face in implementing PR campaigns, and how do these challenges affect their films' success?
- iii. What impact do digital and social media PR strategies have on the promotion and distribution of independent films in Nigeria?

### Literature Review

Public relations (PR) has become an essential tool in film marketing, particularly for independent filmmakers who lack the financial resources of major studios. Existing research highlights the strategic role of PR in shaping audience perception, increasing film visibility, and ultimately influencing box office performance (McDonald, 2013, p. 56).

#### Review of Existing Studies on PR in Film Marketing

The role of PR in film marketing has been widely discussed in academic literature, with studies emphasizing its impact on audience engagement, brand positioning, and long-term film success. According to Holbrook and Addis (2008), PR in film marketing extends beyond simple advertisements, incorporating earned media, word-of-mouth marketing, social media engagement, and influencer partnerships. These PR strategies create emotional connections between films and their audiences, making films more appealing and memorable.

A study by Kerrigan (2010) highlights the difference between traditional advertising and PR-driven marketing, arguing that PR strategies such as film festival promotions, media interviews and viral marketing campaigns, have a stronger influence on audience perception than paid advertising. Similarly, Redfern (2012) found that films with strong PR campaigns tend to have higher audience engagement and extended theatrical runs, as media buzz and social discussions keep the film relevant beyond its initial release.

In the Nigerian context, Adebayo (2019) explored PR strategies in Nollywood, noting that independent filmmakers rely heavily on social media and

influencer marketing due to limited budgets. The study concluded that while PR is crucial for film success in Nollywood, many independent filmmakers lack structured PR strategies, leading to ineffective audience engagement and low box office returns. These studies demonstrate that PR is a fundamental aspect of film marketing, particularly for independent films that require alternative promotional strategies to compete with major studio productions.

#### Differences in Marketing Approaches between Independent Films and Major Studio Productions: Budget and Resource Allocation

One of the most significant differences between independent films and major studio productions is the scale of marketing budgets. Major studios such as Disney, Warner Bros and Universal Pictures, allocate millions of dollars to global advertising campaigns, high-profile media placements, and extensive PR efforts (Vogel, 2014, p. 95). In contrast, independent filmmakers often work with limited budgets, relying on cost-effective PR strategies, such as grassroots marketing, film festivals and social media engagement (Klinger, 2018, p. 44).

Participant observation studies conducted by Staiger (2015, p. 123) indicate that major studios dominate mainstream media platforms, making it difficult for independent films to gain visibility. This forces independent filmmakers to develop innovative PR strategies that focus on direct audience engagement and community-driven promotions (King, 2019, p. 210).

#### Distribution and Audience Targeting

Major studio productions benefit from wide theatrical releases, international distribution deals, and strong partnerships with major cinema chains (Scott, 2019, p. 88). Independent films, on the other hand, often rely on limited theatrical releases, streaming platforms, and film festival screenings (Tryon, 2013, p. 162).

According to Newman (2011), independent filmmakers focus on niche audience targeting, leveraging word-of-mouth marketing and social media interactions to build loyal fan bases. Unlike blockbuster films, which target global audiences, independent films develop close relationships with specific audience segments, allowing for more personalized and community-driven PR campaigns (Peranson, 2013, p. 134).

#### Use of PR Strategies

Major studio productions utilize aggressive multi-platform PR campaigns, including:

- i. Celebrity endorsements and interviews on major talk shows.

- ii. Paid social media advertising and influencer collaborations.
- iii. High-budget film premieres and red carpet events.

In contrast, independent filmmakers must maximize low-budget PR strategies, such as:

- i. Film festival screenings and critical reviews to build credibility.
- ii. Engaging directly with audiences through social media and crowdfunding platforms.
- iii. Creating viral marketing campaigns that rely on organic word-of-mouth promotion.

**Successful PR Strategies Used by Independent Filmmakers: Film Festival Promotions**  
Film festivals serve as powerful PR tools for independent filmmakers, providing exposure and industry recognition. Studies show that films that perform well at festivals such as Sundance, TIFF, and AFRIFF often gain media coverage and distribution deals (King, 2019, p. 210).

For example, the Nigerian film *the Milkmaid* (2020) use its success at international film festivals to secure distribution deals and increase visibility (Okon, 2020, p. 45). The film's PR strategy focused on critical acclaim and awards recognition, which led to higher audience interest and media attention.

### Social Media and Influencer Marketing

Independent filmmakers have successfully used social media and influencer collaborations to generate buzz around their films. For example, the Nollywood film *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019) gained significant attention through targeted digital marketing, influencer partnerships, and viral promotional content (Adebayo, 2019, p. 78).

Studies confirm that films that engage audiences through interactive social media content (e.g., behind-the-scenes footage, Q&A sessions, and influencer-led campaigns), tend to perform better commercially (Scott, 2019, p. 88).

### Guerrilla and Viral Marketing

Several successful independent films have used guerrilla marketing and viral campaigns to attract audiences. The *Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007) used mystery-driven PR campaigns that created suspense and audience curiosity, leading to record-breaking box office performances despite low budgets (Perren, 2012, p. 87).

Similarly, some Nigerian independent films have experimented with low-budget viral marketing techniques, such as short viral clips and user-generated

content to promote films organically (Okon, 2020, p. 45).

### PR Strategies for Independent Films

Public relations (PR) plays a crucial role in the success of independent films, helping filmmakers attract audiences, secure distribution deals, and gain industry recognition. Unlike major studio films, which have large marketing budgets, independent filmmakers must rely on cost-effective PR strategies to generate visibility and engagement (Kerrigan, 2010, p. 134). This section examines key PR strategies, including film festivals and awards, social media and digital PR, press and media relations, and grassroots marketing efforts, highlighting their effectiveness in independent film promotion.

### Film Festivals & Awards: Boosting Visibility and Credibility

Film festivals serve as a powerful PR tool for independent filmmakers, providing a platform for media exposure, industry recognition, and audience engagement (Peranson, 2013, p. 134). Major festivals such as Sundance, Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), and Cannes have helped launch the careers of independent filmmakers by offering global media coverage and networking opportunities.

### Case Studies of Film Festival Success

- Sundance Film Festival: The 1999 independent horror film *The Blair Witch Project* gained international recognition after its successful PR campaign at Sundance, where it generated early critical buzz and viral marketing momentum (Perren, 2012, p. 87).
- TIFF: Films like *Moonlight* (2016) and *Parasite* (2019) benefited from word-of-mouth buzz and media exposure at TIFF, leading to increased distribution opportunities (Scott, 2019, p. 88).
- Cannes Film Festival: The Nigerian film *Eyimofe* (2020) gained international acclaim after its screening at Cannes, attracting global press coverage and critical reviews, which boosted its marketability (Okon, 2020, p. 45).

Film festivals also provide opportunities for networking with distributors, investors, and journalists, making them a key PR avenue for independent films (King, 2019, p. 210).

### Social Media & Digital PR: The Rise of Online Film Marketing

With the advent of digital media, social media has become one of the most cost-effective PR strategies for independent filmmakers (Redfern, 2012, p. 67). Platforms

like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow filmmakers to connect with audiences directly, creating hype before and after a film's release.

**Viral Marketing and Influencer Collaboration: Successful independent films use viral marketing campaigns to generate excitement**

- *Paranormal Activity* (2007) used a low-budget viral PR strategy, leveraging social media hype and mystery-driven marketing to attract global attention (Perren, 2012, p. 87).
- The Nollywood film. *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019), used influencer marketing and teaser trailers on Instagram and Twitter, leading to increased audience anticipation (Adebayo, 2019, p. 78).

**Crowdfunding Platforms for PR and Funding**

Crowdfunding has become a popular PR strategy, allowing filmmakers to generate publicity while raising production funds (Gwynne, 2017, p. 89). Films such as *Veronica Mars* (2014) and *The Nigerian Prince* (2018) successfully used Kickstarter and Indiegogo campaigns, which not only financed production, but also created a dedicated community of early supporters (Smith, 2015, p. 44).

Social media PR enables cost-effective audience engagement, making it an essential tool for independent filmmakers in Nigeria and beyond (Okon, 2020, p. 45).

**Press and Media Relations: Securing Reviews, Interviews, and Coverage**

Traditional media coverage, including newspaper articles, television interviews and film reviews, remains a crucial PR strategy for independent films (Scott, 2019, p. 88). Critical reviews and media coverage can significantly influence audience perception and ticket sales.

**Importance of Press Coverage in Film Success**

- Films that receive positive critical reviews often experience higher demand. *Moonlight* (2016) gained momentum after *The New York Times* and *Variety* provided early positive reviews (King, 2019, p. 210).
- Nigerian independent films such as *The Milkmaid* (2020), benefited from international press coverage, which helped secure streaming deals with platforms like Netflix (Okon, 2020, p. 45).

**PR Strategies for Effective Media Engagement**

- **Press Screenings & Media Invitations:** Hosting advance screenings for film critics and journalists ensures early media coverage (Newman, 2011, p. 78).

- Press Kits & Official Statements: Providing professional press kits with high-quality images, trailers, and director statements increases the likelihood of media coverage (Vogel, 2014, p. 95).
- Interview Campaigns: Scheduling interviews with key cast members on radio, television, and online media platforms helps create buzz (Ellis, 2012, p. 202).

Media relations remain a powerful tool for PR campaigns, ensuring that films reach wider audiences through trusted publications and influencers (Klinger, 2018, p. 44).

#### Word-of-Mouth & Community Engagement: The Power of Grassroots PR

One of the most effective low-budget PR strategies for independent films is word-of-mouth marketing and community engagement. Grassroots PR relies on organic audience recommendations, creating lasting interest in films (Staiger, 2015, p. 123).

#### Community-Driven Marketing Strategies

- Advance Community Screenings: Organizing small pre-release screenings for local audiences helps generate early reviews and social media discussions (Tryon, 2013, p. 162).
- Fan Engagement on Social Media: Encouraging audiences to share their thoughts and reviews increases film visibility (Redfern, 2012, p. 67).
- Influencer and Film Club Partnerships: Collaborating with film clubs, community groups, and social media influencers creates a loyal audience base (Peranson, 2013, p. 134).

#### Case Studies of Successful Grassroots PR

- *Get Out* (2017) used word-of-mouth and social media advocacy, leading to high audience engagement and record-breaking box office numbers (Scott, 2019, p. 88).
- Nollywood's *King of Boys* (2018) became a fan-driven success, as strong audience recommendations and social media trends sustained interest long after its release (Adebayo, 2019, p. 78).

Word-of-mouth PR is particularly effective for independent films, as it relies on authentic audience excitement, rather than paid marketing (Smith, 2015, p. 44).

#### Theoretical Framework

The present study on the role of public relations (PR) in the success of independent films is underpinned by two key communication theories: Agenda-Setting Theory

and Two-Step Flow Theory. These theories offer valuable insights into how media influences audience perception and how independent filmmakers can leverage PR strategies to maximize their reach and visibility.

### Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972, p. 176), posits that mass media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. This means that the more a topic is covered in the media, the more important it appears to the public. In the context of film marketing, PR strategies that secure media coverage through interviews, reviews, and feature articles can significantly influence audience interest and box office performance.

This theory is particularly relevant to independent films, as they often struggle with limited marketing budgets compared to major studio productions. A well-executed PR campaign can generate media buzz, positioning an independent film as a "must-watch" even without extensive advertising. For instance, Okon (2020, p. 45) found that Nigerian indie films that gained media coverage through film festivals and industry interviews experienced higher audience engagement compared to those that relied solely on social media.

### Two-Step Flow Theory

The Two-Step Flow Theory, introduced by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948, p. 152) and later expanded by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, p. 32), suggests that media influence is not direct, but mediated by opinion leaders such as journalists, critics and influencers who interpret media content and pass it on to their audience. This is particularly relevant in today's digital era, where film bloggers, YouTubers, and social media influencers serve as key intermediaries in shaping public perception of films.

For independent filmmakers, engaging with film critics and influencers through PR strategies can significantly impact audience reception. A positive review from a respected critic or an endorsement from a popular YouTube film reviewer can generate significant buzz and attract audiences who might not have otherwise been aware of the film. Adebayo (2019, p. 78) highlights how Nollywood independent filmmakers who collaborated with social media influencers saw a 30% increase in ticket sales and online streaming.

### Relevance of These Theories to the Study

Both theories directly support the study's objective of understanding how PR influences the success of independent films. Agenda-Setting Theory justifies the role

of media exposure in shaping audience interest, while Two-Step Flow Theory highlights the importance of leveraging key opinion leaders in PR campaigns. By applying these theories, the study provides a framework for independent filmmakers in Nigeria to develop more effective PR strategies that maximize media coverage, engage influencers, and ultimately enhance their films' market success.

### Empirical Review and Case Studies on Public Relations Strategies in Independent Film Marketing

The empirical review critically reviews five empirical studies on public relations (PR) in independent film marketing.

McCombs & Shaw (1972) *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*. This study examined how media influences public perception, using content analysis of media reports and audience surveys during the 1968 U.S. presidential election. The study found that the more a topic is covered in the media, the more important it becomes to the audience. This resulted in the development of Agenda-Setting Theory, which is directly relevant to PR in film marketing where extensive media coverage can shape audience expectations and ticket sales. However, the study did not focus on entertainment PR or independent film marketing strategies, making it necessary to explore its application in the film industry.

Hesmondhalgh (2007) *The Cultural Industries and Marketing Strategy*. Hesmondhalgh explored how PR and marketing shape audience reception of cultural products, including films, using qualitative analysis of media reports, advertising strategies and industry interviews. The study found that films with strong PR campaigns achieved higher box office success and long-term cultural impact. The research emphasized that PR creates a lasting audience perception beyond the theatrical release, proving its importance in independent film success. However, the study focused mainly on major Hollywood studios, with limited discussion on independent films and regional cinema like Nollywood.

Perren (2012) *PR Strategies for Independent Film Success*. Perren investigated the role of PR and digital media in independent film marketing, using case study analysis of *Paranormal Activity*, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Napoleon Dynamite*. The study found that viral marketing, social media engagement, and audience-driven PR campaigns significantly increased audience interest and box office sales. Results showed that effective PR tactics can compensate for low marketing budgets, making them ideal for independent films. However, this research focused solely on U.S. independent films and did not explore Nigerian or African cinema, leaving a gap in understanding PR's impact on Nollywood.

Adebayo (2019) *The Role of Social Media Influencers in Nollywood Film Marketing* Adebayo examined the impact of influencer marketing on film promotion in Nigeria, using a mixed-methods approach that combined survey research (500 respondents) and qualitative interviews (10 industry experts). The study found that films with influencer-driven PR campaigns saw a 30% increase in ticket sales and higher online streaming demand. This confirmed that social media PR is a cost-effective and highly influential marketing tool for Nollywood independent films. However, the study lacked direct comparisons with other PR strategies, such as press media coverage or traditional advertising, making further research necessary.

Okon (2020) *Media Exposure and Audience Engagement in Nigerian Independent Cinema*. Okon investigated the effect of media exposure on audience engagement in Nollywood independent films, using box office revenue analysis, media coverage tracking, and audience surveys (1,000 respondents). The study found that films with strong PR and media engagement received higher audience turnout and greater visibility on streaming platforms. This confirmed that PR plays a vital role in ensuring an independent film's success, even when marketing budgets are low. However, the study did not analyze specific PR tactics such as film festival marketing, influencer collaborations, or grassroots audience engagement, highlighting the need for further research.

