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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

School of English

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES IN GENDER REPRESENTATION: A CORPOREAL STUDY OF WOMEN'S ROLES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN FICTION.

by

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the work of three contemporary Nigerian writers, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street and Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come (2005). Adichie, Unigwe and Atta are all women of Nigerian origin, have lived in Nigeria at some point in their lives and have presently relocated to the West, or are presently living in Nigeria while still maintaining that link with the West as second 'home' qualifying them as Nigerians in Diaspora. Their works of fiction cover a range of diverse themes and genres from historical fiction and bildungsroman to politics, sexuality and mapping of women's agency in urban spaces. This study focuses on the recent women's writing that has come out of Nigeria and is important because of the problematic representation of women in first generation writing in terms of agency and voice. My study addresses these main questions. What role have women played in Nation formation and what is nationalism to them in terms of the post – colonial state and experience? How have women writers positioned themselves in terms of the representation of women in contemporary Literature and what is the relationship between women's bodies, patriarchal structures and the post - colonial nation? How are the agencies of women being mapped across these novels and in what ways has this changed over the last ten years or so as represented in literary analysis?

There is a vast amount of writing coming out of Nigeria at the moment and I think it is important to chisel down my choices by categorizing these authors in this way.

This project is largely a body project, and I will be considering the gendered human body as the prototype of society marking the site of representation where disorder in the society is enacted upon and considering the politics of this. I will be using novels by the afore mentioned authors as my primary text in order to analyze the ways in which their modes of literary expression reflect the changing perception of African women against the wider theoretical scholarship on women's bodies and feminism.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Lois Tugba, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Shifting Perspectives in Gender Representation: A Corporeal Study of Women's Roles in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction. .....
.....

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed: .....

Date: 27/09/2014 .....

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The dissatisfaction with the political state of the nation is a common underlying theme in the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe and Seffi Atta. The use of real life Nigerian democratic and military rulers such as Obasanjo, Ojukwu, Gowon, Shagari, and Abacha are either inspiring or indeed, incensing models for each of these authors' literary works. All are works of fiction that are modelled on real live events or personalities that depict either the war time battles of the Nigerian Civil War or the post - war battles raging in the collective psyche of Nigeria.

The female body in particular seems to be in a war against the state and what I want to identify in these texts and also highlight (which is intimated by all three writers) are the coping mechanisms used by women to gain control over and liberate the body. On one hand, to some extent it would seem that in this setting, the female body has to distort, to torment and even prostitute itself in order to liberate herself from constraints outside her in order to be 'heard'. On the other hand, there is the educated voice of the gendered body which rejects borders and poses a threat to the social order. As the material in this thesis clearly shows, Nigerian women writers are currently embroiled in a vibrant movement. Some aspects of the work analyzed in my thesis inadvertently reinforces sexual hegemonic powers while others challenge, subvert and resist imposed modes of morality, behaviour patterns and identity. Adichie's female protagonists are seen to enjoy their sexualities in ways which are not closely related to biological processes, solely for purposes of reproduction. These contemporary women writers understand sexualities as socially constructed and therefore deeply influenced by social, economic, political and cultural forces. The shift in the representation of women as 'silenced' and without agency, whose bodies are enacted upon without actively engaging occurs as Adichie's women in particular offer layered insight to women's lives in terms of women's sexual pleasure, subversion, creativity, violence and oppression.

The question of power is one theme that the materials in this thesis return to time and again. All of these writers mentioned earlier are aware of

the close relationship between power and gender, between political oppression and the oppression of women simultaneously by nationalistic patriarchal structures from both state and non-state actors. This thesis analyses the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe, and Seffi Atta in order to survey the ways in which these writers show empathy (or not) with feminist positions. The chapters will be dealing with different themes on the body such as exploring the link between power, sexuality and the commoditisation of female bodies. There is a vast representation of this in all three novels, but most explicitly and significantly portrayed in Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street. In addition to the above, bodies and desire, bodies and nation, bodies in trauma/violence are also underlying themes in all of the novels against the larger back drop of feminist discourse. There is currently a significant amount of research in African Literature on Nigerian writing, but what makes this project different is its sustained focus on women's writing from out of Nigeria which has exploded within the last ten years. Chinua Achebe in his comments on Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) describes Adichie as a "new writer endowed with the gift of ancient story tellers". He goes on to describe her as "fearless" for taking on the horrors of the Nigerian civil war in her work. These 'new writers' are cosmopolitan in their approach and well versed in the art and rhetoric of writing captivating and believable fiction. Of these third generation writers, few have taken stabs at writing about the Nigerian Civil War which according to Kole Omotoso is the most important theme in Nigerian Literature. [1]He goes on to state that:

> A label in itself is of little use, but the observable fluctuation between Nigerian Civil War Literature and Biafra War Literature mirrors the unresolved nature of this period in Nigeria's history: it is a period which continues to interest and thus initiate new artistic examinations of the nation's communal base. Indeed, to read Nigeria's war fiction is to observe the country's uncertainty and unease over the position and unity of a militarily won 'imagined community' (510. quoted in Bryce)

To say that the Civil War is one of the most important themes in Nigerian Literature is a statement which is certainly supported by the sheer number of

[1] Bryce Jane, Conflict and Contradiction in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War. African Languages and Cultures, 4 (1), p.29.

Nigerian writers of the second generation who have written about this topic in varying degrees and depth [2]. It is not surprising therefore that third generation writers would also feel the need to rehash a topic that has already been dealt with repeatedly and painstakingly by their forebears. Perhaps as Omotoso states, it is a period which continuously requires 'new artistic examinations of the nation's communal base'. Of the four new generation writers who have alluded to the Biafra war in some way or another in their work; Chris Abani in Graceland (2004), Helon Habila in Measuring Time (2007), Uzodinma Iweala in Beast of No Nation (2005) and Sefi Atta in Everything Good Will Come (2005), Adichie is the only author who has chosen to tackle this topic in Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) by setting her novel firmly within the time frame of political instability preceding the war, during the war and after it. The entire plot of the novel encompasses the formation and the eventual disintegration of Biafra. It is difficult to see the work as strictly war or historical fiction because although the novel is obviously anchored mainly in the 1967-1970 war time era, the author does not belabour us with specific dates regarding events that occur during the war and avoids chaining the work to a historical fact check list, choosing instead to partition the time frame of the novel loosely into four parts fluctuating rhythmically between the early and the late sixties.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has written three novels and a collection of short stories; Purple Hibiscus (2003), Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), The Thing Around Your Neck (2009), and her most political novel, Americanah (2013). She was born in Nigeria and left the country on a scholarship to America from where she wrote her first novel Purple Hibiscus (2003). In this thesis, I focus on Adichie's Biafra novel, Half of a Yellow Sun (2006). Chika Unigwe is a Nigerian-Flemish author who writes both in English and Dutch. Like Adichie, she was born in Enugu, which was also home to Chinua Achebe and is located in South Eastern Nigeria. Unigwe emigrated to Belgium where she wrote the majority of her novels and subsequently emigrated again to the United States of America with her family in 2013. Her debut novel, De Feniks (2005) was published in Dutch and is the first novel written in Flemish by an author of African origin.

[2] A small sample of Nigerian writers who have used the Biafra war as their setting include Chukwemeka Ike's Sunset At Dawn (1976), Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty (1976), Cyprian Ekwensi's Survive the Peace (1976), Flora Nwapa's Never Again (1975) and her Wives at War (1980), Ken Saro Wiwa's Sozaboy (1985), and Festus Iyayi's Heroes (1986).

Other works by Unigwe include Fata Morgana (2008), On Black Sisters' Street (2009), Night Dancer (2012) and Black Messiah (2014). Although she has produced a number of novels over the last ten years that portray complex female characters, in this thesis I will be analysing her novel on African prostitutes in Belgium, On Black Sisters' Street (2009). Sefi Atta is the least well known of the three authors. Whilst a great amount of scholarly attention has been paid to Chimamanda Adichie by critics such as Chidi Amuta, Craig McCluckie, Wendy Griswold and Jane Bryce, not a great deal of work has been produced about Chika Unigwe and much less still on Sefi Atta. Nigerian born Sefi Atta's debut novel, Everything Good Will Come (2004) was awarded the inaugural Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa and her collection of short stories News from Home also won the NOMA award for publishing in Africa. Similar to Adichie and Unigwe, Sefi Atta divides her time between the United States and Nigeria, and produces much of her work about Nigeria from the West. Whilst Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie may be lauded as the 'New Queen' of African twenty-first century literature by magazines, scholars and celebrity alike, John Masterson (2007) concurs that the "glossy marketing of Adichie as literary It-girl can deflect attention away from the compelling questions raised" by her work. As publishing houses look to someone new and fresh to essentially become a spokesperson for contemporary African literature, this analysis looks beyond writer as brand and explores some of the other literary texts which also offer an equally corporeally grounded reading experience. Posing searching questions about bodies and power remains urgent in today's world in order to establish the relationship between them for the advancement of the feminist cause, here specifically in the Nigerian context against a global backdrop. Each of these three novels explores the constraints placed on women's everyday lives under patriarchal structures that do everything within their power to mould and entrap African women's perceived identities into a homogeneous experience. This study aims to show that the images of women which are portrayed in these writings are powerful and heterogeneous, they have agency and voices; challenging and often triumphing against existing state and patriarchal structures in both overt and covert ways.

Although my study draws upon previous scholarship by Stephanie Newell (2006) and Florence Stratton (1994) particularly with regards to them study on gender in African literature, there is currently not much research in

the field which focuses particularly on feminine bodies in Nigerian Literature and their relationship to the State. Therefore, the importance of this project, if we consider the human body as the prototype of our society as suggested by anthropologist Mary Douglas, lies in this assertion. I will be carrying out my research not as an anthropological study, but as a study of literary discourse purely using written texts as my primary sources. It is important for new literatures to be academically critiqued, analyzed and 'read' so that 'new writers be accepted into the literary canon and given a space for further investigation. This is not to suggest that the Literature studied today in most Universities in Nigeria is by any means less important, but I think that it would be useful to open up the academic reading to new generation writers, and it is my hope that my project will contribute towards achieving this.

1.1 Tonal Shifts in Reading and Writing African Women

This thesis covers the last decade of contemporary writing from women authors out of Nigeria investigating writings produced from 2000 to 2009. I have chosen to focus on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe and Sefi Atta because they are important feminist voices at a pivotal moment in Nigeria's history where women are becoming more prominent as leaders in the national and political sphere. Their novels are important sources for analysing the changing relationship between women and nation, both domestically and internationally as they themselves represent a break from 'home' with regards to geographic location and spaces. Each chapter in this study will analyze the novels written by each author and investigate the new ways in which Nigerian women are portrayed in fiction.

The purpose of this study is not to isolate women's creativity from men's but in order to explore the urgency with which these authors express in representing lives of women, gender does serve as a definitive category. For that reason, this study takes womanhood as a starting point in discussing contemporary Nigerian fiction.

Women and men frequently position themselves in relation to one another from gender specific points of view. In order to engage in powerful processes of contesting and negotiating gender and meaning, writers make use of fictional narrative as can be seen from close readings of the texts in this study. New ways of perceiving womanhood can be 'read' from these novels, and this generates a new landscape for the interpretation of African women's perspectives and lives. Diverse scenarios with regards to heterosexual relationships are explored by these novelists ranging from the egalitarian involving mutual respect as portrayed by Adichie, through to the unhappy oppressive marriages portrayed by Sefi Atta, moving across to what can be described as modern day slavery portrayed by Chika Unigwe in On Black Sisters' Street. Although all three novelists, seem to share with one another a concern to portray women as having agency and voice, rather than idealised simply as representative of "Mother Africa", their themes and political views should not be synchronized.

Several feminist literary critics in the 1980s and 1990s accused male African writers of constantly producing female characters who were passive and submissive, hovering silently in the background of the narrative (see Achebe, Things Fall Apart, 1958), only surfacing as wives and mothers, very rarely to be seen actively participating in the resistance to colonialism (Stratton, 1994; Ogundipe, 1994). Most critics saw that this kind of writing only fed into the patriarchal discourse which excluded women from positions of power in post- colonial Africa which was in contrast to the reality of a long history of female political power dating back through the centuries. From strong leadership and legendary figures of the princess Inikpi of the Igala Kingdom, Moremi of Yorubaland to the warrior Queen Amina of Zazzau (now Zaria) women have historically played an active role in political and economic power in Nigeria. Under the scrutiny of feminist critics, the marginalization of women's writing and the tendency to dismiss female foundational texts such as Flora Nwapa's Efuru (1966) were brought to the fore. Male academics who had branded the text as a 'trivial, domestic novel with no place in the literary canon of the region'[3] were roundly criticized by novelists such as Mariam Ba, who stated that the "Black woman in African literature must be given the

[3] Ojo- Ade 1983.

dimension that her role in the liberation struggles next to the men has proven to be hers" (Innes 1991: 129). Stephanie Newell (2006) states that is since the comments of Mariam Ba in the early 1980's that literary scholars began to take an 'increasing interest' in African women's writing and identity. The study of the ways in which female identity is constructed in creative writing has since been brought to the fore. Themes include motherhood, domestic violence, female infertility, rape, women's nationalist discourse and also the education of girls. Increasing numbers of women writers have come to the fore, however as mentioned earlier this summary of themes does not indicate a homogeneous political agenda.