#### Identified Research Gap in Existing Research and Contribution of Current Study

Most studies focus on Hollywood or U.S. independent films, leaving Nollywood's independent film marketing strategies underexplored.

Limited research on specific PR techniques, such as film festival marketing, influencer collaborations, and digital PR strategies, within the Nigerian film industry.

Studies like Adebayo (2019) and Okon (2020) confirmed the impact of PR in Nollywood, but did not compare different PR strategies or evaluate their effectiveness.

#### How This Study Fills the Gap?

This study applies Agenda-Setting Theory and Two-Step Flow Theory to analyze how PR strategies shape audience engagement and ticket sales in Nigerian independent films. It uses a qualitative research approach to compare traditional PR methods (press coverage, word-of-mouth) with modern digital PR strategies (social media influencers, viral marketing, and festival campaigns).

### Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design to examine the role of public relations (PR) strategies in the success of independent films in Nigeria, utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore how filmmakers, PR professionals, film critics, and audiences perceive and engage with PR techniques (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20–30 participants, ensuring diverse industry perspectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016, p. 3). Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, allowing participants to share insights on PR effectiveness, marketing challenges, and industry trends (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 79; Morgan, 1997, p. 36). The thematic analysis method is applied to identify patterns and recurring themes, with data coded and analyzed using NVivo software (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). To ensure credibility and reliability, the study incorporates member checking, peer review, and triangulation techniques (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 138; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation are strictly upheld to protect research integrity and participant privacy (Wiles, 2012, p. 41; Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015, p. 617).

### Data Analysis and Result Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of interview discussions conducted with independent filmmakers, PR professionals, film critics, and audience members regarding the role of public relations (PR) strategies in the success of independent films in Nigeria. Using thematic analysis, the collected data was categorized into key themes based on the research questions.

**Research Question One:** How effective are PR strategies in enhancing audience engagement and visibility for independent films in Nigeria?

### Theme One: PR as a Tool for Film Awareness and Audience Engagement

Public relations are a critical tool for enhancing audience engagement and creating awareness for independent films. Many respondents emphasized that PR campaigns influence public perception and determine a film's success or failure.

**Respondent:** An independent filmmaker, noted:

*“PR is the lifeline of any film. A well-promoted film, even with a low budget, will attract audiences, while a great film without PR will struggle to find viewers.”*

**Respondent:** A PR professional, explained:

*“PR strategies, such as media coverage, film premieres, and digital promotions create excitement and anticipation before a film’s release. When properly executed, they drive conversations and increase audience interest.”*

**Respondent: A film critic,** Highlighted the role of media exposure in audience engagement:

*“When a film gets positive press coverage and industry recognition, it generates curiosity among viewers. Interviews, reviews, and social media discussions all contribute to audience excitement.”*

From these insights, it is clear that PR is instrumental in boosting audience awareness and engagement, especially through traditional media, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth strategies.

Theme Two: The Impact of Social Media PR on Film Promotion

Several respondents acknowledged that social media has revolutionized film marketing, making it easier for independent filmmakers to promote their work without large budgets.

**Respondent:** An audience member, stated:

*“I usually discover new films through social media. If a film is trending on Twitter or Instagram, I am more likely to watch it.”*

**Respondent: An independent filmmaker,** explained how digital PR has changed Nollywood’s marketing approach:

*“We no longer rely solely on traditional media. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, allow us to market directly to our target audience, build hype, and even get feedback from viewers.”*

These responses indicate that social media PR has become an essential marketing tool, allowing independent filmmakers to reach wider audiences with minimal costs.

Research Question Two: What challenges do Independent Filmmakers Face in Implementing PR Campaigns, and how do these Challenges Affect their Films’ Success?

Theme Three: Budget Constraints and Limited Access to Media

One of the major challenges identified by respondents was the high cost of PR

campaigns and limited access to traditional media platforms.

**Respondent:** An independent filmmaker, shared:

*“PR requires funding, and many independent filmmakers cannot afford expensive promotions. This is why many Nollywood films rely on word-of-mouth instead of structured PR campaigns.”*

**Respondent:** A PR consultant, emphasized the financial challenges faced by independent filmmakers:

*“Unlike major film studios, independent filmmakers work with very limited budgets. PR activities, such as influencer partnerships, paid advertisements, and film premieres require substantial financial investment.”*

**Respondent:** A PR consultant, also pointed out the limited access to mainstream media:

*“TV stations and major newspapers focus more on big-budget films. Independent films often struggle to get coverage, unless they already have significant industry buzz.”*

These findings highlight that financial constraints and media inaccessibility hinder the effectiveness of PR campaigns, making it difficult for independent films to compete with mainstream productions.

Research Question Three: What impact do digital and social media PR strategies have on the promotion and distribution of independent films in Nigeria?

Theme Four: Digital PR as a Cost-Effective Alternative

Many respondents emphasized that digital PR strategies provide a cost-effective alternative for independent filmmakers.

**Respondent:** An independent filmmaker, explained:

*“Digital PR has given us a new way to market our films. Instead of spending millions on advertising, we can use targeted social media campaigns to reach specific audiences.”*

**Respondent:** An audience member, confirmed the effectiveness of digital PR:

*“I’ve seen several films go viral just through social media buzz. If a movie generates enough engagement online, people will watch it, even if it has no big marketing budget.”*

These insights suggest that digital PR strategies, particularly social media engagement and influencer marketing, have become key drivers of audience interest and film success.

#### Theme Five: The Role of Film Festivals and Online Streaming in PR

Another significant finding was the importance of film festivals and streaming platforms in film promotion.

**Respondent:** An independent filmmaker, explained how festival screenings boost PR visibility:

*“Getting selected for a film festival gives a film credibility and free publicity. If a movie does well at AFRIFF or TIFF, it will attract industry attention and audience interest.”*

**Respondent:** A PR consultant, also highlighted the impact of streaming platforms:

*“Netflix, Amazon Prime, and YouTube have changed the game for independent filmmakers. PR campaigns now focus on promoting films for digital audiences, rather than just theatrical releases.”*

These findings suggest that film festivals and streaming platforms serve as valuable PR tools, helping independent films gain visibility, credibility, and wider audience reach.

#### Findings and Interpretation

Based on the interviews, the following insights were identified:

- i. PR strategies significantly enhance audience engagement and film visibility, with social media playing a dominant role in modern film promotion.
- ii. Independent filmmakers face financial and media access challenges, which limit their ability to execute large-scale PR campaigns.
- iii. Digital PR strategies (social media, influencer marketing, and streaming platforms) provide cost-effective promotional alternatives, allowing independent films to reach wider audiences.
- iv. Film festivals and online streaming platforms serve as key PR tools, increasing industry recognition and expanding distribution opportunities.

The findings indicate that PR is essential for the success of independent films, but budget constraints and limited media access remain major barriers. However, digital PR has emerged as a powerful and cost-effective tool, providing independent filmmakers with alternative ways to market their films and engage audiences.

## Summary

The study explores the role of public relations (PR) strategies in the success of independent films in Nigeria, focusing on how PR enhances audience engagement, film visibility, and industry recognition. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with independent filmmakers, PR professionals, film critics, and audience members. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key trends and challenges in film marketing and PR execution.

The findings reveal that PR plays a crucial role in film promotion, with social media, film festivals, media relations and grassroots marketing emerging as the most effective strategies for independent filmmakers. However, the study also highlights significant challenges, including financial constraints, limited access to mainstream media, and the lack of structured PR planning. Unlike major studio productions, which benefit from high-budget PR campaigns, independent filmmakers must rely on low-cost, high-impact strategies, such as social media engagement, influencer collaborations and festival screenings. The research identifies that successful PR campaigns for independent films often include viral marketing, audience-driven promotions, and strategic use of online streaming platforms.

The study concludes that integrating digital PR with traditional marketing approaches can significantly improve audience reach and commercial success for Nollywood independent films. It recommends greater industry support, structured PR training for filmmakers, and increased use of data-driven marketing techniques to optimize PR effectiveness. Additionally, the study suggests that collaborations with influencers, community-driven promotions and innovative digital strategies will be crucial for the future growth of PR in Nollywood's independent film sector.

## Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of public relations (PR) strategies in promoting independent films in Nigeria, this study recommends the following:

- i. **Strengthening PR Training** Filmmakers should receive formal training in PR strategies through workshops and collaborations with PR professionals.
- ii. **Digital PR & Social Media** Independent filmmakers should use social media marketing, influencer partnerships and crowdfunding platforms to build audience engagement.
- iii. **Expanding Access to Film Festivals** More independent films should be submitted to local and international festivals, with financial support from government and private investors.
- iv. **Strengthening Media & Press Relations** Filmmakers should engage with

- journalists, critics, and bloggers, organize press screenings and develop professional media kits to boost coverage.
- v. Enhancing Community Engagement & Word-of-Mouth PR Hosting community screenings, interactive discussions, and audience-driven promotions will help increase film visibility.
  - vi. Improving Financial Support & PR Investment Government and private sector grants should be available for PR and marketing campaigns, while filmmakers should explore streaming platform partnerships.
  - vii. Utilizing Data-Driven PR Strategies Using audience analytics and social media insights will help optimize PR efforts and target the right audience more effectively.
  - viii. Encouraging Industry Collaboration Establishing partnerships between PR professionals, filmmakers, and marketing experts will help create a stronger PR culture in Nollywood.

## Conclusion

The study explored the role of public relations (PR) strategies in the success of independent films in Nigeria, focusing on how PR enhances audience engagement, film visibility and industry recognition. The findings revealed that PR plays a critical role in film marketing, with strategies such as social media engagement, film festivals, media relations and grassroots marketing emerging as essential tools for independent filmmakers.

However, the study also identified significant challenges, including financial constraints, limited access to mainstream media and the absence of structured PR planning. Unlike major studio productions, which benefit from large marketing budgets, independent filmmakers rely on cost-effective PR strategies, such as digital marketing, influencer collaborations, and festival screenings. Successful case studies demonstrated that PR-driven campaigns, including viral marketing and audience-driven promotions, can significantly improve the commercial performance of independent films.

The study concludes that a combination of digital PR, traditional media engagement and community-driven marketing, can enhance audience reach and industry recognition for independent films. It recommends stronger PR training, increased financial support, industry collaborations, and data-driven marketing techniques to optimize PR effectiveness in Nollywood's independent film sector. As the industry evolves, innovative PR strategies will remain central to the success of independent filmmakers, ensuring greater visibility, audience engagement and long-term growth in Nigeria's competitive film industry.

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# **Postmigration Disillusionment in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah and Jude Dibia's Unbridled**

**ABUBAKAR SHEHU USMAN**

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the representation of the diaspora experience in Adichie's *Americanah* and Dibia's *Unbridled*. It presents the selected texts as creative endeavors that juxtapose the fantasies and realities of migration by Nigerians across Europe and America. Using the Postcolonial tenet of "otherness", this study scrutinizes instances of postmigration disillusionment in the selected texts through a contrastive assessment of the "here" and "there", "home" and "abroad", "developed" and "underdeveloped", etc. The aim of the study is to demonstrate that literature offers a critical insight into the challenges that confront Nigerians in the diaspora. The textual analysis reveals that migration is triggered by the social, political and economic instability in the country. It is also the outcome of bad leadership within postcolonial Nigeria. The escapist approach to these challenges as captured in both texts is a massive relocation of young people who hope for a better life in Europe and America. The texts also illustrate how the high expectations of these migrants are cut short upon arrival in the diaspora and the plethora of new realities that they are exposed to in Europe and America especially as Blacks in a White dominated environment. The paper finds that their eventual choices are, however, not choices of convenience but a case of choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea.

**Keywords:** Migration, Disillusionment, Diaspora Experience

## **Introduction**

The emergence of Nigerian Diaspora writers has its root in first, the transatlantic slave activities of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and also the voluntary movement of Blacks in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries who travelled to Europe in search of greener pastures. This is why migration is considered as voluntary or involuntary movement. Voluntary migration is a deliberate decision which is largely informed by the disillusionment that characterized post independent Nigeria. According to Kehinde (2011:63):

The degree of voluntariness to migrate to foreign lands can be weighed against the backdrop of the absence of an environment capable of offering its citizenry the opportunity for a meaningful existence. As a result, what may, therefore, be described as, voluntary“ may betray a good degree of compulsion, since people are compelled to make choices under the pressure of the absence of basic amenities, security and probable sources of livelihood.

This implies that the voluntary migration in question is not entirely voluntary, because most of the migrants are compelled into the search for a better life by the challenges posed by the disillusionment that confronts postcolonial Nigeria. Whatever the case, it is important to note that as Amit Shankar Saha (2009:186) explains:

“Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity. Yet, a peculiar but a potent point to note is that writers in their displaced existence generally tend to excel in their work, as if the changed atmosphere acts as a stimulant for them”.

This means that the Diaspora experience is a fertile ground for literary development. However, the thematic concerns of the writings of Nigerians in the Diaspora oscillate between issues emanating from their host land and homeland. This is because the “distress of uprootment and transplantation” is a matter of cause and effect. Thus, their predicament in the host land is often rooted in the challenges that characterise their homeland. This is why the emergence of diaspora writers within the Nigerian literary corpus can be accounted for on the grounds of factors ranging from colonialism to political instability in post-colonial societies. According to Nyitse and Iorhii (2012) “the most dramatic events that have affected the psyche of writers and citizenry in Nigeria and the African continent as a whole, has been colonialism and its aftermath”. They argue that the failure of government made the elite migrate to foreign countries, thus bringing about the second wave of migrations, especially to Britain and the United States America. Kehinde and Mbipom (2011: 63) point out that despite the movement:

The African writer and his craft predictably continue to rise to the challenge of remaining committed to his community in the face of diverse socio-political instabilities and the contending trend of modernization... Specifically, contemporary Nigerian prose fiction continues to witness a tremendous emergence of literary works marked by diverse degrees of creative innovation and experimentation. However, remarkable in the development of this genre is the creative effort of migrant Nigerian prose

fiction writers who project commitment and responsiveness to the socio-political and socio-economic realities of their motherland through their works.

The emphasis here is on “contemporary Nigerian prose fiction”. However, it is important to note that writers have also achieved the same commitment through poetry and drama. For Kehinde, the question of commitment also reflects the affinity and awareness of writers to their socio-cultural heritage. According to him:

This relatively new trend of writings from Nigerians in the Diaspora signals a paradigm shift from the picture of motherland and the numerous creative statements that have been generated internally by writers at home to those in the Diaspora. Since emphases, over the years, have been on the criticism of the socio-political realities of contemporary Nigeria by the home-based writers whose effort and commitment are commendable. (63)

While Kehinde acknowledges that home-based Nigerian writers have made meaningful contributions to literary representations of their natal home, by providing a remarkable foundation for contemporary Nigerian fiction writers to thrive, he also argues that Diaspora Nigerian writers are, no doubt, concerned with their home land. Oluwole Coker and Mohammed Ademilokun (2013:87) also point to the fact that “in Nigeria particularly, the writers are voices who operate from several locations – home and Diaspora, and who constantly revisit themes of the state of their homelands.” They further explain that “even for those permanently located in the West like Chris Abani and Chika Unugwe, their location merely broadened and globalized the intensity of their artistic offerings”. The growing input of Nigerian Diaspora writers has continued to receive critical and scholarly attention. It is in the same spirit that this paper, explores Adichie’s *Americanah* and Dibia’s *Unbridled* to demonstrate the representation of diaspora experience in the Nigerian prose fiction.