The consensus in the 1980s was that just as Achebe had struggled against the distortions of Africa, most notably against Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899), women writers were also in the process of (re) representing themselves from the prevailing perceptions of African women as completely marginalized from mainstream agendas. A useful model is provided by Stephanie Newell in West African Literatures Ways of Reading (2006). She argues that the reaction against male writers is by no means the sole purpose of texts by women. While acknowledging gender, it is not necessary to reproduce the 'reductive polarization' of men from women, especially within the complex space of writing and representation. Rather, she argues that models which appreciate the nuances of African women's lives without ignoring their positions as women within the social 'scapes' of their communities are required. Writers who are considered as 'elite anglophone' such as the writers in this study are better able to be 'heard' in western metropolitan centres as well as their indigenous communities. Ousseina Alidou makes the suggestion that elite women's literature is more assertive and empowering to women because the European languages are themselves "foreign" and less subject to social regulation" This study would not necessarily agree with this principle in general because while Anglophone texts are certainly more accessible to a wider readership, the emphasis of these writers are to showcase their indigenous culture within the Nigerian context and resist the assertion and thinking of African women as chattel. Black women's writing in the Diaspora signifies 'reassertion, rethinking and renewal'. The

[4] Whitsitt, 2002; Larkin, 2002.

narratives are those which are positioned on the margins of mainstream Euro centric culture and have not been assimilated by Western ideologies. In terms of these writers' social experiences and access to power, they are able to rise against the stereotypes of the concept of gender itself and explore more radical possibilities in their work. Thus four prostitutes in Unigwe's On Black Sisters Street are not portrayed as 'good girls gone bad' but rather Unigwe paints a picture of women who are determined to carve out for themselves social and economic independence in a world dominated by men. In the same way that Atta's Everything Good Will Come and Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun reject the idea that marriage is the only method of upward social mobility, stability and emotional satisfaction for women. Flora Nwapa's women were equally outrageous in her bid to 'write back' to the male writers of her time. Mama Emeka tells Mama Nkem in Women Are Different:

> My daughters will marry as soon as worthy suitors come their way. I will encourage all of them to marry, just have those three letters M-R-S, just answer MRS, and you can do any other thing you wish to do [...] I say, go and answer MRS then if you can't cope with marriage, you can do other things. (53)

Flora Nwapa's women are intentionally outrageous. In Women Are Different (1986) Amaka's mother blames her for trying to be a faithful wife to Obiora her husband, where after Amaka seduces a celibate priest and gives birth to twins. Ayo in One is Enough (1981) enjoys her 'status' as a kept woman. Her novels are peppered with young girls out to 'grab what they can' from men which makes them economically independent but still dependent in the end on men in what Stephanie Newell refers to as 'bottom power'.

Unlike the more 'traditional' conservative society represented in Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart where arranged marriage involving a beautiful and 'compliant' (49-50) village girl are the norm, Nwapa's women are audacious. They commit adultery, (with the exception of the tradition bound protagonists Idu) Efuru flouts parental consent to marry a man of her choice, Amaka, Chinwe and Zizi abandon their husbands for the glitz and glamour of city life. To recognise Flora Nwapa as one of the earliest literary feminists would be accurate as she deliberately, through her portrayal of

Women, rubs uncomfortably against the grain of traditional stereotypes in African society. Throughout her writing career, Nwapa revisited themes of childlessness, depicting the lack of choices available to married women with no children. In her work, barrenness seems to be the only untenable position for a woman in the society. This is repeatedly suggested through a series of desperate and impracticable options that her protagonists are willing to take in order to secure for themselves a child and thus a marriage. Moving forward to the third generation writers, who are equally and just as fiercely 'speaking out' for Nigerian women, Adichie, Unigwe, and Atta show that women can find pleasure and indeed, even happiness in being single women without biological children or alternatively, embrace single motherhood in urban spaces outside the bounds of marriage.

1.2 African Feminism (s)

Buchi Emecheta in an interview about her relationship to other female writers such as Grace Ogot, Christina Aidoo, Bessie Head and Flora Nwapa, describes herself as 'their new sister' (Umeh and Umeh 25). In this way she acknowledges the female writers who have preceded her and recognises the need for an African literary sisterhood for the emergence of self-conscious female expression. Emecheta has had more success as a writer than any of her predecessors, having written eleven novels and received numerous awards and considerable critical attention. Emecheta herself made a point of distancing herself from western feminism in her declaration, "If I am now a feminist, then I am an African feminist" (Feminism 175). While the popular link between 'feminism' and excessive female sexuality has caused many West African women to try to rename and renegotiate the feminist discourse in ways that are specifically African, this rejection of Western feminism has opened up several new '-isms' which seem more palatable to African gender theorists: 'Womanist', 'motherism', 'femalism', 'gynandrism' amongst others[5] (Nnaemeka, 1990) are all terms coined by theorists to include an affirmation of

[5] See Nnaemeka, Obioma (1990) 'Mariam Ba: Parallels, Convergence, and Interior Space', Feminist Issues 10 p.12

motherhood as the 'source of supreme power[6]' (Osundare, 2002 p.70). The term 'womanism' independent of 'womanist' was also coined by Nigerian literary critic Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in her 1985 article, 'Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English'[7] and asserts that the womanist vision is not only to equitably share power amongst the sexes but between races as well. Some of these theories may appear on the surface to be divisive, separating African women from the feminist movement, however black, feminist scholars assert that African women are doubly marginalized in the social, economic and political sphere because they face oppression on the basis of their gender and also race. Although the abundance of terms beyond feminism reveals the proliferation of woman – centred theories in West Africa which are currently being discussed, the volume of new labels also suggests women's sustained focus on establishing new spaces for African gendered identities which are neither stereotyped, marginalized, nor Westernized in national literary discourse. Cultural specificity by its very nature acknowledges the differences not just between Western and African women but also between African women themselves whilst also recognizing a common identity nevertheless. The question of (African) female identity and gender as a whole is clearly a problematic category as feminists worldwide, writers and theorists will acknowledge. Therefore, any practical strategies to end women's subordinate positions are considered useful.

This study is informed by a theoretical perspective and draws heavily on literary studies and the primary texts of the writers earlier mentioned. I will analyze the anxieties and frustrations that these women experience in their writings as African women as they question and push the boundaries of who an African woman is supposed to be. I will illustrate the ways in which they produced multiple and nuanced representations of African women and shift the stereotypical images previously produced by their male forebears.

My study will develop the assertions I have made about African feminism, gendered stereotypes, politics and patriarchy in the following ways. In the second chapter, I will be looking intently at the representation of women's bodies in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2006 civil war novel, Half of a Yellow

[6] Alice Walker's theory of black women's identity. Author and poet Alice Walker first used the term "womanist" in her work, In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose.
[7] Phillips, L. (2006). The Womanist Reader. p. 83

Sun. Adichie's text is significant to discourse on African women's contemporary writing in terms of its prolonged and sustained engagement with women's bodies and sex during the Nigeria- Biafra civil war of 1967-70. The lack of texts available on this period which utilize female characters as main protagonists, actively involved in the war has led to a limited understanding of women's experience of life in Biafra and through critical analysis of Half of a Yellow Sun, this chapter seeks to probe the narrative as it foregrounds various interpretations of women's bodies, sex and power within Biafra as a conflict situation. This chapter aims to do this by examining the ways in which women's bodies became objects of masculine warfare during the Nigerian Civil war and the corporeal concerns that lie at the heart of Half of a Yellow Sun will form the basis of this analysis.

Chapter Three analyses Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street (2009) in which Unigwe challenges the notion that prostitution is solely the prerogative of immoral women. Her novel critiques national and transnational patriarchy, and rather than making the figure of a woman a symbol of national moral decay from which the men are excluded, Unigwe portrays the women as products of a failed political system largely commandeered by men. On Black Sisters Street deals with the unusual political situation in Nigeria which as a result of its constant instability has resulted in gross imbalances in the economic power of women in relation to men. I will analyze the seedy business of transnational prostitution which simultaneously grants marginalised women access to economic power whilst degrading and disempowering them. This chapter focuses on the use and abuse of women's bodies, explores women's agency and choice and also demonstrates the emotional healing which becomes possible through the formation of women's communities.

Chapter Four focuses on the writing of Sefi Atta in her novel Everything Good Will Come (2004). In this chapter I will be looking at state violence, male violence and how these sometimes come together as a force against women. Atta's novel is the most overtly feminist of the three texts, and engages closely alongside political events as they unfold in Nigeria of the day. The novel conforms to the Western model of bildungsroman, however the protagonist and the state are closely intertwined. The strongest aspects of the novel are portrayed by the juxtaposition of silence with voice. Silence is frequently used as a masculine weapon to highlight gender imbalances of power. The novel

charts a path of the protagonist's journey to self- discovery which occurs outside the periphery of heterosexual happy ever after plots. The novel in itself is oppositional as it charts the protagonist's journey away from repressive and oppressive gender roles. On the first page of the novel, the protagonist, Enitan, begins her journey 'believing everything she was told' (7) and by the end of the novel she is dancing in the street, triumphant as she has discovered personal fulfilment in the realization that her freedom, outside the bounds of marriage, is what will bring her everything good.

Bringing together these three contemporary writers to analyze the politics of feminine identity and the question of masculinity is the way in which this study aims to show the ways in which the agencies of women are currently being mapped. From the multiple perspectives in Adichie and Unigwe's novels, to the first person narrative in Sefi Atta, recent women writers are focusing strategically on the problematic representation of women in Nigerian literature. It is also worthwhile to note that none of these novels are set in the village, which has been a common theme in first generation authors writing women. Urban spaces and politics feature heavily in all three novels which allow us to understand women as actively taking part in nation building and economic processes.

In this study I will show how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe, and Sefi Atta 's writings offer a tonal shift in the representation of women which has occurred in the last decade known as the third generation of Nigerian writers. They also demonstrate the ways in which institutionalized violence is connected to both nation and men, through the commodification of women's bodies. My aim with this study is to extend the existing scholarship on African women's identities in fiction, and in so doing contribute towards the growing body of feminist scholarship and nudge forward the broader African struggle for social transformation.

Chapter 2: Food for Thought: Exploring the Representation of Women's Bodies in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun.

In this chapter, I will be looking intently at the representation of women's bodies in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2006 civil war novel, Half of a Yellow Sun. Adichie's text is significant to discourse on African women's contemporary writing in terms of its prolonged and sustained engagement with women's bodies and sex during the Nigeria- Biafra civil war of 1967-70. The lack of texts available on this period which utilize female characters as main protagonists, actively involved in the war has led to a limited understanding of women's experience of life in Biafra. Through critical analysis of Half of a Yellow Sun, this chapter seeks to probe the narrative as it foregrounds various interpretations of women's bodies, sex and power within Biafra as a conflict situation by examining the ways in which women's bodies became objects of masculine warfare. The corporeal concerns that lie at the heart of Half of a Yellow Sun will form the basis of this analysis.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains in a 2006 interview with The Guardian that her aim was to write realistic fiction about the war, without allowing the narrative to be overly burdened by dates and historical facts. She wanted to remain true to central events and in so doing 'did not play with the big things', but only tried to re-imagine other things. Little things, such as a train station linking Nuka to Kano, distant towns placed geographically closer to each other, or subtle changes to the chronological order in which towns were conquered during the war.

It is important to note that the bulk of the Nigeria/Biafra civil war literature has been written by male authors as they imagined or remembered events, which makes Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun a refreshing contribution to the body of Nigerian civil war Literature. Flora Nwapa's Never Again (1975), and Buchi Emecheta's Destination Biafra are two of the only fully fledged

fictional texts written by Nigerian women based on the civil war. The statistics on violence towards women during conflict are horrendous, and unfortunately have come to be expected as a normal by-product of war time and conflict zones. Global current statistics suggest that these events are not isolated to Africa alone, but are indeed generally an expected outcome of national conflicts regardless of geographical location. The absence of records, fictional or otherwise, of violence against women's bodies during the Nigerian Civil War may be as a direct result of the lack of material written by women authors regarding this dark period in Nigeria's history. On the other hand, violence against men is recorded extensively, in an almost heroic mode by the largely male authorship. Such titles as Eddie Iroh's Forty-Eight Guns for the General (1976), Wole Soyinka's Madmen and Specialists (1971), or John Munonye's A Wreath for Maidens (1973) are only a few titles which are indicative of the framing of the civil war as a masculine prerogative. Ossie Enekwe's Come Thunder and Christopher Okigbo's Labyrinths listed as one of the books that 'helped' in Adichie's research, are racy accounts of the war full of gore yet silent on violence to feminine bodies. The maiming of the male body is interpreted as a sign of nationalism and patriotism because while men go off to fight, women are left behind to care for families and the everyday private activities of life in a war torn country. Only those in active combat, which in the Nigerian context is exclusive to men, are perceived to have fought for and sacrificed toward nation building. In this way there is a gendering of the spheres between public and private, placing women firmly in the private sphere thereby creating a schism which the women cannot hope to overcome. Women's sense of national identity is already in deficit before the victory or defeat of the nation. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi implicitly agrees with this analysis in her study, "Women in Nigerian Literature" noting the effect that the silencing and omission of women has had on the nation:

> Nigeria is male, a fact that is daily thrust in myriad ways on the Nigerian woman. An example of this cultural aspect is the national anthem with its incredibly divisive call on compatriots to serve their fatherland in the tradition of past heroes. The belligerent tone with its macho-masculinity excludes more than half the population of the country--women and all the children, the country's future. Is it a wonder then that the country is a shambles when "he" has failed to solicit the help of its "better half"

and his offspring for pacific pursuits, for the betterment of the country? (60)

What if women were also seen as revolutionary? If the violence enacted upon them in the private sphere was also considered important enough to be a war wound to nation building? The gendering of the spheres of public and private life creates an uncomfortable dynamic which has implications on the manner in which violence against women is conceptualised. [8] Men were seen as being fully engaged in war either at the front lines or logistically but the fact remains that women are present in conflict zones and are also engaged physically with war. If not at the front lines of the battle, they are engaged in other ways such as through trade, teaching, air raids, (subjects of) violent sexual attacks alongside starvation - all forms of physical engagement. The effects of the war may have been less noticeably physically inscribed on women's bodies but in ways equally as dramatic and haranguing as that of their male counterparts, women's bodies were also at war. The physical inscription of war on gendered bodies become a question of the public versus the private sphere, and the unwillingness of Nigerian writers to fully engage with violence against women during the Biafra war with any consistency or intensity, further highlights the subordination of women in the patriarchal socio-political system of 1960's Nigeria.

Half of a Yellow Sun was written almost forty years after the end of the Biafra/Nigeria civil war and contributes to the tradition of Nigerian canonical writers who have contributed vast amounts of literature to this period in the country's history. Half of a Yellow Sun is an important novel when discussing the Nigeria /Biafra war for a variety of reasons, and this is also evident by the amount of critical scholarship the novel has attracted. First of all, this novel is considerably longer than any other fictional treatment of the war and has a

[8] Buchi Emecheta (1982) writes about women being beaten and sexually assaulted by soldiers, whose commanders would say: 'It is war and in a war situation, men lose their self-control' as if that were explanation enough" (113) When Emecheta's protagonist is raped again and attempts to report the rape, she is told to wash herself with hot water, that 'hundreds of women have been raped' and she is 'lucky to be even alive.' This excerpt further shows how women's bodies were used as objects of male domination during the war.

rich and complex berth of characters which reach more widely across national and international spaces than any of its predecessors. As such, it gives the reader a wide and varied view of the events and of life at that time. The novel has three main focalizers who each exist in contrast with each other. Olanna is the female daughter of a nouveau riche business man, placing her in the upper echelons of Nigerian society at that time. Richard is the Englishman who comes to love Biafra and engage with the war with such nationalistic pride rivalling that of any Biafra born and bred. Although his whiteness remains loudly un-Biafra, it also affords him the privilege and "elite-ness" unavailable to Biafrans in Biafra at that time. Ugwu is completely uneducated and has lived all his life in the village until he becomes houseboy to the University lecturer, Odenigbo. Ugwu represents the bottom rungs of the society in terms of class. Susan Strehle suggests that the three main focalizers force the reader to view the war through three specific sets of eyes which is problematic and does not allow for an objective perception of events. Strehle[9] writes that:

> The restriction of the narrative to these three lenses deliberately sacrifices any claim to provide an objective, impersonal, or certain account of the events in the Biafra War. Each witness considers meanings from a single vantage point in gender, class and race; the multiplication of three observers only amplifies subjective viewpoints, rather than producing comprehensive objectivity. (654)

I suggest that these three focalizers do not limit, but allow for alternative ways of reading the novel. For example, Olanna's class position as the daughter of a rich government contractor ensures that she is not marginalized simply for being a woman. She is able to transcend certain perceived cultural norms because her education and privilege opens up these alternatives to her. I will discuss this in further detail later on in the chapter with regards to women's bodies and violence during the war. Ugwu's subaltern position and voyeurism allows the reader to witness many events through his thoughts, as his opinions cannot always be 'voiced'. Richard represents the colonial 'other' which he

[9]Strehle, Producing Exile: Diasporic Vision in Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun,2011, p.653

tries so hard to reject in favour of Biafra assimilation. Richard's character also provides ways of re-reading the white colonizer or the perceptions of a British white man, who having not long granted independence to Nigeria found it possible to value Africans as equals.

Another aspect that sets Half of a Yellow Sun apart from previous literature on the war is its focus on the everyday normalities of life before the war and during it. Brenda Cooper explores the nature of the everyday in Adichie's novel and traces how everyday realities transform under the pressures of war, which is what Achebe also did with his collection of short stories, Girls at War and Other Stories (1972). Adichie refers explicitly to these when she states in an interview about Half of a Yellow Sun [10] that this collection of stories is "about what happens when the shiny things we once believed in begin to rust before our very eyes." Andrade[11] (2011) suggests that "Adichie extends further in 2006 what Achebe was able to imagine and write in 1958 and proves that the prose of female novelists has increasingly become more nationally engaged the longer the writers have been on the scene of literary production."

In addition, Adichie is one of those new writers whose position in relation to emerging literatures from Africa has forced academic scholars such as Jane Bryce to revisit their earlier research and adjust certain earlier assumptions. For instance, Bryce (2008) concedes the new directions that fictional accounts of women's identities are taking in Nigeria. 'No longer is feminine identity constrained by nationalist priorities that privilege masculinity, as was evident in earlier women's writing'. As Half of a Yellow Sun deals with the same subject and moment in Nigeria's postcolonial history as previous texts by women writers, I think it is interesting to look at what has caused the shift in the nature of the story. [12] With regards to this 'shifting of the

[10] See After word. Adichie, In the Shadow of Biafra, 2006, p.9
[11] Andrade, S., Adichie's Genealogies: National and Feminine Novels,2011, p.93
[12] Jane Bryce suggests that the forms of feminine identity evident in earlier women's writing was constrained by nationalist priorities that privileged masculinity, but that these "have given way to a reconfiguration of feminine identies" amongst third generation women writers. The use of twins as a narrative device is also new and has emerged as a means of exploring feminine repression in relation to the socially conditioned version of feminity.

ground' of identity-construction in Nigerian fiction to a notion of selfhood as split[13] or multiple, Bryce writes:

> This has given way to a challenging reconfiguration of national realities in which the feminine is neither essentialised and mythologized nor marginalised, but unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world. (49-50)

Half of a Yellow Sun is set in the dusty university town of Nsukka located in the South Eastern region of Nigeria. The university itself is indigenous and seemingly free of colonial influence as it receives support from an American University rather than a British one. (HOAYS, p.32) The story revolves around a range of complex characters that are connected to the university in one way or another. The characters are of varying social standing, yet somehow manage to transcend national, race and class lines to be inexplicably tied to and dependant on each other which we will see as the novel progresses.

The novel is divided into four parts. Part One provides an introduction to the characters. Ugwu is the thirteen-year-old houseboy who comes to work for Odenigbo, the well educated, eloquent yet tribalistic academic. Ugwu's move from the village to the city is made possible through the 'good fortune' of Ugwu's Aunt who overhears Odenigbo inquiring after the services of a houseboy, while she is sweeping the corridor in the Mathematics Department. Odenigbo or 'Master' as Ugwu refers to him through out the novel is a passionate freedom fighter who identifies with tribe or ethnicity before nation and this is evident in every aspect of his mentality, even down to his taste in

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[13] Multiple identities allow the reader to move away from the essentialised 'African Woman' of which there is no such thing. Ogundipe-Leslie in the introduction to her collection of polemical essays, Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation, says: "[T]here is no such thing as 'the African woman.' She cannot be essentialised in that way; rather she has to be considered, analyzed and studied in the complexity of her existential reality. . ." (9).

music. He rejects the music of 'Rex Lawson' who his colleagues tote as a true Nigerian because he (Rex Lawson) does not 'cleave to his tribe' but sings in all major Nigerian languages. Odenigbo retorts: "That's reason not to like him. This nationalism that means we should aspire to indifference about our own individual cultures is stupid." (109)

For Odenigbo, there is no rationale behind this country called Nigeria because for him, the many tribes are all too different and only the same 'to white eyes'. Pan-Africanism is fundamentally a European notion, and despite all Africans having white oppression in common, the only authentic identity for an African is the tribe. The excerpt below is taken from a scene where Odenigbo and his colleagues are gathered for one of their evenings of food, drink and political conversation. It is narrated from Ugwu's point of view, as he has come into the room to clean up shards of broken glass. He takes his time cleaning so as to ensure the conversation is clear because he finds it almost impossible to hear what Professor Ezeka says from the kitchen. Odenigbo explains:

> I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came.
>
> Professor Ezeka snorted and shook his head.
>
> But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race.'
>
> The pan-Igbo idea existed long before the white man! Master shouted. Go and ask the elders in your village about your history.' (20-21)

Adichie's Odenigbo, though not one of the three main focalizers of the novel is a very important character simply because he is a fearsome defender of the Igbo tribe and Igbo 'dignity' as it were. He is consciously and constantly

unbending to the idea of the white coloniser as the civiliser of Africans. In writing on the role of the African writer in dealing with the past Achebe states:

As far as I am concerned, the fundamental theme must first be disposed of […] that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; […] The writer's duty is to help them regain it [their dignity] by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost.

(The Role of a Writer in a New Nation, 1964)

Odenigbo's character in the most positive sense, is a post- colonial continuation of the project that Achebe stirringly promotes which is to enrich understanding of the African colonial experience as lived by the colonized and not only the colonists. Odenigbo's house is a hotbed for political discussion and is the perfect setting for Ugwu's development from illiterate village boy to knowledgeable historian and author. In this manner the novel employs the logic of bildungsroman as we witness Ugwu undergo personal experiences of growing up and life changes during the war. Very early in the novel, Odenigbo impresses the importance of education on Ugwu, informing him that Africans can never resist exploitation if they do not have the tools to understand it. (HOAYS, p.11) His instruction continues in every aspect of his time at Odenigbo's house so that even when he is back from school, or has finished his homework and is participating in household chores, learning is continuous for Ugwu. From listening in to the conversations and pocket lectures that are given during Odenigbo's social gatherings at his house, Ugwu is unconsciously being instructed and imagines that one day he too will be like his Master. He imagines himself speaking swift English and using words like 'decolonize' and 'pan-African', moulding his voice after Odenigbo's while talking to rapt, imaginary guests. (HOAYS, p.20)

Ugwu is a boy on the cusp of manhood and he has a single minded devotion to his master; he aspires to be like his master in all things and enjoys a secure position in the house, having a room and a bed to himself. Unlike other houseboys who sleep on mats and on kitchen floors, Ugwu does not have a master-slave relationship with Odenigbo, but rather is treated as human, and in some ways much like a younger brother or son. This is the kind of behaviour

that Olanna wishes that her own parents would extend to their stewards, to 'acknowledge the humanity of the people who served them'. (HOAYS, p.30) giving the reader an insight into Nigerian social practices and how class relations exist.

Olanna is Odenigbo's love interest who returns to Nigeria from London to live in Nsukka with him. Olanna and her twin sister Kainene are daughters of nouveau riche parents, who own half the city of Lagos. They are both fiercely independent female characters. Olanna, we are told is used to her mother's disapproval as it had coloured most of the major decisions she had made in her life. Olanna refuses her parent's covert tactics of using her as sex bait in order for her father to secure government contracts and instead chooses to live with her lover Odenigbo in a basic university house with sturdy rooms, plain furniture and uncarpeted floors. Olanna, Kainene, Edna and Miss Adebayo are all unmarried women able to live and work independently in the city without the usual suspicion surrounding single women, which is rampant in Nigeria. By portraying feminine characters such as these, Adichie writes against the grain of stereotypical gender ideologies.

Richard Churchill is the Englishman and writer, 'the outsider' who is drawn to Nigeria through a fascination with Igbo Ukwu art. He later becomes Kainene's lover to the disapproval of her parents because although he is a foreigner, he does not have many dealings with the money making expatriates in Nigeria at the time, being more concerned with immersing himself in the customs, culture and language of the land. Richard spends most of the novel trying to assimilate and become as Biafra as possible. He prefers the spicy peppers of Ugwu's cooking to the bland tastelessness of English food; a signifier of his longing to identify with the dominant cultural group to attain a sense of belonging. An example of this is a scene where Richard goes to Odenigbo's house and eats pieces of tripe in a bowl of pepper soup. He raises it to his lips to drink the broth. Even though his tongue is burning, his nose is running and his face has turned red from the 'delicious burning' which he finds unbearable, Richard persists. Miss Adebayo comments that "this is proof that Richard was an African in his past life". A statement to which he cannot respond as there is still too much pepper in his mouth. Throughout the whole novel, Richard tries feverishly to overcompensate for his whiteness. 'He would

be Biafra in a way he could never have been Nigerian— he was here at the beginning; he had shared in the birth' (168).