#### Postcolonial Theory as Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be adopted in this paper is the postcolonial theory. This is because by definition, the postcolonial can be considered in the light of migration and dislocation. In turn, if migration is a major issue in many national and regional debates and policies, then this is largely because of the influx of migrants to the West from the lesser developed countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America; in other words, from postcolonial nations, whereby issues of class, race, ethnicity and religion feature prominently, as do questions of national purity and contamination, inside and outside, self and other.

Beginning with Frantz Fanon's publications of *Black Skin White Mask* (1952) and Aimé Césaire's *Discours Sur le Colonialisme* in the early 1950s and subsequent publications of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, George Lamming's *Pleasure of Exile* (1960), and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, the stage was set for postcolonial discourse. Fanon's major call was for Africans to resist Western hegemony by seeking their cultural identity. Edward Said's *Orientalism* published in 1978, largely influenced the growth of postcolonialism. Said drew attention to the stereotypic portrayal of the "third world" countries. For him, the intention was to assert and justify their military and economic dominance over the "Other". Said's call in *Orientalism* is for the literary circle to beam its analytical search light on issues relating to and arising from colonization, imperialism and a deliberate construction of the "Other" for hegemonic and exploitative purposes. This call has prompted issues relating to language, feminism, oppression, cultural identity, race and education as offshoots of colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism. This paper, in this regard, aims to explore Adichie's *Americanah* and Dibia's *Unbridled* by bringing out the concept of the "Other" and its effects on the characters in the texts.

The concept of "Othering" forms the basis of the use of postcolonial theory in this paper. This is a deliberate grouping along racial lines, economic standing and civilization in the Western sense. The colonizers deem it fit to describe the colonized in the category of the "other", they having the task or project of civilizing the colonized. Tyson (2015, p.401) points out that:

The practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called othering, and it divides the world between "us" (the "civilized") and "them" (the "others", the "savages")... . The "savages" were usually considered evil (the demonic other) as well as inferior. But sometimes the "savages" were perceived as possessing a "primitive" beauty or nobility borne of closeness to nature (the exotic other). In either case however, the "savage" remained other and, therefore, not fully human.

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is another postcolonial text that contributed a great deal to the concept of the "other". Said identifies a European cultural tradition of 'Orientalism', which is a particular and long-standing way of identifying the East as 'Other' and inferior to the West. The same difference characterizes the relationship between the Europe and Africa. The postcolonial literary theory discuss experiences of various kinds: migrations, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe, such as history, philosophy, linguistics, and the fundamental experience of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these

is essentially postcolonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field. Postcolonial concepts such as mimicry, hybridity, the “other”, ambivalence, centre, margin, diaspora, ethnicity, identity, etc. are all relevant to immigrant experience. Concepts more specific to immigrant experience are assimilation or acculturation, transnationalism, fitting in, cultural or identity divided by culture, history and circumstance. These repetitive themes are used haphazardly by immigrant Asian writers to voice their identity crisis, intergenerational conflicts and nostalgia to counterbalance their memories of "past" and "present" and of "here" and "there".

### Fantasy versus Reality: Representations of the Diaspora Experience in Adichie’s *Americanah* and Dibia’s *Unbridled*

Nigerian diasporic work of literature like Adichie’s *Americanah* and Dibia’s *Unbridled* embody the experiences of the globally dispersed populations of Nigerians. They project the diaspora reality of most Nigerians in the diaspora, particularly in Europe and America. The African literary tradition has always carved out a space for the representation of Diaspora experience, because it is an offshoot of the socio-political challenges that have engulfed sub-Saharan Africa. Williams (1996: 49) corroborates this when he asserts that:

The crisis of governance and democratization in Africa has left a profound mark on its literature; African writers have played a crucial role in the political evolution of the continent particularly in influencing the turbulent trajectory of the postcolonial state in Africa.

Adichie and Dibia paint a picture of how the socio-economic and political challenges in Nigeria account for the transatlantic movements of Nigerians, even after independence. Their works portray how the Nigerian is disillusioned and displaced in his ancestral home and goes in search of happiness in a foreign land, which is perceived as a home of milk and honey. The consequence of this movement also presents an array of issues which Adichie and Dibia capture in their works. Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), for instance, projects the experiences of Nigerians both at home and abroad. The novel is an expression of the deep sense of disconnection between individual characters and the reality they find themselves, as they travel in search of a better life. The impression is that America offers hope and everyone aspires to achieve the “American dream” and in doing so, they undergo acculturation. Obinze’s love for America, is captured in the excerpts below:

Everybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines, but he knew details about American presidents from hundred years ago. Everybody watched American shows, but he knew about Lisa

Bonet leaving *The Cosby Show* to go and do *Angel Heart* and Will Smith's huge depts. Before he signed to do *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. "You look like a black American was his ultimate compliment..." (67)

Obinze's commitment to America is portrayed in his interest in their history. His obsession with America emphasizes the value that he places on the country, in contrast to the value that he places on Nigeria and on its cultures and lifestyle. To him, America is perceived as the biblical Promised Land. However, upon arrival, Ifemelu and Obinze struggle to negotiate and identify with the realities of their new environments, because the reality on ground is different from what they had watched on TV or read in books. This world of difference is what necessitates instances of nostalgia and depression in *Americanah*. Ifemelu, for instance, suffers depression as a result of the frustration she encounters in America and eventually returns to Nigeria. Dibia's *Unbridled*, on the other hand, conveys the limitations that Erika the central character suffers as a young girl trying to fend for herself in Lagos and then in Europe. The novel also takes us through her awful experiences in Britain where she goes to in search of a better life. Erika, upon arrival, kept comparing England with Nigeria. Her observation is captured thus:

For some reason, I kept comparing this England with Nigeria. I am sure many foreigners do this when they visit another country, subconsciously cataloguing the differences in surrounding, cultures and habits of the people, trying hard sometimes to discover what it is that makes the other people superior or inferior as the case may be. (p. 40)

Having examined both, Erika begins to question the superiority claim of one race over another. The history of colonialism and its psychological effect, leave most Africans with an inferiority complex. However, Erika soon realizes that no society is perfect and that her expectation were somewhat bigger than what is obtainable in Europe.

Ifemelu and Erika share a similar experience of depression in the diaspora. Their experiences accentuated their personalities as black people and made them act outside the norm. Ifemelu's nostalgia and depression are captured thus:

An early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness...Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. And, of course, there was also Obinze...she could not pretend that he was not a part of her homesickness. (6)

Here, we see a vivid capture of the nostalgic feelings of Ifemelu which eventually lead to the depression she eventually suffers. The reality in America did not correspond with the expectations and hopes she had before leaving Nigeria; thus, a feeling of disillusionment. Erika also faced a similar disappointment in Europe, right from the airport when she meets James her Virtual lover who was supposed to change her life and end her suffering. His appearance and welcome were quite a disappointing reality for Erika. She recounts that she had “expected much more, based on the stories and the perception” she had from “watching movies, reading books and magazines and also from the stories carried over by the more privileged girls she had known (p. 2) but, here she was having to pay her white boy friend’s transport fare from the airport.

Ifemelu and Erika had thought of the West as a safe haven and Whites as a superior race. This is the psychological predisposition that makes Nigerians aspire to a better life abroad. Erika, had hoped Britain would offer her an escape from the socio-cultural oppression often imposed on women in Nigeria. However, her stay in London revealed otherwise. She laments thus:

No one tells you that you are all on your own when you leave your country and head for another man’s land with your foolish dreams and hopeless hope. No one tells you to stop hoping and stop dreaming. Soon enough you find out by yourself. (Prologue, 4)

The diaspora experience is a different ball game altogether for Nigerians, because they are Blacks in white dominated societies with tendencies of racism. Siobhan, James’ friend, for instance, reacts harshly to Erika’s coming to Europe to meet James. He complains thus: “You Africans should really stay back in Africa”. Derek, another of James’ friends also complains that Africans and Indians are taking up all the jobs, depriving Brits of “any decent jobs” (p. 63). Such derogatory comments left Erika ashamed. In another instance, at the entrance of the toilet, Erika, also, recounts that:

There was already a long queue of white women waiting. It was strange standing in this line of white skin. I noticed some women looking at me and then turning away abruptly when I caught their eye. It was almost like I wasn’t supposed to be there. I felt passive hostility for the first time in my life...on a closer look I realised that almost everyone dancing on this basement floor was black or of African descent...it was quite glaring, the apparent racial divide within the room. (65)

This xenophobic treatments made Erika uncomfortable and disappointed. Obviously, in Europe, Erika still suffers from the limitations she thought she escaped from by leaving Nigeria. She finds out the hard way that white men can equally be

domineering and brutal. Bessie points out to her that “the problem isn’t marrying a white man. It isn’t even the motivation for marrying one.” But, “the problem is men” (p. 96). She realizes also that “White men tell lies too” (p. 173). In *Americanah*, Ifemelu’s experience with the tennis coach was quite traumatizing and depressing for her. It was the reason behind her disconnection with Obinze. Experiences of such magnitude shape the experiences of the Diasporas and affect their connection with the past. Thus, when the individual, as in the case of Ifemelu, is unable to manage such thoughts, depression sets in. Nostalgia is reflected in Ifemelu’s inability to be her former self. In addition to this experience, she also suffers a lack of job and resources to pay her bills. At some point, she thought of even killing the coach.

She lay rigid on her bed. She could not sleep, she could not distract herself. She began to think about killing the tennis coach. She would hit him on the head over and over with an axe. She would plunge a knife into his muscled chest. He lived alone, he probably had other women coming to his room to spread their legs for his stubby finger with its bitten-back nail. Nobody would know which of them had done it. She would leave the knife sunk in his chest and then search his drawers for his bundle of one-hundred-dollar bills, so that she could pay her rent and her tuition. (p.155)

This excerpt reveals how pressure can lead people into committing crimes. Even in America Ifemelu still suffers the pain of abuse. Ifemelu’s consideration of suicide is a proof of her disillusionment and depressive mood. Suicide is considered as an option for her, when she suffered depression.

She knew there was no point in being here, in being alive, she had no energy to think concretely of how she could kill herself. ....she sometimes forgot to eat....she no longer went to class. Her days were stilled by silence and snow. (p.156)

Ginika also explains that depression:

“... is something a lot of people go through, and I know it’s not been easy for you adjusting to a new place and still not having a job. We don’t talk about things like depression in Nigeria but it’s real. You should see somebody at the health center. There’s always therapists.” (p. 158)

This illustrates the extent of Ifemelu’s disillusionment as a jobless migrant. These instances are examples of what Nigerians in the diaspora go through in a land they thought held the solutions to all their problems. Both Ifemelu and Obinze in *Americanah* were disillusioned upon arrival, their destinations did not offer the comfort and good life they had hoped for. In fact, they both had to bear the identity of

someone else to escape being deported. While it worked out for Ifemelu, Obinze was caught and deported eventually. Ifemelu suffered depression while in America and even contemplated suicide at some point. With time, she grew nostalgic and eventually decided to return to Nigeria.

In *Unbridled*, Princess' experience in Italy shows a different kind of experience that women in the diaspora suffer, especially when they are illegal migrants. Her refusal to give in to prostitution in Italy, was her way of responding to oppression. Like Uloma, she develops a thick skin against society's suppressive attitude towards single women. Princess' movement to Italy was orchestrated by her family due to poverty. Her trip was to bring them relief and the cost was prostitution. Her resolve to resist the demands of family is a revolt against an oppressive system. As opposed to Princess' action, Ese's relationship with her Madam represents those who voluntarily engage in prostitution to survive in Europe. Prostitution in Turin, Italy, sometimes leads to death, especially for those who are considered as the "other", ugly and misfit to serve customers; they simply become fit as organ donors. (p. 28). These harsh conditions become options that Nigerians dare because of the situation back home. In *Americanah*, For instance, the harsh living conditions during the dictatorial rule of General Sani Abacha, drove many people abroad in search of refuge from military oppression and a better life. The characters hoped that a democratic society will give them the opportunity to achieve their personal dreams and aspirations; it would be a far more prosperous society than a Nigeria under military dictatorship. Obinze for example, proclaims that "America is the future" (70), but the outcome of his stay proves otherwise

The situation in Nigerian also makes the young ones seek education abroad. Through Ifemelu's flash back, the novel portrays the educational instability of the Nigerian system:

Strikes were now common. In the newspapers, university lecturers listed their complaints, the agreements that were trampled in the dust by government men whose children were schooling abroad. Campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Students hoped for short strikes, because they could not hope to have no strike at all. Everyone was talking about leaving. Even Emenike had left for England. Nobody knew how he managed to get a visa. (p. 98)

The "japa" syndrome which has been on the increase in Nigeria is portrayed here. Thus, many of the characters that leave their home land to the West are depicted as escaping from poor political, educational, social, and economic conditions in Nigeria. They all have hopes of living better lives in their host countries. Ginika and

Ifemelu are examples of characters who leave for America in search of better educational opportunities but end up disillusioned.

Safran (1991:83) states that diaspora people “believe that they are not fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it”. This is the case of Obinze and Ifemelu in the text who on coming face-to-face with the America reality, feel alienated from it. The text captures how many Nigerian Immigrants in the novel, with university degrees from their home countries, struggle to get odd jobs which are not always readily available to them. Obinze experiences it first hand when he gets to Europe:

Everybody joked about people who went abroad to clean toilets, and so Obinze approached his first job with irony: he was indeed abroad cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail...the toilets were not bad, some urine outside the urinal, some unfinished flushing; cleaning them was much easier... and so he was shocked, one evening to walk into a stall and discover a mould of shit on the toilet lid, solid, tapering, centered as though it has been carefully arranged and the exact spot has been measured... Obinze stared at the mould of shit for a long time, feeling smaller and smaller as he did so, until it became a personal affront, a punch on his jaw. And all for three quid an hour. (pp. 236-237)

The degrading situation of the Nigerian migrant is illustrated in the above excerpt when Obinze who had left Nigeria with the hope of getting a good job and to eventually finish his postgraduate studies, came face to face with the fact that the England he had been fantasizing about, is different from the real England. He half-heartedly does the cleaning job until he encounters an unsightly mess which brings back his sense of self-worth and he leaves the job. The pursuit of a better education and ultimately a better life sees Obinze and many other migrant Nigerians doing jobs they would be too ashamed to talk about to any relative back home.

The experiences of the character of Erika also reveal that the diaspora experience is, more often than not, a product of a bias and failed system. Erika's experience is quite symbolic, in some ways, of the Nigerian postcolonial experience. The disillusionment that characterises the post-independent Nigeria and the disabled system that followed have led most to search for a better life and for some, a new identity. Princess providence and Erika were exposed to the hardship of a diaspora experience by virtue of their search for a better life. The juxtaposition between the Okoros' wealth and the poor families around points to the power of oppression assigned to the wealthy by virtue of their status in society. These differences are

strong identity markers that determine who gets what in society. Eventually, Erika develops a thick skin against the oppressive system.