Richard also has a houseboy, Harrison who through his knowledge of English food considers himself to be superior in knowledge to the other 'local' houseboys. In the same scene, he has made English style finger foods for Richard to take along to Odenigbo's house and as Olanna compliments the food— stuffed garden eggs. Odenigbo retorts:

> 'You know the Europeans took out the insides of an African woman and then stuffed and exhibited her all over Europe?' [...] The other guests laugh but Odenigbo does not: It's the same principle at play,' [...] 'you stuff food, and you stuff people. If you don't like what is inside a particular food, then leave it alone; don't stuff it with something else.' (108-109)

Here, Odenigbo's reference is to the case of Sarah Bartmann [14] who was taken to Europe from South Africa to be displayed as a sexual freak and example of the inferiority of the black race. This deeply offensive incident has become both a symbol of European racist attitudes toward Africa and also of the dehumanising over sexualisation of the black African female body by colonialists. These significant elements of Odenigbo's narrative highlight his feelings on nation, identity, integration and colonialism and can also be read as political statements about who can be accepted as African in post-colonial times. In a sense, no matter how many times and with how much fortitude Richard attempts to 'eat Africa'; he can never be Biafra and the narrative implies that he therefore should not be telling Africa's stories by the reference to his race in his reports of the war for publication in Western newspapers. 'Simply because he is a white man living in Biafra, though not a professional journalist, the world would more readily believe his accounts of the war.'

[14] The bottled organs (brain and vulva) of Saarti Baartman known as the Hottentot Venus for her pronounced buttocks and genitals were preserved and put on display in a Paris museum, and could be seen right up to the mid 1970s when they were removed from display. Saarti Baartman whose name was anglicised to Sarah Bartmann was brought to London from South Africa in 1810 by a British doctor who exhibited her off to a paying audience as a freak of nature. She was then sold on to a French entrepreneur, fell into alcoholism and prostitution and was dead by 1816. Upon her death her body was acquired by scientists who dissected it, boiled her bones and preserved the brain and vulva for scientific analysis.

(HOAYS, p.305) Although Richard remains 'othered' throughout the narrative and never fully assimilates, this becomes Richard's contribution to Biafra. Where he is the white British male steeped historically in a difficult past fraught with racial prejudice and cultural tension, readers will find it hard, despite his affable character to separate him from the vilified West.

Kainene is described as 'not pretty at all'. She is very thin and very tall— almost androgynous— with skin the colour of Belgian chocolate. (HOAYS, p.57) She is unlike her twin Olanna, who has a more approachable beauty, and a fleshy, curvy body that fills out a dress. Olanna has a body that Susan, the condescending British expatriate, would call African[15]. (HOAYS, p.60. Original emphasis) Susan has been in Nigeria for a while and as such speaks with authority on Nigeria and Nigerians, informing Richard that "They (Nigerians) have a marvellous sense of energy, really, but very little sense of hygiene." She sees Nigerian women as non-threatening to her as they are not 'equal rivals' and perhaps, that is what draws Richard away from her and towards Kainene. Also through this character we are able to glimpse snippets of post independence colonial racism, endemic in expatriate communities at that time. When Richard first sees Kainene, we are told that he 'wouldn't have guessed' that she was some wealthy Nigerian's daughter because she had 'none of the cultivated demureness' gained by one used to moving in the civilised upper classed circles of the British. Kainene wears tight red dresses, has eyes of steel, is brazen, blows perfect smoke rings and is described as aloof and non committal. She is nothing like the softer faced, smiling graciousness that is Olanna. (HOAYS, p.60) She tells a rather shocked Olanna that the benefit of

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[15] Once again and possibly as a result of cases such as that of Saartjie Baartman--Hottentot Venus, there is a tendency to associate a certain homogenous type of black female body as an African one. This plays into stereotypes of the African woman's body as over sexualised and 'excessive' to some Western European eyes. In the case of the Hottentot Venus, she was fantasy made flesh uniting the imaginary force of two powerful myths: Hottentot and Venus. The latter invoked European cultural traditional of lust and love; the former signified all that was strange, disturbing and-possibly-sexually deviant. She became the favoured subject of caricaturists and cartoonists where Georgian England both privately celebrated and publicly deplored excess, grossness, bawdiness, and the uncontainable. (Holmes, R., The Guardian, and Flesh Made Fantasy, March 2007.) Half of a Yellow Sun is set in 1967-70; years after Sarah Bartmaan's initial voyage to Europe in 1810, but the legacy of those stereotypes remain over time. See the recent controversy involving the Sweden's Minister for Culture where she was photographed cutting a cake shaped in the form of a naked black woman filled with a gruesome blood red sponge. She begins by taking a chunk from the cakes clitoris. The blackened head screams every time the body is sliced and the people around take photographs and laugh. There is no black person present besides the blackened artist and the event is said to highlight female genital mutilation amongst black Africans. (The Guardian, 18th April, 2012) http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/17/sweden-europe-news

being the ugly daughter is that 'no one uses you for sex bait'. (HOAYS, p.35) This is a reference to her father's ploy of hosting bogus dinner parties in order to parade his daughters before politicians and government officials to further his ambitions for wealth. It was she who used to say their mother's breasts did not dry up at all, that their mother had only given them to a nursing aunt to save her own breasts from drooping. (HOAYS, p.39) She possesses an acute business sense[16], has contractual dealings with the Nigerian government, runs both her father's cement factory and Oil Company in Port Harcourt and is observed to be 'not just like a son; but like two [...] so whoever had thought that Chief Ozobia had lost out by having two daughters was a liar.' (HOAYS, p.31) She is described by Olanna as someone who is very strong. "She is not afraid." (HOAYS, p.271) We see this more clearly when during the war Kainene, runs a relief center looking after the refugees and providing food for them. It is as a result of the lack of food from the government agencies for the relief center that Kainene decides to cross enemy lines to remedy the situation. This is a journey from which she never returns.

With the introduction of an intrusive and scheming mother-in-law, the novel takes on a kind of soap opera effect. The infidelity of Odenigbo with a house maid (plotted by Odenigbo's mother), sees Olanna end up in a one night stand with the impotent Richard, her twin sister's lover. The housemaid falls pregnant by Odenigbo and gives birth to a child, who Olanna takes and raises as her own and who is simply called 'Baby'. The betrayal of Olanna and Richard causes a fracture in the already fragile relationship between the twin sisters, which later heals during the war time when Kainene reflects, "There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable." (HOAYS, p.347) The portrayal of family life and strife, love, sex, anger and betrayal in the novel allows the reader to be drawn into the characters normal abnormality during a harrowing war in which three million people were killed. The novel is thus transformed into a social experience with a mixture of warmth and humour, a semblance of normalcy, amidst tragedy, violence and loss.

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[16] In Half of a Yellow Sun Kainene observes that the reason the Federal Government of Nigeria waged war against the breakaway Biafra State was because of the oil, which they would not be able to let go of easily. She however had been advised by Col. Madu to donate some foreign exchange to the war cabinet, so that at the end of the war she would get any contract she bid for. (p.180)

2.1 Metaphors and Corporeal Signs

From the very first scenes in the novel and consistently throughout, Half of a Yellow Sun draws heavily on its concern with sex and the relationship dynamics between characters in the home. Susan Strehle's [17] criticism of Half of a Yellow Sun recognizes that earlier scholarly readings of the novel focus on Adichie's choice of Ugwu, the village houseboy, as recorder of the traumatic history of Biafra, and by so doing neglect the private dimensions and foreground the public dimensions of the novel. She argues that in doing so, the novel's crucial linkages between the two spheres— public and private are neglected. However, this criticism according to Strehle misses the point because although Strehle sees the personal relationships at the heart of the novel, the love stories, as the link between the private and the public, Ugwu by nature of his voyeurism is central to both the private and the public spheres – 'Ugwu felt not just involved in, but responsible for Olanna's happiness'. (202). A crucial metaphoric substratum has been overlooked by Strehle to which Ugwu, the cook and houseboy, is a key character. By reason of his subaltern position as houseboy and because of his eventual conscription into the Biafra army, Ugwu serves as an important link between the private and the (national) public. Although he is not embroiled in a romantic relationship himself, he is very much a part of a private love story because of his voyeurism. He is witness to Olanna and Odenigbo's loud and sometimes therapeutic sex, as well as the changes that their relationship and sex life undergo from the privacy of the house in Nsukka to the family's not-so private living quarters as war time refugees.

Adichie's use of rich metaphors form the plot from the public history of 1960's Nigeria which mirror the private lives of her characters who reflect the complex portrait of the Biafra war. So for example, the breakdown and mistrust amongst the Biafra nation which becomes apparent as the novel

[17] Strehle, S., Producing Exile: Diasporic Vision in Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun, Modern Fiction Studies, 2011.

progresses, is also reflected by the breakdown and mistrust between Olanna and Odenigbo in their private relationship. Ugwu is witness to changes in the sound and frequency of the lovers' sexual encounters which reflects the break down of society. The first example in illustrating the parallels between family and national life occur when Olanna discovers Odenigbo's infidelity. As the breakdown of their relationship begins, these events are juxtaposed by the onset of the coup in Kano during which the Igbo's are massacred which in turn leads to their secession.

The infidelity of Odenigbo, with the house maid leads to the birth of the illegitimate female child 'Baby' that Olanna raises as her own daughter, unable to give birth to a child of her own. To this end, even though Olanna is mother to Baby for all intents and purposes, Olanna is failed by her own body for seemingly unknown reasons despite access to the best (British) gynaecological care (224) and is left self-harming in the bathroom, 'savagely squeezing her own belly' because the pain she inflicts on herself serves as a physical reminder of how 'useless' a woman who cannot have a child nestled inside her body (232) is perceived to be in the Nigerian context. At the same time, the child she desires so fiercely is instead nestled inside the body of a stranger, a woman whom Olanna sees as inferior to herself, having put in minimal effort yet obtaining the prize. Likewise, the newly attained independence of the Nigerian state in 1960 was seen by the Igbos as too easily granted, 'handed to the North on a platter of gold', with a dubious constitution formulated in favour of the conservative North. Chinua Achebe in his collection of essays writes that, "This transition was flawed because the British handed over power to that conservative element in the country which had played no real part in the struggle for independence." (Achebe, 1975). Adichie's narrative technique using plot as metaphoric representations of more complex meanings is not only a recurring theme throughout the novel, but also a nod to her literary predecessor, Achebe. Politically and economically, at that time the Igbos were in an extremely weak and precarious position. Having migrated to other parts of Nigeria, primarily for trade and economic benefit, they were heavily marginalised and prone to attack. Through Richard's journalistic pursuits, readers are made aware that the Igbo have earlier been massacred in 1945, due to the British generally encouraging 'anti-Igbo sentiments,' albeit on a smaller scale than the subsequent massacres in Lagos and Kano leading up to

the secession (p.166). The narrative largely suggests that this is a group which is collectively and historically accustomed to violence, carnage and marginalization at the hands of Northern Nigeria facilitated indirectly by the British colonisers, 'If this is hatred, then it is very young' (p.166).

In much the same way that gender roles can be observed in a society, where dominant codes of masculinity create imbalances with regards to gender relations, power is largely situated within the (masculine) North, while the Igbos remain emasculated, regardless of their contribution to the common wealth of the nation. The strategy employed by the British in order to make the Nigerians 'governable' are the same strategies employed by patriarchal societies in order to keep feminine bodies in their place. According to Richard's article within the novel, "The divide and rule policies of the British colonial exercise manipulated the differences between the tribes", and this is inherently what Half of a Yellow Sun is about; division. Male from female, rich from poor, blacks from whites, those with agency and power from those without. The struggle that Olanna experiences with her own body, unable to produce a child with Odenigbo, something she desires so greatly, is metaphorically linked with the nation Biafra. Olanna with her heritage of wealth, 'womanly curves' seemingly 'African' body is representative of the Igbo and south-eastern region of Nigeria, richer in fertile soil than the North and also housing Nigeria's sizable oil reserves, thereby directly in possession of the country's major source of wealth but unable to control or exact political or economic empowerment from it. Instead, that wealth is firmly in control of the North while the South East appears marginalized, anxious to birth a nation, but ultimately failing and surrendering to Northern Nigeria in an unsettled peace- for all intents and purposes, one nation standing, but illegitimately conceived. With precedents dating back to Buchi Emecheta's Destination Biafra and Ngugi wa Thiongo's Wanja in Petals of Blood, whom he uses as an allegory for (the birth of) a new Kenya, it is not new for African writers to utilise tropes of motherhood to symbolise the birth or death of a nation. Like Adichie, Emecheta portrays the failure of Biafra through the failure of her character's marriage, numerous miscarriages, the birth of a 'monstrous child' which must be destroyed as soon as it is born, and also by the impotence of her husband. Unlike Adichie, Emecheta lifts the burden of bodily national failure from the female body and rests it on the masculine body through her portrayal of

impotence and masculine inability to father the child. The women are denied the joys of motherhood as a result of the political and physical incompetence of their husbands. Readers do not see any real trouble occur in the relationship between Olanna and Odenigbo until they eventually get married. Problems manifest in the face of displacement, starvation, death, (Odenigbo's) alcoholism and subsequent return to infidelity. The imminent collapse of Biafra is signalled through accounts of their dwindling sexual desire for each other. Readers are made aware on several occasions that Odenigbo's touch "made her skin crawl" (382) and "irritated her." (387) Odenigbo's marriage proposal was one that Olanna had tried to resist in order to 'guard their bond' [for fear] that marriage would flatten their relationship into a prosaic bond (52). In this way marriage becomes a metaphor for trouble, instability and even danger. In a recent interview, Adichie points out that marriage as an institution is 'not set up to benefit women,"[18] and in its feminist critique of marriage, by portraying characters such as Olanna, Kainene and various female colleagues of Olanna's at the post- independence university campus, the narrative works hard to demystify marriage as the only route for women to have meaningful relationships and enjoy sex and gain identity in Nigerian society. These women are able to rise above the social norms and stereotypes of a traditionally patriarchal Nigerian society. In this way, the university symbolises a modern independent space which enables women to negotiate the various strands of 'masculinism[19]' often encountered. There is an obvious tension in the way African writers of different generations and genders portray African women. According to Stephanie Newell:

> "It is an internally complex but dominant masculine ideology [that] can be located in Nigerian popular literatures written by

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[18] http://www.cp-africa.com

[19] Stephanie Newell uses the term 'masculinism' to stand for that strand of masculinity where writers anxiously re-invent and represent women to a male addressee, adapting old gender models to maintain control of changing social and cultural formations. Where 'masculinity' is the dominant ideology supporting male social and political power, 'masculinism' is the more obsessional male mindset that has a misogynist edge. Masculinism designates one particular set of representations within the dominant gender ideology: it is not necessarily conspiratorial and need not be regarded as a consciously thought out strategy by men to ensnare women in negative gender roles.

> men since the 1960s […] It is more of an attitude, a conservative and entrenched way of thinking about gender relations that is passed automatically from father to son." (1966:171)

In West African Literatures: Ways of Reading, Stephanie Newell writes that "contemporary popular literatures in Africa inherit masculinist constructions of women from their literary forebears" and cites such works as The Birthday Party, by Segun Adebanjo (1987) which opens up with the standard description of feminine bodily perfection, recurrent in the opening chapters of most locally published fiction. However, if the past is littered with conceptions of women that fit in to the desires of the male gaze, contemporary African writing is repositioning women's representation and providing them with agency within these modern characterisations, whilst re-imagining the past. Able to conceive of unmarried urban feminities beyond the scope of mother, virgin, prostitute, Half of a Yellow Sun is explicit in its examination of women's sexual pleasure and agency. Although these detailed descriptions of sexual encounters are set against the backdrop of war and violence, and are in some ways problematic because of the fine line between representing sex in conflict as normative and pleasurable. This kind of sexual experience appears in the narrative as reserved only for women who are higher up in the socio economic class structure, whereas sexual violence becomes normative for the "uneducated" women. In other words, pleasurable sex in the novel appears to be the premise for women of a certain class- Olanna and Kainene. Whereas sex for women from lower classes is always represented as transactional, tactical or violent in nature. A study by Zoe Norridge published in Research in African Literatures titled "Sex as Synecdoche", explores the intimate languages of violence in wartime Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Her study traces the 'manner in which desire intersects with perceptions of pain and responses to conflict' highlighting Kenneth Cain, Heidi Postlewait, and Andrew Thomson's Emergency Sex (and Other Desperate Measures): True Stories from a War Zone, which gives account of high libidos, international aid work responding to conflicts in Africa. The danger that Half of a Yellow Sun poses with its sustained attention to sex is to fall into the stereotypical impressions of African conflicts as places where Westerners perceive "there's a lot of free sex here" (369), hyper sexuality of African bodies which in any way may detract

from the gravity of sexual exploitation of women committed in Biafra by foreigners, interethnically and by the Biafrans themselves of which there are no official statistics on record. However, Adichie's narrative certainly recognizes and extends the notion that sexual desire characterizes women's major experience of warfare and signifies the writer's willingness to engage with subjects that were previously largely invisible in formal Nigerian literature.

The private sphere of the novel explores many aspects of sexuality including masturbation, orgasm, infidelity, and fantasy which before now have not been featured overtly in Nigerian literary canon. Representations of women's bodies and of sex in the novel become problematic as comparisons are drawn between women's bodies and food which directly contradicts Adichie's stance as an 'African feminist'.

2.2 Feminist Approach to Sexuality

Adichie's description of marriage, which traditionally and socially validates heterosexual relationships in Nigeria, works to transform and to explore the way marriage is regarded as a woman's validation into something problematic for women. The fixation on marriage in the Nigerian context explains the reason that the narrative positions its two main female characters, Olanna and Kainene in the position of the unmarried woman, yet economically and socially mobile. Duerre Humman discussing Ama Ata Aidoo's Two Sisters writes about an exchange between two characters in the novel regarding a suitor whom the protagonist loves, but unfortunately does not possess the material wealth to help her escape her undesirable (low) class position. This "reduces marriage, which under different circumstances could be seen as primarily a romantic or social arrangement, as mainly a financial and economic one." (129) In the Nigerian context, where women's power, authority, and social standing is connected to a man, or having a husband, in order to balance overbearing gender imbalances that indirectly require a woman's

identity to rely on a man's presence, women are socially conditioned to perceive marriage to be of the utmost importance.

According to Anne McClintock in *The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the term Post-Colonialism*, 'not only have the needs of post-colonial nations been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations, and male interests, but the very representation of national power rests on prior constructions of gender power (p.92) highlighting the same issues that Adichie addresses in the novel. Gendered power relations are a major concern of the novel as is represented through the relationships of the twins, Kainene and Olanna as unmarried women because post-colonial Nigerian society cannot conceive of a woman who is unmarried and in a mutually desirable relationship with a man, as an individual to be respected or have any agency of her own. Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang in discussing Adichie's short story, "Birdsong" writes about a woman whose "stare was too direct, not sufficiently vacant […] furthermore her agency is complemented by her forefinger bejewelled, insinuating the presence of a wedding ring. Her marriage status is thus understood in terms of power." (75) Opoku-Agyemang goes on to critique Adichie's use of the illicit relationship in the story which shows that "By persistently dismantling the marriage ideal in Birdsong, Adichie indirectly attacks the corrupt structure of the nation, since the home usually serves as a narrative symbol in post-colonial fiction." (76)

The idea which is still socially circulated, that marriage is the singular way for women to gain social mobility in Nigeria is further dismantled by Adichie's use of the twin which present us with multifaceted views of loving and respectful extra marital relationships. The assumption that an unmarried woman must have a deeper, more sinister flaw which prevents a man from marrying her, whilst using her body for his own sexual pleasure is deeply rooted in misogynistic social structures. Zoe Norridge, in her discussion on rape and shame, drawing from Diken and Lausten,holds that patriarchal societal structures such as these mythologize rape victims as "seducing men" and both deny women sexual autonomy— the authority to say no— and depict all women as sexually available. (28) Any woman behaving in a sexually authoritative manner is immediately suspicious, probably has no home training or is simply a whore. If there are any uncomfortable links between earlier male authored depictions of promiscuity during the war, and female authors

insistence on discussing rape, Adichie certainly complicates them, by showing women desiring sex for pleasure and emotional stability.

The unconventiality of Olanna and Odenigbo's co-habitation is mentioned by Odenigbo's uneducated mother to Ugwu: "She is not your madam, my child. She is just a woman who is living with a man who has not paid her bride price." (212) Then again by Olanna's cousin Arize when she inquires if Olanna is moving to Nsuka to marry her lover. Olanna responds that she does not know about marriage yet, just that she wants to be closer to him. At this point, Arize's eyes are admiring and bewildered: "It is only women that know too much Book like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don't know Book wait too long, we will expire". (41) The suggestion here is that although an educated woman may have greater control over the timing of the choices available to her, she still does not have autonomy over her body as anything more than a convenient pleasure for a man, and her ultimate destination still lies in marriage.

However, the detailed descriptions of Olanna and Kainene's extramarital sexual encounters with their respective partners debunks this myth in the way that both twins draw pleasure from their ongoing sexual relationships before and during the war. There is much space throughout the narrative dedicated to descriptions of sex and sexual pleasure as release, filling [Olanna] 'with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace' (234). Sex also becomes a type of therapy during the war for the psychological effects that the war is having on Olanna's mind in reaction to the news that their friend, Okeoma has been killed:

> Olanna reached out and grasped Odenigbo's arm and the screams came out of her, screeching, piercing screams, because something in her head was stretched taut. Because she felt attacked, relentlessly clobbered, by loss. […] When he slid into her, she thought how different he felt, lighter and narrower on top of her. He was still, so still, she thrashed around and pulled at his hips. But he did not move. Then he began to thrust and her pleasure multiplied, sharpened on stone so that each tiny spark became a pleasure all its own. She heard herself crying, her sobbing louder and louder until Baby stirred and he placed his palm

> against her mouth. He was crying too; she felt the tears drop on her body before she saw them on his face. (p.392)

There is no sense of shame in such descriptions as this, rather the mutual participation and matched desire gives the sense of the possibility of sex as therapeutic and even empowering for both women and men. Afterwards, Odenigbo makes this abundantly clear as he displays an admiration for Olanna, telling her that she is 'so strong, nkem' which are words she had never heard from him before. This is not the first time that we have seen Olanna use sex as a remedy for psychological distress.

After witnessing the massacre of her family in Kano, readers are told of the 'dark swoops which descend on her from above', leaving her 'breathless, too exhausted even to cry' and with 'only enough energy to swallow the pills Odenigbo slipped in her mouth'. The dark swoops upon her mind also manifest on her physical body and it begins to fail her; she loses the use of her legs and bladder, creating 'liquid horrors' as she mentally re-imagines the headless corpses that she has seen. (156) On the day that she is finally able to walk the short distance to the toilet, signalling her road to recovery, this recovery is explored also through sex even though Odenigbo is not sure that she is fully recovered and prefers to call the doctor:

> She took his hand and touched it to her face, pressed it against her breast. "Touch me" She knew he didn't want to, that he touched her breasts because he would do whatever she wanted, whatever would make her better. She caressed his neck, buried her fingers in his dense hair, and when he slid into her, she thought about Arize's pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken, skin stretched that taut. She started to cry. (160)

This is how we are led into the discussion on 'new beginnings' and the birth of Biafra. Olanna is finally able to add her signature to the letter demanding secession of the Igbo people as a means of security, but there is no need as the secession is announced by Ojukwu that evening. (161) Her sexual encounter signals a return to normalcy, and she is now able to think of Aunty

Ifeka's 'awkwardly twisted' limbs without interferences with her psychological and physiological processes. This is how, by Olanna's return to sexual intercourse we are made aware that she has physically and mentally recovered. The focus of the narrative on feminine sexuality is deliberate and feminist in its attempt to reclaim the discussion surrounding African women's sexualities as shameful, immoral and something which serious scholarship not to engage with, and reintroduce it as empowering, freeing, acceptable.

When Olanna goes to confront Odenigbo about his infidelity, she has sex with him before driving off in a rage. Ugwu who is used to listening in on the other side of closed doors tells us that she sounds different, 'as if she was waiting to see how much pleasure she could take' before letting out her rage (242). This is a woman firmly in control of her sexuality, one who does not equate sex with reproduction and clearly vocalizes her pleasure.

In this regard, Adichie's text is pioneering, reclaiming previous interpretations of African female sexuality as passive and subject to masculine authority.

For Richard and Kainene, sex outside on the veranda during the war becomes a 'ritual', when 'she climbed astride, he would hold her hips and stare up at the night sky and, for those moments, be sure of the meaning of bliss.' (308) Kainene is portrayed in a position of power as opposed to Richard's earlier weakness; episodic impotence in the face of his terror of failing Kainene sexually. This alternate reading of a woman's body as analogous with national histories and breakdown is interesting because of the very personal spaces in which these discoveries occur— a bedroom, a veranda. Richard is very much physically connected to Biafra through his enduring sexual commitment to Kainene.

Though he is intimately connected to her, there is the knowledge that even while he dreams about 'being inside her, thrusting deep as he could, to try and discover something that he knew he never would' (65) she, like Biafra is always slightly out of his reach, and in the end, with Kainene's eventual disappearance, Richard knows that he will only ever see things in 'shadows' and 'half glimpses'. (430)

Casual sex is also used as an indicator of [Ugwu's] 'growth' and coming of age. Over the course of the narrative we see his interest in his sisters budding breasts, to his schoolboy infatuation with Nnesinachi the village girl, to a sexually convenient arrangement with Chinyere who works in the neighbours house and is silent during sex, culminate in his deep love for Eberechi and subsequent unfortunate participation in the gang rape of a bar maid. I argue that even though Ugwu is central to the development of the story from a narrative point of view, Ugwu's sexuality and sexual discovery does not work to any higher purpose in the "sexual empowerment" underlying themes which are seen with regard to some female characters in the novel. Rather, while Ugwu's sexual journey works against the new readings of sexual encounters within Biafra they ultimately form an integral part of his education, development and growth. In this regard, Half of a Yellow Sun is both a war novel and a bildungsroman.