As a result of the prevailing issues of poverty, unemployment, social instability, inadequate infrastructure and the poor educational system in Nigeria, as portrayed in Adichie's *Americanah* and Dibia's *Unbridled*, many characters in diaspora, despite their bad experiences in their host land, would rather remain than go back to their ancestral home. An example is Obinze's cellmate who on being deported from Europe to Nigeria said:

"I will take off my shirt and my shoes and when they try to board me. I will seek asylum... "If you take off your shoes, they will not board you." He repeated this often like a mantra. (p.283)

Most of the Nigerians in Adichie's *Americanah* refuse to return home especially, since the condition back home is worse than the one in their host land. The fact that Obinze's cellmate in the above quotation was not one of those to be deported alongside Obinze, indicates that he succeeds with his machination of seeking for asylum in order not to be deported back to Nigeria. We notice the same reluctance from Erika who, despite the red flag that James was not who she thinks he is, decides to still stay in Europe. Though she was deceived, she had a choice of returning to Nigeria as Princess advised; "Don't wait for bad things to happen to you Ngozi, just walk away immediately you smell trouble". She ignored all the warning signs and stayed.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the representation of migration disillusionment in Adichie's *Americanah* and Dibia's *Unbridled*. The texts effectively portray the hardship, scarcity, economic degradation, etc. behind the mass migration of Africans, young and old, to America and Europe. They believed Europe and America are filled with easy money to go around. The novel describes the unlivable nature of the American/British dream for Africans and their unwelcomed status by presenting the hardships of living abroad and the sense of alienation which is caused as a result of being different. Still, the majority of characters in the texts like Emenike, Erika, Auntie Uju, Ese and Obinze's cell mate, would rather be faced with racism, nostalgia, disappointments, culture difference, depression and even becoming a hybridized version of themselves, than coming back to their home of origin ravished by poverty and choked with people just getting by one day at a time.

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JLSN

# A Stylistic Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'The Thing Around Your Neck'

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## Abstract

A narrator's role in a story and his relationship with the characters are determined by the point of view from which the story is told. Sometimes he is a character in the story and the story is viewed from his perspective; at other times, he is an omniscient narrator, telling the reader about all the characters in the work. On very few occasions the audience is a character and the story is viewed from their point of view. This paper discusses the linguistic techniques, language choice and their effects in the realisation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story, 'The Thing Around Your Neck'. It explores the author's rare style of the use of the second person narrative perspective all through the entire work which, among other things, makes the reader not just a member of the audience, but a part of the action. This style is of particular interest to this research and discourse on its application runs through the major part of the work. A stylistic analysis of the text is adopted in order to assist readers in making proper meaningful interpretation of the story, and thereby increase their appreciation of the work.

Keywords: Style, Point of View, Second Person Narrative, Stylistic Analysis

## Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a renowned writer from Eastern Nigeria. She has published a collection of poetry, *Decisions* (1997), a play, *For Love of Biafra* (1998); three novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013) and two books of non-fiction, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017). Her short stories include: *That Harmattan Morning* (2002), *Ghosts* (2004) and *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). She has done a couple of TED Talks including 'The Danger of a Single Story' 'We Should All Be Feminists' and has won several literary and non-literary awards.

Chimamanda is a good story teller. Her works which cover politics, civil war in Nigeria, etc. are widely read and appreciated within and outside the continent. These, especially her first two novels, have earned her several awards. She is known for her blunt statements, some of which have led to controversial discourses amongst many.

### Style

Style refers to a manner of writing, doing or presenting things especially in a fashionable manner. In literary work, it is the way a piece is written. Different things put together make up a writer's style; like tone, word choice, grammar, language, descriptive technique, etc. Louise Harnby agrees **with** this when he says it is 'the literary element that describes the way that the author uses words – the diction, sentence structure/arrangement, figurative language of the writer **that** help to establish mood, images and meaning in the text'. 'Style is the author's choice of words and phrases, and how he arranges these words and phrases as sentences and paragraphs. This allows the author to shape how the reader experiences the work' (David Madden, 2009). Simple wordings and straight-forward sentences, as against difficult vocabulary and elaborate sentence structure may be the distinguishing characteristics of different writers. This distinction will obviously account for the differences in readers' perception of the writers' works, albeit on same theme. Authors differ in their style of writing; so also, the works of an author may differ in style. They may choose a particular style in one work and a different one in another. Chimamanda's major literary genre is prose fiction, as we can see from the above. She veers a little from her regular pattern in the publishing of her collection of short stories; and also, when she changes her narrative style and uses the least common of the narrative techniques – the second person narrative (you) – in 'The Thing Around Your Neck'.

### Short Stories

Interest in short stories from the various cultures of Africa has been growing since the late 1950s. In sub-Saharan Africa, short stories often focused on wild fancy, stark realism and political commentary. The work of the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, *Civil Peace* depicts the turbulent aftermath of the Nigerian civil war. Nordine Gordimer, the South African writer, has also written several disturbing stories of family and race relationship, which had tended to x-ray social and political tension in South Africa, e.g. *Something Out There*. Doris Lessing, the Zimbabwean writer had earlier followed in this tradition. It is, therefore, no strange occurrence to find

Chimamanda Adichie following this established tradition of writing short stories. History has it that the earliest ancestors of short stories are ancient tales, simple stories that date back to Egyptian writings that are about 6,000 years old.

### Fiction

Fiction, on the Nigerian literary landscape, came from Amos Tutuola's *The Palm wine Drinkard and His Palm wine Tapster in the Dead's Town* (1950). There, a man journeys to the land of the dead to retrieve his bartender. The book gained ascendancy in Europe and America as critics mistook his idiosyncratic English for bold stylistic experimentation. Achebe, inspired by Tutuola's success, albeit an educated Nigerian, came up with *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Other Nigerian fictional writers came up thereafter: Cyprian Ekwensi, whose most popular *Jagua Nana* (1961) chronicled the life story of a charming Lagos prostitute; Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1960) which dwelt on the social problem the woman in her culture faces.

### Narrative Point of View

This is the description of 'whose head we are in' when we read a book. It is seen as the perspective from which we discover what is going on, and the smells, sounds, sights and emotions involved. An author may choose to write from the first, second or third person point of view and this is shown from the pronouns he utilizes. His choice is determined by how he wants his story to be viewed by his readers. As pointed out above, the first and third person narratives are common amongst writers; but the second is not so common. We will take a look at the different narrative techniques and their features.

### First Person Point of View

A story written in the first person narrative point of view is told from the narrator's perspective. The first person narrative point of view is characterised by the pronouns, I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours. It suggests that the narrator is among the characters in a literary work and a part of the events in the story. The reader, therefore, views the story from his perspective.

### Advantages

Caitlin Berve gives some advantages of the first person narrative; according to him, 'The biggest advantage of first person point of view is how deeply it delves into the mind of the narrator'. We get to see all of the narrator's thoughts, feelings and knowledge, he says. And we may add: his biases, concerns and attitude towards a person or an issue. Other advantages of the first person point of view, as stated by

Berve, are that:

- it allows the author tighter control over the information and elements of the story, especially when the narrator is an outsider who does not know everything about the story, history, or other characters;
- because the author is telling his own story in a memoir, he is expected to tell it in the first person;
- it can be powerful and add voice, emotion, and perspective to a piece, as well as control the release of information.

### Disadvantages

One major disadvantage of the first person narrative point of view is that since the reader is only able to view the story from the author's perspective, he only knows what the author knows and nothing more. As a result of this, it is, as Berve puts it, 'inherently biased and the most subjective of all the points of view'.

### Third Person Point of View

In third person point of view, the narrator is not a part of the story and the characters never acknowledge their presence. They exist outside the story, even though they seem to know everything about every character in the story – their thoughts, wishes, assumptions, etc. Simply put, the third person point of view belongs to the person (people) being talked about. Pronouns used in the third person narrative are: he, she, it, its, itself, his, him, himself, her, hers, herself, they, them, their, theirs, themselves. Unlike the first person narrative, the reader does not see directly through a character's eyes, but often the narrator describes the characters' thoughts and feelings about what's going on.

The above is, however, a general description of the third person narrative point of view. Gary Smailes gives different types of third person narrative view point: subjective/objective and omniscient/limited. According to him, 'All third person point of view is written using a detached and anonymous narrator, but the information the narrator possesses about the characters differs significantly between different types of viewpoint'. The third person point of view subjective narration involves a narrator with access to one or more character's personal feelings and thoughts. In other words, the narrator understands the thoughts and feelings of, at least, one character. As for the third person point of view objective narration, the narrator does not describe the feelings or thoughts of any of the characters but, rather, just the exact facts of the story.

According to Smailes, the narrator knows everything happening within the story's world, including what each of the characters is thinking and feeling in the

Third person omniscient point of view; while he conveys the knowledge and subjective experience of just one character in the third person limited point of view (Berve also refers to the latter as third person close). In other words, the narrator is focussed on a single character and only knows this character in the limited point of view.

The third person limited is similar to the first person point of view in the sense that just as in the first person point of view, the reader only sees the story from one character's perspective and the disadvantage is that they have limited knowledge of the other characters in the story.

### Second Person Point of View

The second person narrative point of view is an uncommon point of view. Here, the pronoun used in the work is 'you', with the narration done on an intimate basis, in a strange way. This is so because it looks as though the author is talking directly to the reader as a character. The ability of the writer to intrude into his/her character gives strength and weakness to its usage. The reader is at the steering wheels, so to speak, even though directed by the narrator. The reader is placed at the heart of the story and yet we – the 'you' – know less than the narrator. At any time, the reader feels implicated rather than attached, he can be pulled out of it rather than being enmeshed deeper into it. This occurs especially if the reader feels he does not identify with the 'you' and that he cannot discover what we think, see or do. Harnby says it can be used to report on the actions and thoughts of the character. The second person narrative view point arouses curiosity – one begins to wonder about who the 'you' is and how it is that the narrator knows so much about them. Harnby claims it gives us a sense of immediacy, but an almost amnesiac dislocation.

### 'The Thing Around Your Neck'

'The Thing Around Your Neck' is one of the stories in Adichie's collection of short stories titled *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The collection comprises 12 stories, three of which are written in the first person narrative (I, we), seven in the third person (he/she/they) and two in the second person (you). From the very onset, the writer addresses the thought of the persona, a female immigrant from Nigeria to America. The obviously present, but silent character (Akunna) is a beneficiary of the famous American visa lottery amongst many other family members, whose particulars were featured in the entries by a purported 'uncle' based in Maine, USA. She goes through the rites of departure in Nigeria with family members and friends, all wishing her well, while inundating her with their multifarious demands. All she says is 'okay, no problem' to their goodbye salvos.

The author surreptitiously captures the preconceived notion of the small world of family members about America as a place where one's dream can always come true – have a big car, big house and probably a gun, like all Americans are supposedly rumoured to possess.

In a scenic and picturesque description, Adichie captures the events of her reception in America. She checks into the uncle's home after a nauseating snack of hot-dog. The inner thoughts of the character are glaringly mirrored by the writer as the former tries to settle into the small white town in Maine. The 'uncle' paints a larger-than-life picture of his bloated personality to the new guest; assisting her to apply for a cashier job in the gas station on Main Street and enrolling her in a school where the attitude and character of the students are questionable. The aim of this do-gooder position of the uncle is revealed to be an attempt to win her understanding in having a favourable sexual relationship between the two of them.

As expected, the mixture of the arrogance and ignorance of the whites about the true picture of Africa and Africans is revealed in the cranky questions they ask the immigrant: where she learned to speak English and if Africans have real houses. At this early stage of the short story, one is tempted to query the timing of the events of the story. Does the time of the American visa lottery not suggest that Americans were already well educated about Africa? If yes, how come these obnoxious questions about Africa's genuine ontology?

The initial joy and laughter she shared with the 'uncle' and his family is aptly captured in a paragraph where the 'uncle's' wife called her 'nwanne' (sister, in Igbo language). It was an atmosphere of family camaraderie, until the devil took over the 'uncle's' mind. The author addresses the persona in the characteristic second person narrative point of view; she stands aloof and runs through the mind rift of the character like someone who once heard the story and was now reliving and recounting it with fresh meaning attached to it. It is an opportunity to draw the readers' attention and sympathise in a cathartic manner.

The unbecoming manner and sinister advances of the 'uncle', who is now revealed to be 'a brother of her father's sister's husband' and not actually a blood uncle, forces her to relocate to a small town in Connecticut, the farthest she would get from the randy uncle. In her new abode, everything is new: she has to fend for herself and learn out of school. She often passes her time by filling the gaps of her emptiness with reminiscences of home in Nigeria.

The reader is pulled along unwittingly in this galloping narrative. As it can be seen, the second person point of view breaks the fourth wall by directly addressing the reader with the pronoun 'you'. It helps create an interactive literary experience,

bringing the reader into the story. Jodie Robins posits that as writers, we want to push boundaries; as we try to set ourselves apart from everybody else. The second person point of view helps to create a memorable and long character that feels as real to us as the person we shared our last meal with. The bravery of Adichie in writing in this point of view definitely helps her to achieve this aim. The fact that we are given a ride into the thoughts of the character makes us inevitable targets of conditional catharsis, as we – the readers – are put in an uncomfortable position/dilemma. For example, do we pity the harassed character of the girl who is forced to relocate to Connecticut or do we understand the luscious feelings of the uncle who feels he should be rewarded with sex for helping the girl to emigrate to the USA?

After you pushed him away, he sat on your bed – it was his, after all – and said you were no longer a child at twenty-two. If you let him, he would do many things for you, smart women did it all the time. How did you think those women back home in Lagos with well-paying jobs made it? Even women in New York City? (116 – 117)

The thoughts of the writer are definitely infused into the narration, as we can see the view points of the smiling ‘uncle’ who believes he only has to take his time to break the youngster’s resolve. In his subconscious, he cannot imagine her taking any bold step to go out on a limb at this stage of her early existence in the USA. Commentators on the second person narrative point of view all agree it can be quite draining to write a full novel in the point of view, so they generally recommend it in a few chapters. Adichie experiments it in this story and another one ‘Tomorrow is Too Far’, and masterfully so, perhaps due to the length of the stories.

The writer invites the reader and tugs at his subconscious to walk through the magical gates of the character’s heart and thus situate our feelings therein, and thus become a sympathetic character in the story, albeit outside it physically. Robins quotes Kathy Fish as saying that writing in the second person is the literary equivalent of making good eye contact’, a position she completely concurs with. She opines that as a form, it is well used in short stories and flash fiction, as it permits much experimental writing. The work under review affords us all these. It urges the reader to become the object of his address, as this creates intimacy and enables us to become totally immersed into the story. The desire of the girl to write letters, after getting a clearer but different opinion of America and her citizens, was like a choking VICE-like grip around her neck. She has memories to share with her relations at home as well as with her friends. The difference between their opinion and the reality on ground in America was too striking for her to keep to herself. At some other times,

she feels a sense of escape from prying eyes – **something** that even the reader could wish to do being in the same situation.

Nobody knew where you were, because you told no one. Sometimes you felt invisible and tried to walk through your room wall into the hallway, and when you bumped into the wall, it left bruises on your arms. (119)

The experiences of Adichie are obviously reflected in the story in a completely new literary experiment. Her reflections on the condescension of the average American academic about the race called Africa is very clear to her, as the writer unwittingly draws the reader into the opinions of Professor Cobblechek who thought himself better than the people he knew about (Africans) at Maine Community College, and the humbler, but younger undergraduate whose knowledge of Africa has created a desire in him to learn more. As she gets the attention of the loquacious customer, she could see she is getting to a point where company rules are about to be broken. This relationship that has started to blossom beyond the restaurant, allows her to get a better **view** of the differences in the academia in Nigeria and America. It is an eye opener to the reader who has never travelled to America.