2.3 Food, Language and the Body

Sexuality and consumption are so integral to the narrative in this novel because sexual intimacy forms a way into the most private lives of the characters, and also functions as a protest against the notion that sex in war is used solely as a weapon of war, or for transactional purposes alone. Food, and the consumption of it is as central to the narrative in the Biafra context as is the lack of it, since this is a war that was won based on starvation. When sex is given in exchange for bread (Achebe, Girls at War) and young girls are raped by the priest in exchange for crayfish (398), an uncomfortable power dynamic is realised through (lack of) access to food. Women's bodies take on an uncomfortable similarity to food produce; they become transactional, able to expire (41) and also 'something' to be consumed. Just as sex is presented as pleasurable and is later transformed into something violent in Biafra, so also food is a pleasurable centrepiece at the home of Odenigbo, a hotbed of political discussions that occur earlier on in the novel before the onset of the war, where food later transformed into vice. Swinging from the early sixties (before the war) to the late sixties (during the war) and back to the early

sixties, the novel allows us to use (the consumption of) food to chart the changing bodies of characters as physical evidence of the psychic and somatic experiences of the civil war, when characters become, lighter, lankier, as if they could be snapped into two.

Ugwu, as the houseboy cum cook is constantly surrounded by food:

> Even if he hadn't peeked through the kitchen door as they ate, he would still know who had sat where. Master's plate was always the most rice-strewn, as if he ate distractedly so that the grains eluded his fork. Olanna's glass had crescent-shaped lipstick marks. Okeoma ate everything with a spoon, his fork and knife pushed aside. Professor Ezeka brought his own beer, and the foreign-looking brown bottle was beside his plate. Miss Adebayo left onions slices in her bowl. And Mr. Richard never chewed his chicken bones. (83)

Scenes similar in nature to the excerpt above are ones with which readers of Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) [20], will have become familiar as they are constantly presented throughout the novel. Eating is an important image for the novel, but it is more than just eating ones share of food, it is to 'consume' a plethora of other political implications alongside it. For instance, the seemingly ordinary event of a house servant clearing away dishes after a meal takes on a deeper meaning when we read into the 'culinary habits' and consequently into the characters who are not present in the scene. This extract is one of many scenes which revolve around meal times, the home and politics, yet Adichie still takes time to highlight Ugwu's voyeurism, Olanna's affinity for foreign niceties such as lipstick, face cream, and wigs (377), Okeoma's disdain for colonial etiquette, and Richard's status always as alien-not entirely in tune with local cultural habits. What happens around food and eating during the war provides us with a profound sense of the consequences of war on the everyday concrete practices of life. This pre war ordinary everyday practice of eating, of excess- food strewn around plates, of sharing, of well being and home becomes transformed into something monstrous under the pressures of war.

[20] From this point, all subsequent citations from this edition will be referred to as HOAYS in parentheses.

Nothing demonstrates this transformation more accurately than when later in the novel the gentle, affable, inquisitive Ugwu participates in a gang rape and describes this violent act in terms of gastronomical consumption. Food becomes political; a marker of power, class, social connections, and disruptions and ultimately a weapon of war:

> Ugwu tries to back away but the soldiers accuse him of being afraid to which he responds:' Who is afraid? He [says] disdainfully. 'I just like to eat before others that is all.' To which they reply, 'The food is still fresh! Aren't you a man?' (365)

This language is disturbing and problematic. The use of food and eating as a metaphor for violence is an association that is imbalanced especially from a feminist point of view. A view which the author consciously works to promote through the presence of strong female characters in her work. Food connotes comfort and nourishment, a primary need which we see as the war progresses become a scarcity which is largely beyond the reach of the low rank soldiers. A feminine body equated as food, something to be devoured, ravished or enjoyed deflects entirely away from the rape and undercuts its previous violent description. Also Ugwu's insinuation that 'the food is not fresh' feeds into the narrative of the raped woman as somehow tainted and a social pariah.

On the surface level of prose, the insertion of indigenous languages into the African novel written in English serves the purpose of opening the reader up to knowledge of other worlds and possibilities outside the dominant European one. This is a technique which is not new. For example, in Chinua Achebe's novels, he frequently uses Igbo proverbs in dialogue to give his prose an air of historical authenticity. For him, 'proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten'[21]. He has developed not one prose style but several, and in his novels he is careful to select the style that will best suit his subject.[22] In Half of

[21] Chinua Achebe notes that among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly. Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe. London, Heinemann, 1979. p.48

[22] To represent in English, the utterances of a character who is speaking another language, Achebe has devised an African Vernacular style which simulates the idiom of Igbo, his native tongue.

a Yellow Sun, the insertion of indigenous foods in the narrative along with the eating habit of the characters whose bodies endure the intense suffering and duress of starvation during the Biafra war provides an alternative language for the novel. The material reality[23] of foods, both indigenous and western, Adichie is doing more in Half of a Yellow Sun. Not only does food fill a conventional metonymic gap, and also act as metaphor, it also opens up the avenue in which to discuss wider complex notions of gender, race, and class.

By examining the Lagos mansions with exorbitant dinners where shady business deals involving sexual favours are set up, and at the other end of the spectrum the war time displacement where families live in one room and eggs are rationed in powder form while salt becomes precious, Adichie portrays power distribution with regards to food. Ordinary men who run relief centres take on the tone of politicians addressing supporters through the 'power that came with knowing whether or not a group of people would eat' (270). It is through these details around consumption, hunger, starvation and excess that we are able to recreate how Biafra completely transformed these lives.

Starvation— which ultimately is key to the loss of Biafra— transforms food from a domestic symbol of comfort, and sharing and 'home' to a national- even international, s y m b o l and weapon of war. As a consequence of the extreme starvation of the Biafrans, a new disease, kwashiorkor— or Harold Wilson Syndrome (HOAYS, p.338) as the Biafrans were calling it- forever changed the image of the African child on the world stage. Ugwu, in his book within the novel writes about starvation as a weapon of war:

> Starvation broke Biafra and brought Biafra fame and made Biafra last as long as it did. Starvation made the people of the world take notice and sparked protests and demonstrations in London and Moscow and Czechoslovakia. Starvation made Zambia and Tanzania and Ivory Coast and Gabon recognize Biafra, starvation brought Africa into Nixon's American campaign and made parents all over the world tell their children to eat up. Starvation propelled aid organizations to sneak-fly food into Biafra. […]

[23] I have borrowed the term 'material realities' from Brenda Cooper who discusses Adichie's work in terms of material objects. See Cooper, A New Generation of African Writers: Migration, Culture and Language.2008, pp. 133-150.

> Starvation aided the careers of photographers. And starvation made the International Red Cross call Biafra its gravest emergency since the Second World War. (237)

This extract demonstrates the crucial role of food to the novel, both physically represented by depiction of gaunt bodies and also metaphorically. The sheer number of times the word starvation is mentioned within this short excerpt not only draws the reader's attention to the importance of the role that food plays in this war, but holds the reader's focus there by beginning every sentence in the passage with the word starvation. The systematic use of the word emphasises the lack of food as central to the war and thereby central to the novel in a number of ways. By this time in the novel, we have already witnessed brutal massacres that take place during the war yet the excerpt suggests that it is the lack of food rather than the tales of human massacre that brings Biafra onto the global map and into international consciousness as a grave emergency on par with the Second World War.

Secondly, the public starvation and photographic images of gaunt African children with 'skin stretched thin over footballs for bellies and toothpicks for arms' causes a psychological ripple effect on parents 'around the world', a social panic that seeps into the privacy of Western homes at meal times, and remains engrained in the media narrative of the African child until today.

And thirdly, for the first time, Africa becomes a player in American politics, measuring foreign policy and bureaucracy against humanity. Through excerpts from The Book which is written by Ugwu and appear within the novel, the reader is given pocket lectures on how America, Germany, Britain and other world governments remained 'silent while they died' and were thereby complicit in the enforced starvation of Biafrans. As a result, the novel allows for us to chart how food is transformed from something familiar and nationalistic into the unfamiliar and indeed the grotesque.

2.4 Textual Anxiety in Women's Rape and Exploitation

Meaningful discussions on sexuality and violence towards women's bodies are an urgent and great challenge for many African women writers. This is mostly because they have a dual sense of loyalty to both womanhood and nation and Adichie is no exception. While HOAYS aims to re-imagine the normality of the everyday lives of men and women during the war with particular attention to their sexual relationships as a marker of 'normalcy', the very nature of the subject matter creates a novel that is bound in conflict; constantly fraught with underlying tensions, horrors and gendered violence. As is most often the case with African texts, the feminization and idealisation of nation embodied as female or as 'mother' is problematic and this also finds its way into the narrative, if only metaphorically.

In light of the silences surrounding sexual discourse within language and literature, it becomes interesting and relevant to explore critical perspectives on sexuality from fiction as navigating these tropes in reality can sometimes prove rather difficult. In this section, I attempt to achieve three main objectives: the first is to explore the language used to discuss sex and sexuality. There are distinctive gaps in Nigerian languages [24] to represent sex if at all. In Hausa there is no one word for sex but there are terms such as *iskanci* which has shared meanings to refer to something morally bad or dirty, ya ci ta which translates directly as 'he ate her'. In Igbo the term for sex; ijaa can also mean 'to drink' which may point to the ways in which Adichie employs language to stay true to Ugwu's character in order to reflect his point of view and not the narrative point of view. I will be using the text in this section to demonstrate how Adichie uses food as metaphor to fill in the gaps of meaning at the point of language. These gaps are simply caused by fissures which are formed when colonial language is required for terms which are silenced in local language, and in this case, Adichie uses food as a metaphor to bridge the semantic gap between colonial and indigenous languages in order to retain the authenticity of the character.

[24] There are currently 365 languages spoken in Nigeria. The three main indigenous languages are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as these three groups make up the majority.

The central focus will be on Ugwu because in order for Ugwu's character to remain authentic, he must appropriate a certain style of language which not only 'suits his subject' and his village background but also evokes the right 'cultural milieu'[25]surrounding sex and sexuality.

I will explore how the novel again uses both food and sexuality as a tool to maintain the unequal power relations between social classes which become especially evident during the conflict.

Talking about sex in public is something which is not common in most African societies. As already noted, most Nigerian languages do not have a word for sexually violent crimes such as rape included in the vocabulary. Men commit rape and women remain silent because the act is so unspeakable. Jita Allen points out in her essay "Trajectories of Rape in Buchi Emecheta's Novels" that heroines search in vain for an indigenous word to express or articulate rape. She raises the case of Esi Sekyi, the protagonist of Ama Ata Aidoo's novel Changes (1993) who following her rape by her husband, discovers that her mother tongue fails her at the point of articulating her violation, pointing out that "Sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right. Any time. And at his convenience" (12). Language also being reflective of culture works as a patriarchal instrument designed to protect male sexual privilege. This is largely true of many Nigerian societies where discussion about gender and sexuality is viewed with unease and even suspicion and there is telling silence surrounding these issues.

One example of this for instance, according to African feminist scholar Sylvia Tamale in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, is in academia. Institutions such as the University of Zimbabwe's Southern and Eastern African Centre for Women's Law (SEACWL), where post graduates, exposed to theories in women's law elective courses on sexuality view subjects pertaining to sexuality with extreme discomfort, even as academic discourse. Sylvia Tamale observes:

[25] I have borrowed this phrase from Kolawole Ogungbesan who discusses Achebe's use of proverbs in his novels not only to suit his subject and evoke the right cultural milieu but also to help define moral issues. 'The Palm-Oil with which Achebe's words are eaten'.

> Sexuality as an area of serious scholarship in legal academies in Africa is a relatively new phenomenon. It is critical to use creative teaching methods that very early on in the course break the ice, bridge the divide and create a safe environment for meaningful discussions. (606)

These meaningful discussions around sexuality have an ally in literature. The narrative on nation tends to become entwined with the feminine body and the ravishing of women symbolises the ravishing of the nation. When Ugwu wonders whether Eisenach's breasts have ripened or are still hard as the 'unripe fruit' of the use tree (8), and muses that Olanna's face is smooth like an egg, or the lush colour of rain drenched earth (23), it brings to mind visions of fertility and gestation in terms of the land and detracts from the concreteness of the women's bodies. Again when Ugwu imagines Olanna to be a 'yellow cashew, shapely and ripe', or her skin to feel like the butter Master spreads on his bread, it further trivialises women's bodies as attractive consumable goods and detracts from the discourse of violence against them as portrayed in the novel. In its portrayal of failures of proper birth and growth, of extreme violence; of foetuses ripped from uteri, and infertility, the novel represents the traumatic nature of life for Biafra women, and the struggle of the nation Biafra metaphorically through the female body. There is no question that the horrors of war are richly depicted in the novel. Adichie does not flinch from portraying in detail the brutal massacres in all their reality, but at the same time, one of the paradoxes of the novel is in its refusal to name Ugwu's violation of a woman's body as rape in one of the most detailed sustained accounts of gendered violence represented in the novel:

> On the floor, the girl was still. Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered her. He did not look at her face, or at the man pinning her down, or at anything at all as he moved quickly and felt his own climax, the rush of fluids to the tips of himself: a self- loathing release. He zipped up his trousers while some soldiers clapped. Finally, he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a calm hate. (365)

The reader is prepped for the coming events as we are told of Ugwu's rage at the boy-soldier High Tech using a page out of Ugwu's treasured book to roll a joint. (364) The usually affable Ugwu lashes out at High Tech with a blow to the face that is 'swift, powerful, furious' which results in the other soldiers dragging him away and offering him more gin. Ugwu continues to drink steadily until his surroundings become a sour-scented blur: "Everything was moving so fast. He was not living his life; life was living him." (364) By no means does the novel condone the rape of the barmaid, but the narrative works hard to excuse Ugwu for his participation and even to provide atonement for his shameful acts, thereby detracting from the realities of rape and male brutality towards women. The soldiers egg Ugwu on and tell him it is his turn; "Target Destroyer is next!" The word rape is only mentioned twice throughout the novel, yet we know that the rape of the barmaid is not the only instance of sexualised violence in the novel.

Kainene casually tells Olanna that the Northern radio stations are reporting that all Igbo women deserve to be raped, and comments on the Northerner's 'lofty imagination'. Eberechi, Ugwu's war time love interest is pushed into an army officer's room by her parents and raped in exchange for her brother's place in essential services in the army (294). We are also told how the white-man mercenary 'throws girls on their backs in the open' in plain sight of all the men and 'does them' while holding his bag of money in one hand (323).

After the war, Ugwu finds that his own sister has also been raped by a group of Nigerian soldiers. Nnesinachi tells him that five soldiers had 'forced themselves' on her. She herself escapes the same fate only because she was living with a Hausa soldier and had travelled out of the town at the time. The insinuation here is that many of the women in the town were raped, but the emphasis once again is on Anulika as Ugwu's sister. She has been gang raped and therefore rendered ugly as we now understand Ugwu's startling discovery that "the sister he remembered as beautiful was not at all. She was an ugly stranger that squinted with one eye (420)." The next paragraph begins:

Back in Nsukka, Ugwu did not tell Olanna about his sister's rape. (421)

It is interesting to note that Ugwu is able to articulate his sisters experience as rape, but never able to articulate or acknowledge his own perpetration of rape.

He cannot even remember the girl's features, only the look in her eyes and the tense dryness between her legs when 'he had done what he had not wanted to do' (397). The narrative acknowledges that Ugwu develops a hatred for himself but more crucially that he would give himself time to atone for what he had done (397). The blurring of the girls features and the hazy controlled imaginations of Ugwu once again detract from the victim and direct the reader's sympathies towards the perpetrator of violence.

Most African women writers are committed to re-imagining the everyday lives of African women which they feel have either been misrepresented by male writers or completely written out of the literary canon. Violence against women is portrayed quite differently in Chinua Achebe's Girls at War. Here, the girls are complicit in handing out sexual favours in return for food and a good time, while the men look on disapprovingly at the rot of the morals of womanhood. Nwankwo who is a 'big man' working with the Ministry of Justice for Biafra, orders his driver to stop in order to give a 'very attractive girl' by the roadside a lift. He takes in her high tinted wig, very expensive skirt and low cut blouse and deems this a tragedy: 'Too many girls were simply too easy those days. War sickness, some called it'. (Achebe, Girls at War, p.106)

Still, Nwankwo has no qualms about using his position to sleep with the girl and we are told that he is 'given a shock' by the readiness with which the girl follows him to bed and also by her language: "You want to shell?" She asked. And without waiting for an answer says, "Go ahead but don't pour in troops!" (Achebe, Girls At War, p.113)

The language here is very military and callous in its delivery, constructing the woman as generally wayward and the man as morally superior to her. The implication is that this is the behaviour generally of women during war time, when moral standards are lowered or completely dropped for a roll of bread. But what about the men. Are they not equally to blame for taking advantage of those in lower class positions? Olanna questions this in HOAYS after Odenigbo takes advantage of Amala which results in the birth of Baby: "How much did one know of the true feelings of those who did not have a voice?" (250)

Attitudes toward rape are seemingly altered during war time and it is often not seen as a war crime worth prosecuting. For the Biafra civil war, though, one of the bloodiest wars in the history of Africa till date, it is seemingly disappointing that although African women writers have engaged with the subject to some degree, only Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) and Emecheta's Destination Biafra (1982) have taken on the unequal representation of female rape and exploitation, and even these do not give a clear insight into the actual sexual politics of the time.

2.5 Testimonial Bodies

Reading the text through observing the violence enacted on bodies exposes the neo-colonial state as well as bourgeois ideology and demonstrates that there are particular bodies that are subjected to particular forms of violence in the novel. It is clear that while the Biafra middle class live through the deprivations of war, they are not completely flattened by it as are their poorer compatriots. What is even more clear is that the ruling upper class are seemingly unaffected by the war altogether. For example, Olanna's parents are able to flee the country during the war and Olanna's old boyfriend Mohammed 'could not know that Odenigbo was drinking too much, that Ugwu has been conscripted, and that she has sold her wig' (377) because daily life for him, as a Northern elite has remained unchanged. When she goes to the market, she is not able to buy the 'greying pieces of raw chicken' so she buys 'four medium raw snails instead.' (329) This really is the extent of the middle class deprivation: lack of food and other daily comforts such as face creams, wigs, Baby's strawberry biscuits. There are changes in their physical appearances due to the rationing of food as is to be expected, but the family does not starve and certainly does not come to any physical harm. Others are not so lucky and do not get off so easily, and it is they whose bodies are depicted as both metaphors and substitutes for the failed Biafra whose wounds continue to fester well into the post-colonial moment.

Brenda Cooper argues that the 'healing' and 'reinventing' of Ugwu through his ability to record all the atrocities performed on the Igbo's by

Northerners and Westerners (by virtue of the world's silence on the war) in his writing of The Book, is ultimately at the expense of the violated woman. She[26] argues that this valorisation of Ugwu detracts from the concreteness of the rape.

It is interesting to note that the author does not extend the same empathy to the Northern soldiers who are also embroiled in the same war and also carry out acts of gruesome violence and rape. Even though her stated purpose is to be as factually and literally faithful to the events of Biafra as she can possibly manage, (Guardian, 2006), it is not entirely possible for Adichie to do so.

These are her people; her heritage to which her own middle class family belongs and would have experienced parallels with the middle class scenario's depicted in HOAYS during the war. The violence which is carried out on Igbo bodies is phenomenal and described in detail and even though it was the Igbo Majors who launched the first coup, killing mostly Northerners, Adichie glosses over this:

> The BBC is calling it an Igbo coup,' the chin-chin –eating guest said. 'And they have a point. It was mostly Northerners who were killed. There was excitement in their voices even when they talked about the people who were killed. "… They said the Sardauna hid behind his wives" (125)

This is the only time that the narrative makes mention of any Northern casualty in any detail minute as this entry may seem, yet clearly the very nature of war demands casualties and atrocities committed on both sides. This scenario is very unlike the scene in which Olanna describes to Ugwu her encounter with a

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[26] 'The World Was Silent When We Died' (396) Richard takes the anecdote, but Ugwu is left with the title, which haunts him: 'It made him think about that girl in the bar; her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor' (396). The title passes from Richard to Ugwu, who is healed and reinvented through recording the atrocities in his writing, which seems, at least in part, at the expense of the violated woman. And thus the novel ends:
The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died
Ugwu writes his dedication last: For Master, my good man (Cooper, 143)

mother carrying the head of her dead child in a calabash. [27]Even though at the time we are unaware that it is to Ugwu Olanna is recounting her experience:

> Olanna tells him this story and he notes the details. She tells him how the blood stains on the woman's wrapper blended into the fabric to form a rusty mauve. She describes the carved designs on the woman's calabash, slanting lines crisscrossing each other, and she describes the child's head inside: scruffy braids falling across the dark-brown face, eyes completely white, eerily open, a mouth in a small surprised O. (82)

And later in the novel when Baby's hair is falling out and has turned a 'sun-bleached yellow-brown from her natural jet black hair, Olanna again recalls from memory the little girl's head in the calabash:

> She began to describe the hairstyle, how some of the braids fell across the forehead. Then she described the head itself, the open eyes, and the greying skin. Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not aware of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves. (410)

The narrative is almost slowed down to a languid almost peaceful pace to accommodate the full scale of the horror and violence in the scene. The terrible image is stamped into our minds as Adichie repeats the reference to it:

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[27] In the cow-centred Fulani culture, the milk bowl or 'calabash' is a very important household object strongly associated with this nomadic group. They are used as storage containers for fresh, curdled milk and grains. It is a symbol of pastoral life and of the co operation between men who keep the herd and women who milk the cows. The decorations on the calabash are the Fulani's only form of graphic expression or representation of artistic skill. It is interesting to note that the calabash is used to transport food and is always carried by females— balanced on the head.

> Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and the rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away [… .] She thought about the plaited hair resting in the calabash. She visualized the mother braiding it, her fingers oiling it with pomade before dividing it into sections with a wooden comb. (149)

Slowing down the moment and allowing us to visit and revisit it on three separate occasions forces the reader to relive the full scale of the horror of the war and ensures that the reader does not forget the brutality of the North. To observe the violent nature of war, ethnic and religious divisions are laid bare. Hausa soldiers burst into an airport and gun down innocent men for the sole reason that they are Igbo. 'Nnaemeka's chest blows open, a splattering red mass. (153) Old friendships are rendered useless in the face of religion.

The 'juicy white pulp' from the sugarcane that Uncle Mbaezi provides for him and his long-time Hausa (read Muslim) friend Abdulmalik to eat and enjoy together' (40) is recalled to our memory when we observe the 'creamy-white' pulp oozing through a large gash in Uncle Mbaezi's head as his body lays facedown in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. The cuts on Aunty Ifeka's naked body are smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips (147).

The markings on her body are reminiscent of the markings on the firm solid wood of the beautiful (Hausa) calabash, which Olanna touches, edging 'her hand forward until it was gently caressing the carved lines that crisscrossed (the body) of the calabash.' The beautiful markings made in peace time are transformed into something horrific when we see the markings on Aunty Ifeka tellingly carried out by the 'criss-crossing' of swords.

Her naked body on the veranda suggests she may have been raped and experienced further torture evident from the small cuts dotting her arms and legs. The full weight of these horrible scenes and imaginations of what Adichie does (not) say is brought to bear when we are told who the killer is.

Olanna sees a crowd of men drifting into the yard, with blood stained kaftans and the shiny metal blades of their axes and machetes, which are

symbols of male aggression, catch her eye: "We finished the whole family. It was Allah's will!' one of the men called out in Hausa. The man was familiar. It was Abdulmalik". (148) He then goes on to nudge a woman's headless body, and steps over it, placing one leg down and then the other, although there was enough room to step to the side. These images that have him trample on the body of a non- Muslim woman who is already dead play directly into the not only Western, but general stereotypes regarding Islam and religious fanaticism. As expected, Adichie tries to balance this out through her portrayal of Mohammed, Olanna's good friend and ultimately her saviour. Earlier we see how Mohammed drives her to Sabon Gari where her 'people' live to try and save them too. They see a bus drive past that looks 'like one of those campaign buses that politicians use to tour rural areas giving out rice and cash to villagers (147). Amongst the slow Hausa words resonating, 'The Igbo must go. The infidels must go.' Mohammed tells her Igbo bodies are lying on Airport Road and Olanna realizes that this is not just another demonstration:

> Allah does not allow this,' Mohammed said. He was shaking; his entire body was shaking. 'Allah will not forgive them. Allah will not forgive the people who have made them do this. Allah will never forgive this.' (148)

Allah is repeated four times, beginning every sentence but one in the statement. Emphasizing repeatedly that it is not in Allah's will to kill and butcher 'infidels', contrary to what the murderous Abdulmalik is calling out.

By referring to 'the people who made them do this' Adichie highlights the underlying political aspect to the massacre and the use of religion as a political tool which the elite use to control the masses. This is mainly possible because of the widespread lack of formal (Western) education in Northern Nigeria. In addition to this, many in the heavily populated Northern regions cannot also afford the fees of Koranic schools where texts can be properly deciphered. This in turn makes it easier for extremists alongside the elite to brainwash those who rely on religious teachings from them which may be twisted for

personal and political gain. This is still very much the case in Nigeria judging from the recent killings sweeping the country by Islamist sect Boko Haram[28].