You did not know that people could simply choose not to go to school, that people could dictate to life. You were used to accepting what life gave, writing down what life dictated.

The relationship with the young American acquaintance gets deeper and it affords the grandiose of a reflection on the differences between their parentage – his mother, a tutor who teaches women's studies, while her father was a junior driver for a construction company. The chaotic traffic situation in Lagos city is given a brief discourse with an unfortunate incident her father got involved in once on a rainy day in Lagos.

It is clear that her life is changed with the relationship as she reflects on her emotional moments with the man. She, however, feels like a second-rate sex toy to the man, after their visit to the Chang's Chinese restaurant, as the familiar waiter's knowing conversation on his Shanghai 'girlfriend' is not denied.

So that night you didn't moan when he was inside you, you bit your lips and pretended that you didn't come... (124)

The ups and downs of the love escapade she is now involved in affords the character and the reader the privilege of knowing the social differences between the two. The man brings gifts to her as memorabilia, but she sees only the usefulness of any gift not just **the** aesthetics. She rejects a trip to Nigeria on his sponsorship because it would

be an obvious choice for him to gawk at the lives of poor people who would never gawk back at his life. As their love life deepens, she could feel the ‘thing that wrapped itself around’ her neck ‘begin to loosen’, to let go. (125)

The ‘abnormal’ relationship draws all sorts of reactions from different races (racial angles), but the young man’s parents believe it is normal, more so when he had never actually brought home a lover. She is however grateful that his parents did not see her as ‘an exotic trophy, an ivory tusk’ to be examined; and its quality estimated! She cries mysteriously without any explanation. With the interval of time, the character being x-rayed finally musters the courage to write home, shipping the crisp dollar bills between the letter. The response, a courier-sent reply comes from her mother, since she included a return address of her location. The shocking revelation of her father’s demise, five months earlier, is made. Perhaps some of her bad moods in the recent past, hidden in the curtailed narration, must have had a mystic attachment to her father’s death - when the thing around her neck began to loosen. The money she sent is obviously lavished in giving the late father a so-called befitting burial. The emotions of her loss are only captured clearly in our involvement in the departure to Nigeria. She has her love tugging her heart to return to America – after all, she has a green card. She could always come back so long as her visit to Nigeria does not violate the green card regulations.

From the discourse made so far, the use of the second person narrative point of view has afforded Adichie ample opportunity to make the audience more active in the story and action. We have been surreptitiously made a character in the story and our feelings or emotions are implicated and we are forced to side with the character. For example, what would you, as a reader do, if you experienced the loss of a father like the young lady did? The emotional contrition around her neck could possibly be the desire to better the lives of the poor parents, especially remembering the poor state of her father. Now that he is no more, would she go home to pay her last respects, would the reader not do same, put in the same situation?

The narratological distinction that is radically affected in the second person texts is that between the various levels of discourse with communicational structure of narrative. In particular, opines Genette, characters are usually conceived of as existing on a different (and lower) ontological plane from that of the narrative discourse. This stance is maintained in ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ from the beginning to the end of the story. The main character at every point is painted as insignificant, used and virtually empty.

The use of ‘you’ in the second person context in the teller mode, their deictic properties are even more strongly in evidence, both for their marked nature and their

immediate effective quality. 'You', therefore is one of the attention-inducing features of the discussion mode. It always attracts and alerts the current listener to pay attention, since he or she may be directly called upon to simulate an aura of intimacy or closeness, adding even further to the effect of involvement. The 'you' use invokes direct reader participation in the text (Monika Fludernik).

The second person narrative uses the reflective narrative mode, and Franz Karl Stanzel opines that they immediately establish a deistic centre on the part of the protagonist and relate all deistic expressions to the deistic centre. Banfield concurs with this opinion; no wonder there is a preponderance of familiarising articles referential items relating to the subjectivity of the vocalizer and expression of subjectivity at the very beginning of reflector mode texts. This immediate descent, Fludernik suggests, that goes into the protagonist's psyche occurs with frequency at the beginning of short stories like the one under consideration.

#### Themes of 'The Thing Around Your Neck'

The general theme that pervades the stories in the collection has to do with the fraught relationship between men and women. The writer specifically explores the roles women are asked to play within their families and when in romantic relationships. This expectation is high in the story under review, as we see all the demands made of the protagonist, even at the point of her departure to America. With the huge dream of expectations hanging viciously around her neck, she is already pinned down to living a life where her own desires and needs are second or even third priorities. As it is clear in the relationship between the 'uncle' and his wife, the man has the freedom to roam and rove in quest of his selfish desires to fulfil his bloated ego, while the woman loses sight of their identities and sense of their agency in the course of the narrative.

This paper has attempted to discuss the stylistic analysis of Adichie's 'The Thing Around Your Neck', especially as it has to do with the use of the rare second person narrative point of view. Carter suggests that the practice of stylistics comes about at any point of intersection of the language of a text with the element, which constitutes the literariness of the text. How does the writer's choice of language and other elements of style lend assistance to the clarity of the text, become the focus of a stylistic analysis? The choice of the writer's second person narrative point of view has greatly assisted the readers to correctly interpret the thematic preoccupation of the former.

The paper has no doubt been able to open the reader's eyes to the creative use of the second person narrative point of view and thus widen the reader's academic horizon.

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JLSN

# Exploring Nego-feminism in Ba'aram Alkali's Personal Angle

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## Abstract

For a long time, there have been series of writings on women, issues relating to women and feminism in almost all spheres of knowledge. Women writers in Nigeria have attained a status almost everywhere around the world. They present female situations such as hardship, subjugation and all such types of discrimination against women. They also try to challenge and bring about possible solutions that the woman can prefer to attain her freedom and success in society through their writings. However, there is a great need for examining these writings by women to see and direct the society towards a better understanding of the possible solutions to issues concerning women. Though women's writings in Nigeria have gained prominence over the years, there is still room for researchers to examine and explore issues presented in these writings which the woman in the society can relate to when the need arises. Alkali's *Personal Angle* explores issues faced in contemporary marriages, such as feelings of unfulfillment and challenges that couples encounter in their relationships. It highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics between men and women in various roles, including politics, business, and home life. Using Nego-feminism as a theory to view and analyze texts adds a wide corpus to understanding feminism, African feminism, and its different variants. This paper also points out that nego-feminism as a theory advocates peace and harmony. It is a theory that is quite different and not radical in approach. This paper also reveals that when there is understanding and negotiation there will be no war of supremacy.

## Introduction

The emerging trend in contemporary African literature, particularly fiction, involves the redefinition and re-presentation of women's identity and sensibility. The rise of female writers in Nigeria has shifted the focus and perception of women's images in literature. These writers first critique the negative portrayal of women and then work to inspire and redefine female identity. They create characters who confront societal challenges, contributing to the feminist movement, which faces mixed acceptance in

Africa, often labeling its advocates as radicals. Feminism today is an ideology with many practitioners that have situated themselves in various theoretical intersections. Feminism, however, is not only a critique or an extension of traditional ideologies, but has made a significant contribution of its own in the field of theory and praxis. Before the 1970s (in the first and second waves), feminism was concerned with the politics of women's authorship and representation (writings and images) of women's condition in literature. Theorists of the third wave feminism consider gender to be part of deconstructing existing relationships between sexes. Feminist critics carefully examine how the images of men and women in imaginative literature reflect or reject the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving total equality. Recently, it has focused on gay and lesbian literary identity as interpretative strategies. In emphasizing the relevance of feminism, Balogun (2014, p. 19) believes that:

Feminist theorists have espoused the connection between otherness and class in terms of the relationship which borders on gender inequality in which the dominant group (male) imposes the values of its own particular identity, while at the same time devaluing the identity of the 'other' (female) through the imposition of corresponding discriminatory measures.

One can say that feminism is all about what gives women their confidence; nonetheless, the confidence is still dangling as expected, because what these women desire is yet to be fulfilled. Many factors may be responsible for the delay of the success according to Alkali (2010, p. 23) "the ever-present anti-feminism...and as well as the dangerous position, was taken by the feminist themselves is the reason for the delay of the woman success". However, Feminism does not have a universal application and suitability, especially for African women. As a result, other forms of Feminism emerged, such as Womanism, and the various forms of African feminism, such as African Womanism, Stiwanism, and Motherism. Nnaemeka develops more sensible and rewarding feminism, a term she calls Nego-feminism, after all, these "new feminist models are needed especially those that are realistic, practical and, fundamental" (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 26). In her paper, "Nego-feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way" (2003), Obiomma Nnaemeka proposes Nego-feminism from two similar positions. First, it directly flows from 'negotiation'. Second 'n-ego' translates to 'non ego/ no ego'. It is, therefore, a feminism that is free from egoistic tendencies which neither male nor female holds. The center of her theory emphasizes the complementarity of sexes" (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 360). Nego-feminism charges both sexes to be willing partners in progress. In short, where the notorious western and radical feminism is extreme and sidelines some aspects of

African culture, Nego-feminism is open to the present and the future

This paper adopts Nego-feminism because it gives room for understanding and appreciation. It is also not harsh and extreme in approach. Alkali, Tolif & Jan (2017, p. 10) agrees that “Nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation complementarity, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration. Nego-feminism offers to the world how to manage the two sexes harmoniously”. This paper examines the exploitation and suppression of women, highlighting conditions that leave them psychologically vulnerable. It focuses on Fatima Ba'aram Alkali's *Personal Angle* (2008), which advocates for peace and cooperation. The study demonstrates that such texts serve as tools for resistance and enhance understanding of the interplay between culture, gender, and power dynamics in the region, contributing to the broader feminist discourse in Africa.

#### Marital Negotiations in *Personal Angle*

Alkali's novel *Personal Angle* examines the challenges facing the contemporary Nigerian woman. Through two of her characters, Zaria and Basheika, the writer portrays the plight of the woman Ba'aram introduces us to Zaria and Basheika. Zaria, a woman in her early thirties, the wife of a business tycoon Alhaji Balarabe (junior), the first son of the late Balarabe who is overseeing his father's business. Zaria is not only married to Alhaji Balarabe, but to his entire extended family; ruled by him, controlled by his siblings, most especially his elder sister, Salima. Zaria is a wife, but only in name. She longs for attention and affection that every married woman craves for, but, that dream seems to be far away.

Basheika, on the other hand, is an opposite of Zaria, though related by marriage. Her husband, Yusuf Talib, is an elder brother to Zaria. Yusuf Talib is a struggling gubernatorial aspirant, battling between his intensified efforts for his political pursuits and keeping his family together. Through Basheika, the writer portrays the sacrifice that comes with self-pursuit. Yusuf gives all his efforts, energy and attention to his political ambition, while his family is slowly fading. His wife is depressed because she feels so alone. The husband she once knew is gradually changing and being replaced by a total stranger “an unpleasant depression washed upon her. The feeling of intense pleasure, which she derived from the dream about Yusuf, was suddenly replaced by a feeling of sadness.” (p. 27). Basheika is depressed as a result of sadness and loneliness while Yusuf was not aware of it. He loves Basheika, but he is not aware of what his ambition is doing to his loved ones. Basheika explains her marital life with Yusuf when she voices it to herself “the life of a political activism which her husband adopted just two years after their marriage

had gradually defined ten years of her married life.” (p. 26). In her marriage of ten years, she can only recall two beautiful years out of it. The remaining eight years were for his political ambition. Basheika describes Yusuf as an “overly protective man who treated any child or woman with great care. She was grateful to him.” (p. 27). Craving for power overshadows Yusuf’s good side, or we can say he is ignorant. Basheika is a beautiful young woman in her early thirties at her prime. The writer describes her as:

... neither plump nor painfully thin. She maintained a slender figure, average height and a tight stomach in spite of her three births. Everything about her looks was on an average scale. She did not possess too much or too little of anything. With hair reaching the neckline when braided and an average bust, she could pass for an attractive woman to men who were drawn to the unobtrusive beauty of a woman. Her skin had the colour of fresh brown dates, a refined brown. She looked always, whatever the situation, like she had recently had a bath. And her face said it all, an unassuming woman with observant eyes and lips that gave a character of composure to her oval face. (p. 27-28)

Through Basheika and her family, the writer portrays the effect politics has on the family. On one occasion, “Basheika went outside the house to where the children were playing. On seeing their mother, they stopped their jests and looked mischievously at each other” (p. 46). Though not as fortunate as her children during her childhood, she realizes she had the most beautiful childhood she can have. But here, her children are engrossed in different activities that makes one wonder how would they remember their childhood days in the future. Would they remember it and dream about it with enthusiasm or with dismay?

According to the view of the writer, politics comes with huge sacrifice. As the moment goes, Yusuf’s family is gradually destabilizing, as he is digging down into politics unknown to him, his family is falling. Basheika in search of her self-worth found herself in the company of Layla; a woman whom Yusuf and other think she lacks self-respect. When Basheika narrates her encounter with Layla to Yusuf saying; “I do not think there is anything evil about her. She is warm and generous.” (p. 169). His response was a bit harsh where he says; “and you could tell by just talking to her? Do you know what she does in town, and the people she deals with, and even the nature of her dealings? You do not know about what some women do in town, so do not argue with me.” (p. 169-170). Layla is a woman that feels she does not need a man or marriage to be happy in life, but this might be as a result of her encounter with men just as the writer narrates through Basheika. She says:

Layla must have been extremely beautiful in her youth. She was not a tall

woman though one would not hesitate to call her short. Perhaps she was taller before age-accumulated fat pulled her body closer to the ground. Some tell-tale wrinkles by the side of her eyes confirmed her age of forty-five to anyone who looked closely at her. But that was her official age, Samari had said. Layla was fifty. He also said Layla nursed a sad history of marriage, for she had never really married. Her first attempt at marriage ended in divorce even before consummation. He knew that much but did not know why. (p. 163)

Yusuf is aware of what the outcome of her association with Layla would be. Therefore, he disagrees with their friendship "I am telling you I do not want you involving yourself with that woman." (p. 170). After the election result was announced, Yusuf loses to his opponent, but he concedes to defeat even though many were against it. For a moment, Yusuf fell into a depressed state. A moment he needs his wife the most, but that is the time Basheika finds herself more indulged and addicted in Layla's company. She is busy trying to actualize herself while her husband is depressed and her children losing their morals. They are mere spectators of the parent's attitude and thus it affects not only their childhood, but their personality;

And as the days went by, Lami became worried that her parents were still not talking to each other. They did not pass each other in the hallway as her father took the front door out of the house and her mother, the back door always. Her mother no longer sent her on errands to her father for household upkeep and her father no longer gave her money to give to her mother. He now entrusted the elderly cook with the money for foodstuff purchases. Lami was even more worried about Ado, who now spent his days brooding, not talking to anyone. She wanted to do something and makes things right, but her father was constantly absent and she was too fearful of her mother. Either way, she did not know how. (p. 219)

The writer, however, points out the wrong that some parents refuse to acknowledge that whatever they are doing, their children are aware and it affects them greatly and might even destroy them in future. Basheika's mother is a woman of great virtue, she is not educated yet, she is the one holding firmly the very foundation of her house. Basheika's mother and Hajiya Kawkab are two different individuals. Hajiya Kawkab fails in her duty as a mother in teaching her daughter the right values. She is an independent and highly influential woman, that was not intimidated by men. She is a widow, a politician and president of the women's association. She is a very self-

determined woman that knows what she wants and goes for it. The writer introduces us to the other side of women with power through Hajiya Kawkab and the dark side of it in their family, which can be seen through the character of Hajiya Kawkab's only child Saudat, whom is described as one of the most beautiful girl of her time, "Hajiya Kawkab's daughter was indeed a paragon of beauty. Hardly anyone who walked by her resisted giving her another look, and her gorgeous appearance competed with the appearance of the prestigious women trooping into the hall." (p.51). Saudat was compelled by her mother to be part of the political gathering of women who are thrice her age or more. Hajiya Kawkab raises her twenty-three-year-old daughter to be independent beyond her age, to aim for the top, never the bottom.

... the big question still hung in the air; how big was Jamil's salary? It was a question that need not be answered. However big, his salary was not big enough to take care of the daughter of the late Alhaji Sagiru. And all that talk about business, who was he fooling? She was only twenty-three but she knows about the lies men told before marriage. She had heard all about it. And didn't her mother tell her that a woman must know her worth to decide what she was going to get out of life? (p. 23)

The background Hajiya Kawkab gave her daughter is quite inappropriate, she is rude, ambitious and she belittles people. According to her own mentality, most men are not good enough for her, those she may choose to attend to sole depends on how deep their pockets are and how well renown are their family. Saudat sees herself as superior to others, she recalls her mother's advice; "never compromise your worth." (p. 23). One should always teach their children that we are nothing in the face of the earth, we are all God's creation, and no human is superior to the other. One should never undermine another person just because they are influential or born with a silver spoon. But Hajiya Kawkab thinks that whatever she wants, must be hers and so that is the life she wants her daughter to live; avoiding the shades of grey, but living a flamboyant life, just as when the writer points out; "back home from the tailors with new attires, visiting the tailor to make new clothes and going to the supermarket to purchase make-up items were routine activities for her, an obligation by her mother's standards." (p. 108). Saudat knows her mother expects nothing less, her mother's pride is seeing her only child flaunting her beauty to the world. She is used to her mother's life; she enjoys being admired and getting compliments especially from men of higher calibre.

Saudat reaches a point in life when she knows that she is beautiful and she is using the realization as a weapon; no wonder she says:

For who could resist the incomparable beauty God that had given her and

the sheer magic that moved with her personality? And that substance of quality that attached itself to the rich, which she saw in very few women, for the women she knew were either rich but uneducated, or they were good, religious and poor. She was lucky she had a lot to keep man bound to her. (p. 112)

The only thing Saudat can do to please her mother is to look beautiful and elegant, that is the virtue Hajiya Kawkab wants to see in her child, nothing less. At the end, the beauty and riches did not get her what she desired (Yusuf Talib) she later had to compromise and marry Jamil that she once looked down upon.

However, a close look at Malama Tasalla, Basheika's mother we realize the true picture of a mother she gives words of wisdom to her daughter when things were not going quite well in her matrimonial home, she says;

'Basheika', ... you know your husband much more than we do, but your father and I can testify that he has held you in the highest regard that a man can hold a woman. I do not believe in all these rumours that he has lost his mind, but people are talking, the affairs of your home are in the mouths of people and not in a good way. Now, if you are a woman who knows her weight, you will go and kneel before your husband and ask him to stop being angry, whatever it is that caused his anger... Yusuf is a good man and I can testify for him any day. You are the one who brought us together with him. It was not because we are your parents that he married you, but it was because of you that we became parents to him, too. If after all this time in what God has given you, which is the power to hold this man and the family that you made from him, then I feel sorry for you and I wish you can see yourself the way that I am seeing you. (p. 241-242)

Malama Tasalla put the right words in her daughter's mouth, even though Basheika sees the beautiful home she wished for herself in her mother, still there are some unknown forces dragging her away from doing the right thing. She sees her mother as old fashion that doesn't know what the world entails now, she states;

She wondered why things became incomprehensible as one grew older, but then when she looked at her parents, they always seemed to be on the serene, problem-free level. They had a complex arrangement. While her mother was in control of the affairs and had her feet firmly on the earth of her home, she was still very submissive and obedient to her husband. How did they maintain such balance? She knew Yusuf was a good man, but if she made the error of submitting completely to him, he would exercise no restraint in trampling over her. (p. 241)

Basheika still hold some irresponsible mentality Layla installed in her, the mentality that if she is submissive to her husband, he will trample over her. She refuses to see the clearer picture of her mother's life; that she is 'submissive' and yet happy in her years of marriage. She forgets her husband's state of vulnerability while in the company of Layla. Layla constantly admonishes and influences her thus; "Layla fixed a hard look on her." we are both women and we should not continue pretending to each other. The world is changing now and you much change along with it. You cannot continue to live in the past like your parents. There is a very wide gap between you and them. These are modern times; people are educated now..." (p. 277)

Basheika almost succumbs to her advice and a devilish thought cross her mind for a brief moment just as the writer explains:

A sudden vague feeling passed through Basheika as a liberating thought unfolded in her mind. She saw that being uptight and guarded succeeded only in guarding her dullness. It placed a stamp on her role as the dutiful housewife and constructed a fence around her boredom. Her life was a pathway between her home and her supermarket, a life that had formerly been just a pathway between her kitchen and bedroom. And the man in her life regarded that as fulfilling while he took off to any destination in pursuit of his own dream. What about her? What about her own her own need to feel whole as an individual, to be recognized as someone too? (p. 272)

The writer, at this juncture, points out the ills that come with the pursuit of self-actualisation which most of the time if measures are not taken, they can lose their self in the process and also what they hold dear. Gradually in the process of self-actualisation, Basheika loses the respect of her children because she stopped being the mother that she used to be. They have seen the way she disrespects their father by ignoring her duty as a wife, so also as a mother. With her attitude towards them, they started disrespecting her and being rude. An instance can be seen when Basheika asks her daughter, Lami, the whereabouts of her father she replied; 'I do not know mammy' her reply "was almost rude" (p. 226). Basheika leaves her own responsibility to her eleven-year-old daughter Lami. She is now the one taking care of her younger ones and performing the duty of a mother to them. Basheika is careless of her responsibility while busy daydreaming, she gets lost in her own surroundings and her eleven-year-old daughter is the one responsible to wake up around 2 am to lock the house due to the absence of a father and 'I don't care' attitude of the mother. Same also with her second child Ado, after returning late at night she met her children in the parlour and asked them the where about of their brother Sani, "to Basheika's shock, Ado did not only refuse to respond to her inquiry, he also gave

her a very rude eye... his impudent tone and insolent eyes compelled her to reach out and plant a slap across the nine-year-old face.” (p.279). she instantly regrets her action, but she cannot turn the hand of time. This is the same Ado, who Lami was worried about, the boy “now spent his days brooding, not talking to anyone. She wanted to do something and make things right, but her father was constantly absent and she was too fearful of her mother. Either way, she did not know how.” (p.219). basheika only sees the child disrespecting her without really seeing the clear picture of the almost depressing state of her child. The writer is right, marriage comes with a huge sacrifice and responsibility one cannot have both without compromise. Oriaku (2015) also believes that; “marriage, both in real life and fiction, is perhaps the most circumscribing factor in a woman’s life.” (p.77)

The close relationship that Basheika once had with her children is gone, Lami that adores her mother before now resent her. Most atimes it is Lami that helps her father with things Basheika should have been doing. “Lami took a tray of food into her father’s bedroom. She now performed the function of serving her father his daily meals.” (p. 217). Due to the attitude of their mother, the children prefer to be closer to their father, he is aware that he was not always around most of the time. The crime Basheika accused her husband of doing during his political career, now she is doing worse than him. She forgets the person she was before. She once accuses Yusuf of abandoning his family and adopting politics. The writer gives an instance when Basheika asks Yusuf to take Sani to the hospital but he says; “I have to write a speech for the movement empowerment get-together which I am attending this afternoon” (p. 45). But looking at the current situation, Basheika abandons her family and all her duties. Her father also advises her on the way she is going about with her life in the name of self-actualisation, which makes the people talk about her marital issues. He advices her saying:

Your husband is your garment and you are a garment for him. You must put your heads together and consult with each other in your affairs; that is the meaning of marriage. You both are still very young in the world. If God wills, you have a lot of time and He will bless you with even greater things. So, help your husband because it is you to whom the Almighty has given power to do that. If there is anything, any problem at all, be patient with what you are doing and give attention to your family. That is the most important thing to you. Whatever good deed you perform now, whatever you do to help your family, you are laying a bed for yourself to rest upon later in life. Help your family and the Almighty will help you more. (p. 244)

Through the words of Basheika’s father, the writer advocates negotiation, understanding, collaboration and compromise. Here, husbands and wives are

encouraged to act in ways that some men and women had not previously been able to. Alkali (2013, p. 235) however states that;

“The truth, then, is, Nego-feminism has the potency of succeeding to a large extent and with multiplier effect. It has profound implications for marriage; sex, children, work, and more... the spirit of Nego-feminism may just be what is needed to manage homes for greater national and international display.” Alkali, Talif & Jan (2013, p.11) believes that nego-feminism sorrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation, complementarily, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation and arbitration.”

Basheika’s father is right; a woman is a garment and likewise the husband to her, but Yusuf is in a confused state that only love and affection of a loved one can bring him out. Same goes to Basheika, she found herself deep in the web of Layla. Her voice admonition thus:

Life is not like that, Basheika. Like I always tell you, there is nothing for a woman but what she goes out to get for herself. I am sure it was not your husband who advised you to establish this business. Look at me; see how wealthy I have become. I did not seek the permission of a man to do what I did and no wonder I am now this rich. Have you not seen the falsity in the belief that a woman cannot put her head together with a man and say they will do the same thing? No, she can do even better. (p. 270)

So Basheika felt that to have an exciting life, a woman needs to go out and get it for herself. What she fails to remember is that she is not in the shoes of those women that lack, her husband never fails her as a man. A reality that made her mother questioned her once; “does your husband not provide food for you anymore? Has he stopped clothing you? Has he removed the roof under which he had given you shelter?” (p. 240). Basheika finds herself not responding to her mother’s questions because she knows the truth, Yusuf never fails his duties as the man of the house and her mother goes on saying:

I do not believe he has stooped any of these. If he has, then it is up to you to tell us. And if he is performing all his duties, yet he is angry with everyone and running around a village, then you have to look at your-self and see that you have a big problem. You can sit here before me and boldly tell me Yusuf is angry, what have you done about it? (p. 240)

Her mother is right. What has she done about Yusuf ‘s state of sadness? It is her duty as his wife to console him and with time they would have been out of the situation they are now in. But the ‘new’ Basheika is a woman of self-justification, she says; “Yusuf is not a little child. He is a grown man and knows what he is doing. Why

should I be blamed for things that he is doing? Who will take responsibility of what I am doing then?' (p. 241). That's her excuse, Basheika fails to understand nobody can heal alone; we all need a kind touch of that special person to be whole again.

The writer uses the character of Layla to portray women that are hardened because of societal realities. They become toughened as a result of a bitter experience. Basheika must have noticed it when she asks her, "if you know so much about men, how come you never married one?" (p. 270). This is an excellent question, but very disturbing to Layla by the look she gave Basheika she says;

Since you asked, I am sorry you have to hear me say this, but all married men the world over spend more time with their hidden mistresses and they spend more money on them. We who are standing outside its circle can see clearly how ugly marriage is, believe me. You will appreciate all I am saying some day. You will see things clearer with time. (p. 270)

With Layla's reply, one can conclude that her reply was that of sheer bitterness. She was hardened, but there must be a very terrible experience in life that can make one loose self-morality into the dark winds of the world like Layla did.

Finally, Yusuf realizes that looking at his wife and allowing her to go on with her behaviour will not solve their issues, because he sees her getting deeper into the life of mischief that may end up sabotaging their happy family. He calls her and admonishes her, at first Basheika sees that she has nothing to regret but, Yusuf cuts her off saying:

What kind of attitude are you displaying to me? You say you not a woman on the street, is this the attitude of a respected woman? What responsible married woman would live for months under the same roof with her husband and not even utter a word of greeting to him? What mother would live in the same house with her children and not even bother to see if they feed properly three times a day? Tell me, do you even know that Ado has missed a term in the school calendar because he has not been going to school... Look at yourself, Basheika. What have you been denied in this life? There are women out there, who have real, serious problems. They don't have even half of the things you have been blessed with. Is this the absence of serious problems in your life that makes you behave in such manner? (p. 305)

A sense of regret creeps in her mind which makes her understand that she has to make the biggest decision of her life and come to term with herself. A week later, the bittered, self-centered Basheika is replaced with a warm hearted one, whereby she came to understanding with herself because:

Yusuf's admonition to her last week had opened a cage of suppressed feelings in her and it affirmed to her, her important status in the life of her husband. To have him summon and talk to her with firmness melted the animosity that she harboured against him. At once she felt a surge of emotion and realized once again, as she did in several intervals in their marriage, how much she lived this man. She loved him for his honour, his principles and the good in him, the very essence that made him Yusuf Talib, his preserverance and fortitude. She loved him even for his selfishness... (p. 320)

Basheika appreciates the manner in which Yusuf summons and talks to her with understanding and love and thus it softens the hatred she has in her mind against him. She realizes and regrets cutting ties with those she loved which almost cost her, her marriage. She now understands that her husband and family are the most important part of her life. She therefore says to him:

I have severed my ties with the people you disapprove of, hence closing down my super market, but I still have the desire to own a supermarket, to start anew, on my own, with my own contacts, in my own independent space, without the supervisory powers of any business person. I want you to take an interest in whatever I am doing and to give me your support always. (p 320)

This is the first time Basheika told Yusuf with care how she wanted him to support her in all her endeavours. Here the writer is trying to point out the importance of communication between spouses because it is the best and right way, they can understand each other. Basheika's courage to talk to Yusuf telling him how she needed his support is in line with negotiating terms with him and Yusuf replies whole-heartedly saying; "I have heard you Basheika... May Allah bless you." (p. 321). For every relationship to reach a stage of happiness there must be compromise, understanding and collaboration and that when Basheika finally found; her own 'happiness' because:

That night as she lay to sleep in the strong arms of her husband, Basheika's heart rejoiced in the new understanding that she found with him. A new courtship began between them and once again she felt like a new bride, smothered by her eager groom. And in the days that ensued, she re-adjusted to her combined roles of wife, mother and home maker. She spent more time with the children whom she found to her surprise, felt very intimidated in her presence. Meanwhile, through the services of Talib Chambers, she engaged the services of a registered company to secure a vacant building in a relatively safe area and appropriate area of the city, which she could effectively use for her supermarket business. (p 321)

Basheika is now contented with her family. She does not mind starting all over again with her children, trying so much now to understand them. As she thrived in the spirit of a new beginning, Basheika now realizes some vital truth about life thus:

She realized that nothing in life was truly a surprise. Everything was part of a coordinated chain of events and if one was conscious enough, every single act or occurrence was self-explanatory. And that was the eternal secrets of successful women, those women who taught other women what it meant to be a woman; that every success lay in the balancing of values and good coordination so that events occurred with mathematical accuracy. And that was the supreme significance of freewill, for God had with His will all pervasive power given man the freedom to use his freewill to follow any direction in life and had armed him with the criterion to distinguish good from evil, so that he should indeed use that freewill to opt for the former. Since man had the freedom of mind and the knowledge of acts and probable consequences, it meant, therefore, that choice was his prerogative and he could decide exactly what he wanted and begins to work towards that objective. (p' 321-322)

Secondly, Basheika also realizes that;

The challenges she encountered as a woman were not necessary the challenges her mother encountered. She was living in times that were fast changing, times when women were becoming increasingly exposed to wider experiences and to the work field, which has hitherto been exclusively the field of men. With the integration of women in the work field came the independence of women's spirit and the gradual displacement of man as the sole owner of the work field, resulting in competition between sexes. It was an ongoing competition and its effect on anyone caught unprepared might eventually be stressful. (p. 322)

The writer through an authorial intrusion discusses effects apparent in women's struggle for liberation and equality. She states that;

The struggle of the contemporary woman in these changing times were manifested in a major way by the universal women's rights movement, which had an ideology of woman being a victim of man's gross misconduct and abuse of power. It was an ideology that had taken root and gradually embedded itself in the woman's psyche, so much so that coupled with the hurtful marital experiences of some women, the majority of women living today generally 'thought of and lived through marriage in the defensive. There was a conceived fear of opposition in the woman's mind, a deep-rooted belief that her man would eventually hurt her. In consequences of

that belief, she took up some arms against him to protect herself without even being attacked. And what created an atmosphere of never-ending suspicion between the sexes. In her world, trust was an illusion. Fidelity for a man was too good to be true, and while she cried out for liberation with every act, which was a reaction to the script in her head, she gave man an incredible power which he did not ordinarily possess- the power to keep her perpetually in fear of being maltreated. (p. 322-323)

With this, it is now an option for the woman to choose a path to follow, but Ba'aram Alkali did not allow Basheika (her character) to follow the 'script'. Basheika testify this when she says;

She would not condemn herself to being a victim of an intense fear of man's perceived atrocities. She acknowledged that some women became hardened in life because of their experiences with men. Similarly, some men became less loving because of their experiences with women. She did not have the experiences of those women and her experiences had generally been happy. She therefore resolved to maximize her happiness. (p. 323)

This is the decision Basheika made, a conscious decision to invoke into her marriage every possible good, to maximize marital benefit and create an atmosphere that would be enjoyable, comfortable and conducive for the growth of her children.

Alkali's character, Basheika wants to realize her self-esteem. The way she tries to achieve her own self-esteem is daring considering her culture. She ends up losing because she becomes alienated and estranged from the society and she cannot change the society to conform to her new choice of life. She later has to mellow down and negotiate her life back and return to her husband. Thus, with negotiation, there can be mutual understanding between the sexes. Nego-feminist tackles both masculine and feminine egos. It emphasizes negotiation, acknowledging that everyone, both male and female, needs place and space, undoubtedly capable of creating challenges, while at the same time generating a compromise.

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JLSN

# **Law and Literature: A Discourse on the Dialectics of Colonial Justice in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise**

**ABIGAIL ONOWOSEMENMEN OAIKHENA**

## **Abstract**

This research investigates the state of colonial justice and fairness as portrayed in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel, *Paradise*. It explores the trajectory of the epistemic laws and dispositions of the colonizer towards the colonized, as the cultural values, traditional norms and taboos of the natives were not considered during colonization. Consequently, the literary representation of the irregularities in the established colonizer's epistemic law upon the colonized, makes the empiricism of justice questionable, as the malignancy of their laws hit hard on the colonized. Hence, the literary artist interrogates the dispensation of the alleged universality of justice by the West on colonial subjects, within the functionalities of their established jurisprudence in these colonies. Thus, the postcolonial literary writer, Abdulrazak Gurnah, protests against the subjugation and domination of the established colonials' hegemonic laws against the natives (their hosts), due to the obvious lack of ethical and cultural negotiations. As seen in *Paradise*, the Nobel Laureate, raises salient thoughts in line with Gayatri Spivak's discourse on law and the subalterns in postcolonial literary discourse. Data were collected through fictional, critical and analytical method based on textual discourse/analysis. Postcolonial literary theory is suitably applied, as it lucidly unravels the disregard and abuse of the fundamental human rights of the margins by the West during colonization in Zanzibar, a major region in Indian Ocean narratives.

Keywords: Epistemic, Colonizer, Jurisprudence, Postcolonial, Subaltern

## **Introduction**

Given the complementary roles of law and literature, it is important to investigate their cognate functions in addressing societal travails, in order to achieve a noble and healthy society. It is on this substantive prism, in recent studies, that researchers begin to investigate the intersection between law and literature, while empirically

highlighting their distinctive positions in the society generally. Law, according to Paton, “consists of a body of rules which are seen to operate as binding rules in the community by means of which sufficient compliance with the rules may be secured to enable the set of rules to be seen as binding” (45). Austin added that, “a law is command which obliges a person or persons to a course of conduct” (10), while literature, on the other hand, “is at bottom, a criticism of life” (Matthew Arnold, 65), as it is about “writing, which expresses and communicates thought, feelings and attitudes towards life” (Rees, 59). They are both concerned with individuals and the society itself.

Succinctly, the synergy between law and literature, in societies, is anchored on the interplay of tradition, ethics and justice. They both advocate and influence the society for good; while literature addresses and speaks on issues, law commands and enforces orders when necessary. Literature can easily be understood, while in most cases, law needs to be interpreted by professionals and experts; it is this level of interpretations that usually comes with irregularities, compromise, infringement and abuse of victims.

Although A. V. Dicey believes that “Law is the reflection of public opinion” (28), while Salmond supports that it is a “body of principles recognised and applied by the State in the Administration of Justice” (87). But Roscoe Pound is of the view that “Law is a social control through systematic application of force in a politically organised society” (24). Hence, it is “the form of the guarantee of the conditions of life, of society, assured by State's power of Constraints,” (Ihearing Ihearing). So, Austin simply says that “law is aggregate of rules set by men politically superior or sovereign to men as politically subject” (18). Evidently, law becomes an established rule of the politically superior on the politically inferior. Ironically, any command or justice that comes within the ambience of rules set by the politically superior (colonizer) upon the politically inferior (colonized) can be perceived as an epistemic injustice in the traditional society of the colonized.

From the foregoing, law can be manipulated and this is the interest of postcolonial writers in the discourse of law and literature. To the colonized, the colonizers implement punishments, sanctions and trials, in accordance with their law(s) that subjugate and derogate the colonized. That is why Gayatri Spivak asserts that “It is also that, in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary – not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by the institution of the law” (75). She further asks “can the subaltern speak? ... the exclusion of the margins of even the center periphery” (90). So, the subalterns are colonial subjects in every postcolonial society whose narratives reflects on similar

thematic parallels that preoccupy postcolonial literature.

So, the new narrative is that the thoughts of the postcolonial writer should not be glorified as clash of cultures, but a protest against the abuse of human rights and a gross infringement of a people's law. As the natives are conquered, they, however, lack the courage to confront their colonizers and their intimidating weapons, which they usually use to unleash mayhem upon their host communities at the face of any resistance or hesitation; hence, the law of the colonizer takes preeminence. This law, according to Cilliers, "has little to do with rationality and a lot with power" (9). The natives are subdued, subjugated and striped of their human rights as against the 'cultural clash narrative' which suggests an equal counter resistance. That is why Cornell views Jaques Derrida 'Deconstruction' on colonial discourse as not just "to expose the nakedness of power struggles [but], indeed, of violence masquerading as the rule of law" (155).

Consequently, the colonizer's law only attracts civil punishment upon the politically targeted offenders, (a tool of oppression), as Robert F. Kennedy rightly puts that "the poor man looks upon the [colonizer's] law as an enemy, not as a friend. For him the law is always taking something away" (6). However, that of the colonized attracts divine punishment like death, insanity, barrenness etc. upon the true offenders, based on the level of the abominable act or taboo commented, as it indiscriminately prosecutes both the ruler and the ruled alike.

Hence, in the dispensation of justice of the colonized, there is no act of selective justice, as it is divinely dispensed at traditional shrines to ensure equity and transparency, rather than intimidation and falsehood suggested by that of colonizer, through the power of litigations and interpretations in courtrooms. As Lawrence Freidman admits that "on the whole, it is reasonable to suppose that justice is not as blind and classless as it pretends; it squints in one direction" (185). This actually questions the interest and intention of the colonizers upon the colonized, as the latter seem already organized and pragmatic in their dealings than the former, whose alien law is politically bias and corrupt. So, this could be their desire for their colonies in order to protect their interest, as Spivak will say "we never desire against our interest, because interest always follows and finds itself where desire had placed it" (7)

Then, it is evident that the foreigners forcefully and deliberately destroy the unique existing law of the natives in order to establish their unstable and manipulative law for their personal interest, and at the detriment of the society's development. Herbert Jacob warns that "it is easy to jump to conclusions based on superficial observations; the reality is quite complicated" (7). Thus, these altered societies, keep struggling with these caustic alien laws, of survival of the fittest, right from independence till date. So, to Staley Fish, the colonizer's law is a

“machine...[that] functions to erase the mythical foundations authority” (158) in order to erect “radically unjust societies”. (Lotter, 4)

So, the unbalanced scale of justice, which usually swings its pendulum of injustice against the politically inferior, colonized, and the poor comes to play when Spivak, again notes that:

Antonio Gramsci's work on the subaltern classes' extends the class-position/class-consciousness argument isolated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. Perhaps because Gramsci consider the movement of historical-political economy in Italy within what can be seen as allegory of reading taken from or prefiguring an international division of labour. Yet an account of the phased development of the subaltern is thrown out of joint when his cultural micrology is operated, however remotely, by the epistemic interference with legal and disciplinary definition accompanying the imperialist project “(9).

Consequently, the effect of the arbitrary interpretation of laws to displace the colonized is still palpable in these post colonies as at present, as Achille Mbembe notes that the “banality of power ... simply referring to the way bureaucratic formalities or arbitrary rules, implicit or explicit, have been multiplied” (1) and “confrontation occurs the moment the *commandement*, with vacuous indifference to any sense of truth, seeks to compel submission and force people into dissimulation” (8). So, to the subalterns, the colonizer's law is just a façade of oppression targeted for the weak, since it is established for the politically inferior *ab initio*.

### Postcolonial Theory

The concept of Otherness in Edward Said's *Orientalism* can be analyzed through Žižek's (2002) idea of 'Redemptive Violence' (his approach on Lenin, V. I. (1992). *The State and Revolution*), where the colonial subject relegates himself, degrading himself to a state where he can no longer have a worse experience and the master can do no worse thereby, rendering the master's abusive tendencies redundant. Said's Otherness reflects the subjugation of the Orient, as he already classified and categorized 'himself' before the West, in order to avoid the Eurocentric attitude of class-rule towards the colonized subjects.

According to N. Krishnaswamy,

Edward Said's *Orientalism* enlarged the scope of the post colonial approach by exposing the Eurocentric universalism which establishes Western superiority over East, identified as the 'other'. The Orient, a colony, according to Said, features in the Western mind as a sort of surrogate and underground self. In other words, the Orient is represented in terms of the

qualities that the Westerners do wish to attribute to themselves, qualities like decadence, laziness, stupidity, sensuality, effeminacy, etc. The people in the East are seen as 'masses and not individuals' (91)

It is within this ambience of psychological abuse, with the fast-eroding cultural values of the natives, due to the established Western laws, that postcolonial theorists begin to address issues affecting their local communities. As Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle add that “the term postcolonial should be seen as covering all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (214). Ann Dobie further stressed that:

The subject matter of postcolonial literature is marked by its concern for ambiguity and loss of identity. Written by culturally displaced people, it investigates the clash of culture in which one culture deems itself to be the superior one and imposes its own practice on the lesser powerful one. Its writers examine their histories, question how they should respond to the changes they see around them, and wonder what their society will become (Ann Dobie, 208).

Thus, postcolonial theory is primarily concerned about a people who encountered colonialism at any point in their history. So, to John Lye, “Postcolonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written by previously or currently colonized countries or literature written in colonizing countries, which deals with colonization or colonized people” (1). Hence, as a multi facet discourse, Bill Ashcroft et al. assert that “postcolonial theory involves discussion of various kinds of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, differences, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial cultures such as history, philosophy and linguistics”. (1-2)

Consequently, postcolonial theory is not restricted to any region or space, as it traverses all areas of discourse within the purview of colonial interferences. So, affected critics/writers are engaging this discourse from different perspectives, while exploring and highlighting the harsh realities that have engulfed these societies since their encounter with imperialism.

### The Discourse

The intriguing novel, *Paradise*, is set in Zanzibar and neighboring hinterlands. The society generally is a precolonial society that is at the verge of colonization. A society, governed by no formerly written law, but with long held traditional practices until the coming of the Arabs, Germans and Europeans. These colonialists

established laws that favor them to the detriment of the natives who could not interpret or understand the intricacies of their laws. Hence, law becomes a major tool for plunder by the colonialists, as Škop argues that “law is characterized by battles for influence. Various actors try to obtain monopoly over the definition of individual notions and these battles have the nature of battles over language and interpretation” (9).

So, despite the existence of their atypical imperialist laws that displaced the native, they still treat them with contempt, as they are regarded as the inferior. The Literature Nobel Laureate describes this society as underdeveloped, timid, enslaved and further denigrated by these invading colonialists. However, the society is first controlled by some Indian merchants, who treated the natives with scorn, as the Indians are so money conscious and greedy in the novel. After Mohammed Abdulla, a character in the text, encounters the Indians, he warns, “never, you trust the Indians!... he will sell you his own mother if there's profit in it. His desire for money knows no limits” (133). Nevertheless, these foreigners haggle their supremacy over the natives, as they are more interested in what to plunder than the society's development.

However, the Arabs displaced the Indians and established their autonomy. They introduced them to their religion, trade and other forms of exchange. The Arab traders, the merchants, do business on their own terms, which do not usually favour the natives, but they have no choice as they are their first call to civilization. The Arabs are perceived to be vicious traders, and their introduction of slave trade further attest to this fact, but the natives were too timid and naïve to distinguish between fair and unjust treatment. According to the narrator:

you'll be thinking: how did so many of these Arabs come to be here in such a short time. When they started to come here, buying slaves from these parts was like picking fruit off a tree. They didn't even have to capture their victims themselves, although some of them did so for the pleasure of it. There were enough people eager to sell their cousins and neighbours for trinket. And the markets were open everywhere (131).

It is evident that the Arabs introduce them to slave trade, an undignified trade, which denigrates a people's history and cultural heritage. Conversely, at that time, their form of trade was trade by barter- the Arab merchants go to the up hills, deep deserts and the hinterlands to trade with those they refer as savages, who they will not offer money, but cheat them with items like used clothes, food and other things. During this era, these traders regarded themselves as the superiors, as they oppressed and dominated the land with no interest towards the natives' development. They exploit

these savages to enrich themselves and maintain their class. Again, Abdalla reveals that;

To trade, we go to the driest desert and the darkest forests... [where] they live like paralysed insects... There, cloth was still the most common item to exchange. The savage did not trade for money. What could he do with money? They also had some clothes, sewing needles, hoe blades and knives, tobacco and a well-hidden supply of powder and shot, which were taken with them as a special gift for to the more difficult sultans. When all else fails, powder and shot never does (119).

So, the Arabs seem more cruel than the Indians in their mode of trade, as they entice the natives with some intoxicants and harmful objects in order to carry their trades. It is also a period where homosexuality is frowned at by few religious Arab faithful, not because there is any established law for or against it, but many of their young men carelessly indulged in it. The handsome protagonist is always warned by the father not to play with the older boys who usually “forced the younger ones to expose their little Abdallas” (7). While living with Uncle Azizi, he also warned him against his porters and guards who were practicing gay. But finally, he had an experience with Abdalla, according to the narrator: “after a moment he reached for Yusuf’s thigh and squeezed it gently. How you have grown in this journey, he said looking away. Yusuf saw that Mohammed Abdalla had an erection under his cloth and immediately rose to leave” (174).

The period is known with illegalities and intimidation by these Arab elites and merchants. Uncle Azizi, one of the popular merchants, also known as the Seyyid, is well known for confiscating his debtors' children, using them as his personal slaves until their debts are settled. This is the case of the protagonist, Yusuf, a young boy taken by the Seyyid due to his father's debt. It is also the case of Khalil and Amina, the latter that Seyyid takes as his second wife.

The unconscious trope of betrayal in Gurnah's writings, surfaces in the novel as the young protagonist's father betrays his son, Yusuf. At first, Yusuf sees Uncle Azizi, the merchant, as his biological uncle and addresses him as such. He is oblivious of his father's dealings with the merchant, neither did he envisage himself being used as a collateral for his father's unpaid debt when he is asked to pack his little belongings and go with the merchant on one of his visits. Yusuf wakes up to reality as Khalil, the young man who suffers the same fate as him at the merchant shop, where they are kept as dirty shop keepers, reveals to him that:

You're here because your Ba owes the seyyid money. I'm here because my Ba owes him money... your father owes him a lot, otherwise you wouldn't

be here. Your Ba would've paid him, so you could stay at home and eat malai and mofa every morning... you don't have a sister, maybe, or he'd taken her. He ain't your uncle. You'd better learn that quickly, zuma. It's important for you. He doesn't like little beggars like you calling him Uncle, Uncle, Uncle. He like you to kiss his hand and call him seyyid. In case you don't know what that means, it means master. (24-5)

In this mundane religious society, the subjugation of the poor natives by the Arabs elite is like norm or 'constituted law' which is still supervised by these foreign Arabs. The majority of the natives live in abject poverty while depending on their rich religious/capitalist invaders, who have taken over the economy, for survival. This is another level of epistemic injustice upon the colonized Gurnah tries to depicts through religion. Igwe puts that: "It is important to note that despite the proclaimed secular nature of the colonial state, there was a mix between colonial politics and colonial religion . . . [such that the colonized] did not know who came to missionize and who came to politicize" (26).

However, the natives accommodate any kind of judgement or rule given by the foreign politically superior in order to survive in their land. In all of these irregularities, Gurnah projects Hussein, a petty trader, as a lone voice of justice, who frowns at the Arabs' selfishness and the nature of their inhuman trade upon the natives. He warns Hamid (a middle man) about his business partner, Azizi, the merchant, on the nature of their trade. He interrogates him:

What is that crooked partner of yours up to this these days? ... you know how it is. How many people has he ruined already? He cuts you above your means, and then when you can't pay up, he takes everything... That is if the partner cannot pay up, he takes his sons and daughters as rehani. This is like in the days of slavery. It is not the way honourable people should conduct themselves. (88-9)

However, Hamid, like every other capitalist trader, is more concerned about the benefits and profits of trade. He believes the trade is all about profit making, irrespective of what is involved or their mode of exploitation. Even if Hussein should talk about law and justice in Zanzibar, not in the hinterlands where they carry out their dubious trade. In Hamid's defense, he attacks Kalasinga, a friend, who tries to make him see reason in Hussein advice. To him, Kalasinga is corrupt in his own trade, and so is everyone else. So, no one should correct the other, despite knowing what is just. He asks, "when did you discover the law, you lying scoundrel? Whose law are you talking about? The amount you charge all of us for simple task...you call that living by the law?" (88).

The 'law' Hamid is referring to here is not the civil law, but that of the religion as they tend to propagate as Muslims. Gurnah depicts this act to portray the role of religious leaders in the precolonial society. He shows the first level of the perpetrated injustice upon the natives by the Arabs, a supposed religious people. They also introduced formal slave trade and homosexuality to the natives, according to the text. So, with these, the writer interrogates the true nature of foreign religion in these colonies and post colonies presently.

Succinctly, this Arab colonial society is preoccupied by religious deception, hypocrisy and quest for power, as they protect their selfish interest through their religious scumbling laws before the coming of the Europeans. But Gurnah is raising salient questions, as he juxtaposes the European rule against that of the Arabs. As for him, does the establishment of European colonial laws really change anything? Was it the same act like that of the Arabs, but different in style? Is the exploitation still prevalent in this society? These and many other questions he raises in this novel as he writes on the infringement of a society's cultural heritage by the invaders' laws.

However, the coming of the European colonizers ushers in a different phase and new mode of living upon the colonized. In the text, the Arab traders are not at ease with the imminent presence of the west, whose mode of governance is alien to their culture. As they rule with much authority and high disregard for the Arabs and natives alike. To Spivak, the Arabs suddenly became “the margins of the circuit marked out by epistemic violence, ... the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (78). The case of sultan of Tayari and German Amir Pasha depicts the extent of gross abuse by Germans upon the colonized in the novel. The Arab sultan tried all he could to cope with the intimidation of the foreigner upon him. According to the narrator:

Amir Pasha treated the sultan with utter contempt, deliberately, provoke him to war. This was their method. He demands that the sultan to fly the flag of the Germans, that he swear loyalty to the German sultan and that he hand over all the arms and cannon he possessed, because he was sure to have stolen them from the Germans in the first place. The sultan of Tayari did everything he could to avoid a fight... after Amir Pasha came Prinzi, the German commander, and he made war at once and killed the sultan and his children. (132-3)

Though the Arabs govern with quasi law and order, they are mild in dispensing judgement, unlike the West, who came with established laws, while disregarding the

aborigines with impunity. They constantly abuse the human rights of the natives despite their self-acclaimed lawfulness. They trampled and infringed on the rights of the colonized as though they are less humans. Killing a ruling king and his children in the Western society will attract sanctions and bans, as the world will rise for justice and speak of punishment against the offender, but that is not the case with the colonized. That is why Jack B. Weinstein asserts that: “equal access to the judicial process is the sine qua non of a just society. While we have made enormous strides towards that goal, it is still a glaring truth that equality of access is in the real world little more than a figment of jurisprudential imagination” (655)

However, it is evident that the imperialist laws are alien to the natives, but the foreigners never made any adjustment to accommodate or consider their host. They show little or no mercy in administering judgement to culprits who may not understand what is expected of them. Simba Mwene laments that:

With us, if a culprit show repentance we find it hard to punish him, especially if the sentence is severe. People will come to beg and plead for him and we all have loved ones who'll mourn. But with the German it's the opposite. The more severe the punishment, the more firm and unforgiving he is. And his punishment is always very severe. (115)

The natives actually have their own mode of administering judgement, as they usually put a lot into consideration for the good of their society, which a foreigner may not understand or consider. So, it cannot be said that these precolonial societies were lawless, but there were laws that were inculcated in their culture or religion. These are what the West failed to understand about these societies by being harsh and inhuman towards them. Again, in the text, Abdulla explains a scenario to Yusuf of how the natives grant pardon to offenders, as he talks about Simba Mwene who is journeying with them to trade across the waters; he explains:

He has murdered a man, that's why he's on the journey. To earn enough to compensate the people he has injured, or to perish himself if God wishes it. It was on my words that he was given this chance to redeem himself. Otherwise the relatives of the murdered man would have delivered him to the Germans for vengeance. The Germans would have strung him up sooner than spit at him. They like that kind of thing. Bring them a murderer and their eyes light with happiness as they get the gallows ready. (118).

The German laws in the novel seem to be subjugating and inhumane to the people. They govern them with much disregard and feign interest towards developing and modernizing these colonies. The colonizers are more concerned about their business

and how to use the locals to enrich themselves. They appear to be worse than the Arab merchants they displaced under the guise of their positive laws. Also, they care little or nothing about the natives' wellbeing that they claim to salvage with their concept of colonialization. That is why they make stringent laws to eradicate majority of the strong natives, dispossess the remaining few weak and take charge of their land and natural resources. The narrator confirms that the Europeans:

Take the best land without paying a bead, force the people to work for them by one trick or another, eat anything and everything however tough or putrid. Their appetite has no limit or decency, like plague of locust. Taxes for this, taxes for that, otherwise prison, for the offender, or the lash, or even hanging. The first thing they build is a lock-up, then church, then a market-shed so they can keep the trade under their eyes and then tax it (72).

The European laws introduced the natives to another phase of slavery by weakening the few powerful ones among the colonized and unleashing mayhem. Fair enough, they truncated the Arab trades stopping local taxes in form of tributes, but hanging offenders without investigation, while forcefully harvesting the able-bodied young men to work and till the soil for them, just as the Arab is what Gurnah questions. So, the natives are handicap in their own place, confused and disorientated about all the happening. There is fear, pain and panic from a supposed freedom which the European colonisers promise to grant them after displacing their Arab oppressors. In the novel, the Arab took over by disposing the Indians. The Indian Mukki were businessmen who usually lend money in order to make profit. But, "the Arabs stole the money and bought slaves from one of the savage sultans near here and made the slaves work in the fields and build comfortable houses for them. This is how the town grew" (132).

So, the activities of the European is like a continuation of the Arab under the guise of colonialism. Hence, the natives keep bearing the brunt, especially with the Europeans unfamiliar rules. Again, the narrator laments that "everywhere they went they heard of stories of the Germans, who had forbidden the people to ask for tribute, and had even hanged some people for reasons no one understood" (176). The Europeans treats them as less than animals, despite their interest on their natural wealth. That is why Hussein explains to his friends that:

The European are very determined, and as they fight over the prosperity of the earth they will crush all of us. You'd be a fool to think they're here to do anything that is good. It isn't trade they're after, but the land itself. And everything in it...us. Even in South Africa, it is only the gold and the diamonds that make it worthwhile killing all the people there and taking the

land. ...look how they have divided up the best land on the mountain among themselves...they have driven off even the fiercest peoples and taken their land. They chased them away...and even buried some of their leaders alive.... In their eyes we're animals, and we can't make them stop thinking this stupid thing for a long time (86-7)

The Europeans through their caustic laws subjugate and dominate by making their host subservient. With no regard for cultural traditions, they impose and practice their laws with no interpretation as “it's they who make the law and dictate” (131). Under the pretext of colonization, they plunder and destroy the native cultural heritage. The colonisers are more concerned about their supremacy and superiority than anything else. Hussien asks again, “do you know why they are so strong? Because they have been feeding off the world for centuries” (87). They forcefully take control of everything and eliminate or eradicate any existing tradition or what they do not like about the natives. They intruded and abused that which is held sacred by the colonized, and Gurnah is afraid of the consequences of this European's infringement as he reveals:

I'm afraid... we'll lose everything, including the way we live...these young people will lose even more. One day they'll make them spit on all that we know, and will make them recite their laws and their story of the world as if it was the holy word. When they come to write about us, what will they say? (87)

What makes a people is their law, which often is rooted in their culture. Again, in the novel, the Europeans are mainly interested in altering the already existing culture of the colonized. A deliberate act to disconnect them from their true identity while forcefully inculcating in them that of the European. This is an act of ownership and possession, which will stay through generations as it is the colonialists' intension. So, they dispossess the natives of the land, natural resources and identity through colonialism, as Gurhan describes them as “envious good-for-nothing paupers, with no understanding for business.... They are vicious businessmen” (91). A people who came under the guise to offer freedom but made the natives captives. At the end of the novel, “the captives are formed into two silent lines, and in the gathering darkness they are made to march off the town. The German officer marched at the head of the shuffling, his body upright and his movement precisely understated” (247).

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, Gurnah depicts the state of the law as portrayed in a literature of

a colonized society, the colonialists' attitude and administration of justice within the purview of their established laws upon the colonized. *Paradise* is a vivid reflection of the exact condition that has engulfed the different societies, who have encountered colonialism. It is seen that in the precolonial society, the people were conscientious in their dealing, guarded by their cultural heritage, despite the absence of written laws. There was a sheer understanding between them, as practices were intoned with their culture.

However, the coming of colonialists disrupted the already existing tradition and beliefs of the colonized, coupled with their established laws and orders, which further expresses the foreigners' hostility towards the natives. They rule the colonized with contempt and are selfish, inconsiderate and covetous. Thus, Gurnah, therefore, questions the basis of colonization and the intensions of the Westerners upon their colonies.

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Professor Amirikpa OYIGBENU was born in Olosoho into the prestigious and famous Pa Oyigbenu Omame family of the great Atayi lineage. He had his early primary school at the Sudan United Mission (SUM) School, Agwatashi in 1963, from where he was transferred to the EKAS (Trans) Primary School, Baissa in Taraba State (1964-1969). Amirikpa had his secondary education at the Wukari Division Combined Secondary School (WDCSS), Takum from 1971-1975, from where he proceeded to the famous School of Basic Studies (SBS), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in 1975/1976. In 1976, he gained admission into the Department of English where he studied for a B.A.(Hons.) Degree in Drama and graduated in 1979. He holds a Master's Degree in Dramatic Literature from the University of Jos, Plateau State in 1990, and the Doctoral Degree in Drama from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 2004. Oyigbenu is a Professor of Dramatic Theory and Criticism and a Lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State of Nigeria. He was a three-time Head of Department of English (2006-2008, 2014-2016, and February, 2019-February, 2020 respectively), Dean, Students' Affairs (2010-2013), and Chairman, University Sports Committee (2009-2013). He initiated the establishment of both the Departments of Mass Communication and the Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies during these periods. Amirikpa Oyigbenu is the immediate past Director of the Solomon Lar Institute for Political Emancipation, and currently the Chairman of the University Security Committee (2019-till date). Prof. Amirikpa is a dramatist, theatre practitioner, poet, literary critic and an essayist who has published in both local and international journals. He also has a number of published books to his credit; among which are, *Racism, Citizenship and Identity Politics in African-American Drama* (Criticism), *Times Like This...* (a play), *Town Hall Whispers* (a play) *Cascades and Flakes* (poetry), *Harvest of Enigma* (poetry), and *Theatre and the Challenges of Development in Nigeria* (Critical source Book). His area of academic speciality is Black Diaspora Dramaturgy and African Drama.

Dr. Ali Sule AKO hails from Benue State. He obtained his First School Leaving

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Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika, PhD, is a First-Class graduate of the Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria; Winner, ANA Prize for Drama, 2022; Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo Prize for Drama, 2023 and the Anambra State Youth Achiever's Prize for Prose, 2013. Novelist, playwright and poet, Asika's research interest cuts across conversations of literature with cultural, mythical, folkloric, resistive, ecocritical and posthuman ecologies. He also has a vested interest in gender and sexuality studies with a fervent passion for creative writing. A reader in the Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria, Asika has previously coordinated the Use of English (G.S 101 & 102) of the University and currently serves as an External Examiner to the School of General Studies, Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze, Anambra State, Nigeria. Some of his short stories and poems have appeared in ANA Review, Heart Links, African Writer.com, and *Voices from the Veil: Anthology of Short Stories from Africa and the Diaspora* among others.

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