Adichie's topic is cultural, historical, viable and still unresolved; vested in the quest to understand the changing nature of everyday life. She says she wrote the book because she 'wanted to engage with [her] history in order to make sense of her present. 'Because the brutal bequests of colonialism make [her] angry, because the thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the deaths of women and children enrages [her], and because— most tellingly— she never wants to forget. (2)

We witness how Ugwu changes, from a young boy eager to wear the gleaming yellow crescent shaped sun on his sleeve to a young man whose 'salute is slack, because he is worried about Olanna and Master and Baby in Umuahia, because he is no longer interested in His Excellency, because he does not care for the commander (366). Change brought about by the nature of the events that occurred during the war of which he plays an active role.

[28] One Boko Haram faction has warned all southerners - who are mostly Christian and animist - to leave the mainly Muslim north of Nigeria. President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in Yobe and Borno states, as well as Plateau state in central Nigeria and Niger state in the west, following a surge in ethnic and sectarian violence. Residents told the BBC that those killed in Mubi belonged to the Igbo community from the south of the country. They had been meeting to organise how to transport the body of an Igbo man who was shot dead by gunmen on motorbikes on Thursday evening. "It was while they were holding the meeting that gunmen came and opened fire on them," a resident said. Witnesses said gunmen burst into the hall and shouted "God is great" as they opened fire killing all seventeen of them. (BBC News, 7 January, 2012)

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown Half of a Yellow Sun's deep interest in gender relations and her longing to portray men as victims of violence during war alongside their female counterparts.

The problem with this is that the male body cannot completely heal social/gendered injustices as it also wields a 'mutilating' phallus waging war against the female body, represented in the juxtaposition of Olanna's sexual pleasure over the violence that she had witnessed in the Kano massacre, "When he slid into her she thought about Arize's pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken." (160) Simultaneously, this brings to mind pleasure and pain, visceral body parts alongside the mutilating sword. In her critique of Half of a Yellow Sun, Brenda Cooper also notes that "It is a problematic position that says all men are potentially rapists, if pushed to extreme circumstances" (150). If men are sexual predators under certain circumstances, how then can women be included in projects of national healing? The treatment of sexuality and rape in this text takes on a new importance and warrants attention but unfortunately, the narrative surrounding Ugwu's authorship takes that away. The pact of silence around the aftermath of the rape of the barmaid, her blurring and eventual disappearance from the narrative leave only Ugwu to 'heal' and 'atone'. Adichie's sustained portraits of the violence suffered against women's bodies in the narrative illuminate the author's determination to confront the gap, (that is the anxiety), in the representation of women's bodies in the Biafra war. Her non engagement with the rape victim(s) not only provides a repressed response to female rape but also fails to open up completely, the important conversations surrounding violence against African women's bodies. However, the sustained focus on sex in the text, the representation of women's sexuality as metaphor to explore gender and politics illustrated through the underlying conversation between private and public spheres in the text is a radical and welcome feminist contribution to the study of African women's writing.

Chapter 3: The Politics of Prostitution in Chika Unigwe's on Black Sisters' Street

Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street is the story of four young women who travel to Belgium to work as prostitutes. While the grim reality is that substantial numbers of Nigerian women are trafficked transnationally for prostitution in Europe, this situation is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Nor is corruption, poverty, bad leadership, gender discrimination or vice. However, On Black Sisters' Street is not a story about a group of victimized women who are a symptom of Nigeria's state failure. By considering these women as active participants in their own personal wealth creation aided by globalization, the novel presupposes a world not made up only of nations affected by global processes, but also of locally-situated individuals. When a novel such as On Black Sisters Street portrays lives of prostitutes which are absent from dominant national narratives as hopeful and aspirational it suggests that what goes on in even in the most unstable of circumstances is never so extreme that it cannot be overcome. Groups of women such as these four prostitutes can play an important economic role, through the earning of moneys abroad wired back to relatives, or by returning to their home country (as two of the protagonists do), to set up viable businesses.

Unigwe's account of the Nigerian economic crisis which is in effect prodding some young women to seek alternative methods of 'easy' income within the exploitative sex trade in global spaces, is a narrative that is consciously focused on gendered 'others' operating on the periphery of globalization and trade.

On Black Sisters' Street (2009) tells a very different story from Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun in terms of style, tone, setting and subject matter. In African writing, extramarital sex is often reserved as something immoral .[29] Yet it is precisely through representations of that these two contemporary writers interrogate gender relations and rewrite dominant literary tropes. Similarly, to

[29] See Newell, Stephanie (2006) on West African Popular Literature: Onitsha market literature in the 1950s and 1960s,

Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun, the narrative of On Black Sisters' Street is refracted through multiple temporal frames. The novel begins with a chapter titled "May 12, 2006"— the day of the death of one of the four protagonists, Sisi. The novel then oscillates between sections focalised by each protagonist and chapters entitled 'Zwartezusterstraat', which is the name of the Antwerp street in which the four women have lived, and where the women are mourning Sisi's death. Inserted between the narrative and situated in Zwartezusterstraat are the back-stories of each surviving woman, which they tell each other as they connect through the death of Sisi as they begin to share their histories.

Like Adichie, Unigwe has been published by mainstream, West-based publishers (in this case, Jonathan Cape), which makes her work accessible to international audiences. African readers in the diaspora who may have found themselves engaged in low paid/low level work despite (sometimes) having university qualifications will be able to identify with some of the tragedy represented in the novel, especially the story of Sisi – a middle class woman who is in some senses just like them. Unigwe's narrative also engages with issues of race and the perception of young black women by European males.

In Europe, the girls acquire nicknames, (for example, 'Nubian Princess' (234)). Many of their clients approach them with 'arrogant swaggers, pictures of their pretty wives in leather wallets, looking for adventure between the thighs of een afrikaanse'. (178) The narrative notes that 'the customer was king even when he was being obnoxious'. (275) However, such treatment is not unfamiliar to the women who are already accustomed to treatment as second class citizens in Nigeria's patriarchal society.

Looking at the position of the commodified female body in a globalised economy, Unigwe uses fictional means to interrogate these gender-specific questions arise. Who owns an African woman's body? To what uses are these bodies put? And in which spaces are these exoticised/othered bodies able to operate independently as something other than commodities? These are the questions this chapter seeks to answer.

3.1 Overview of Prostitution in African Postcolonial Texts

On Black Sisters' Street problematizes the condemnation of prostitution on moral grounds, challenging the notion that women who are prostitutes have no agency. Despite the plethora of derogatory names for sex workers, the narrative only refers to its protagonists as 'girls'. The literary portrayal of commercial sexual transactions are frequently bound up the moral anxieties specific to African male literary tradition, embodied in the figure of a woman mostly always represented either as Mother Africa or as a whore. Florence Stratton demonstrates this in her writings on 'The Mother Africa Trope[30]' She identifies the frequency and the history of the trope's occurrence within the African male literary tradition as I further discuss below. From African oral cultures to written artistic expression,

Stratton holds that through the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman, literary texts of national vision "operate against the interests of women, excluding them, implicitly if not explicitly, from authorship and citizenship" (40). These kinds of allegory of 'male and female', 'domination and subordination', 'mind and body', 'subject and object' 'self and other' are problematic because they are usually definitive of a situation that is conventionally patriarchal. Most problematic is that male literary texts pay tribute to the female body as trope in ways which are "frequently associated with the African landscape that is [a man's] to explore and discover. The 'national allegories' such as Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, Mongo Beti's Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, Wole Soyinka[31]'s Season of Anomy and Ngugi wa Thiongo's Petals of Blood are all instances of texts that represent woman as an 'unchanging African essence, heritage of African values or as an index of the state of the nation. Mother Africa becomes a whore when she serves as an allegory of the embattled state of the nation, its culture and society, which usually occurs upon contact with Western society or the city. From Len Orzen's English translation 'The Promised Land' of Sembene's short story, 'La noire de…' (1962) - where Mother Africa represented as Diouana is transported to France by her employers and made to slave for a pittance -

[30] See Stratton, F., African Literature and the Politics of Gender, 1994.
[31] Wole Soyinka has been explicit in the literary context about the function of his female characters. They serve primarily as 'symbol and essence.' See Bryan 119.

Mother Africa endures servitude and eventually commits suicide in a foreign land. According to Stratton, Mother Africa continues to experience degradation at the hands of male literary tradition as exemplified in Nuruddin Farrah's young woman Ebla, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) who abandons her nomadic roots in the Ogaden for life in the city as a prostitute. She represents the history of Somalia to the time of independence, where Somalia is partitioned by British, Italians, French, Egyptians, and Ethiopians under colonialism. Against the backdrop of this, Ebla wonders when this 'kind of going from one hand to another would come to an end' (128). Not unlike the girls in Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street who also see their vagina as a 'God-given trump card wedged between their thighs' (26), Elba 'scratches her sex' and then concludes, "This is my treasure, my only treasure, my bank, my money, my existence" (160). Unigwe represents sex workers in a manner which critiques national and transnational patriarchy, rather than making the figure of a woman a symbol of national moral decay from which men are excluded.

Similar to Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, and first published one year prior to Nigeria's independence from Britain is also tale of prostitution contained in Cyprian Ekwensi's much-loved novel Jagua Nana (1961). Jagua Nana is the story of a beautiful young woman who shuns her life in the village, and having had enough of the humdrum of boring, marital life catches a train to Lagos leaving her husband of three years and family behind. She understands early on that her family will never understand her longing, and 'hot thirst for adventure in her blood' and sets about working the streets of Lagos where girls wore 'high-heeled shoes' and were 'free' and 'fast' with their favours (167). Here, Jagua is less of a symbol for Mother Africa, and more of an example of what girls may become upon introduction to the evil city atmosphere that resides in Lagos:

> "That driving, voluptuous and lustful element which existed in the very air of Lagos, that something which awakened the sleeping sexual instincts in all men and women and turned them into animals always on heat." (180)

Lagos is described as a place where girls smoked, wore narrow slacks and worked in offices like the men. These city women are depicted as a far cry

from the demure sights of the village where women were beautiful yet not brazen, complimentary to the palm trees and the Iroko, the rivulets and the fertile earth (180). Lurking here is the author's desire to return women to their natural 'trope', pure physicality, 'fertile earth' where seed can be planted. Unfortunately, Jagua having began to prostitute herself in the city, earning good money and acquiring finer taste, was slowly gaining fame in Lagos as 'Jagwa! … Jagwa Nana!' because of her 'good looks' and 'stunning fashions'. Jagwa secures the love of an educated young man, Freddie, alongs ide her steady stream of clientele, and tries but fails to conceive a child with Freddie. Living in fear of aging without securing for herself the most important thing, a husband, Jagwa pays for her young man to further his education in England on the understanding that he will marry her on his return. Throughout the novel, Jagwa feels anxiety over the threat of her age even though she still retains her youthful good looks and spends most of her time agonising over this. When Jagwa learns that Freddie is having an affair with a much younger girl, with 'standing breasts' (8) the kind of youth for which Jagwa longs, she can no longer restrain herself. She begins to openly walk the streets at night, soliciting men in cars, and no longer limiting her business to the shadowy lights of the Tropicana Club. After a series of events which lead her to Freddie's village albeit in his absence in the hopes of securing the favour of his people, all comes to nought and eventually Jagwa settles down as the mistress of the elderly politician Uncle Taiwo. Although she knows she doesn't love him and is a "mere tool in his hands" he also knows what he wants and doesn't complain when asked to pay for it (186). Although Jagua is a strong, vocal, female character whose personality is a force of nature in itself, autonomous and outgoing, there is no hope for her because nothing comes of it. She has no money to her name after years of working in Lagos and thereafter, the author banishes her back to the village which seems to be the only redemptive measure for her. After the death of Freddie and subsequently Uncle Taiwo, Jagua relocates back to the village where she eventually becomes pregnant by a stranger 'passing through'. The novel then ends on a note of uncertainty with Jagua bearing a son who then dies two days later, at her breast as he nurses. The village evening breeze soothes her as she reassures her mother that she will not return to Lagos as she sits on a log and dreams about new hopes.

Ngugi's Wanja, in Petals of Blood (1977) incorporates both forms of Florence Stratton's 'Mother Africa' trope, which she calls 'woman as a pot of culture' (African values) and the other as 'the sweep of history' or index of the state of the nation. Wanja represents the post-colonial history of Kenya and at many points her condition is allegory for the state of the nation, again through her longing to be pregnant but seeming barrenness. Wanja is seduced by a friend of her father's at the time of the Mau-Mau war for national liberation. He is an entrepreneur and is also a supporter of the British. Wanja becomes pregnant by him, drops out of school and leaves home, eventually giving birth and disposing of the baby in a latrine. This act signifies the abandonment of hope in the justice and principles of the new nation. The pattern of Wanja's life repeatedly shifts following Kenya's independence. She sometimes lives in the city where she becomes a prostitute and endures exploitation at the hands of the men who form the new ruling class. Eventually she becomes a whorehouse madam, concluding:

> In a world of grab and take, in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil, some can send their children to schools and others cannot… in a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor, in such a world, we are all prostituted. (240)

Wanja, at other times also lives in the rural countryside, Ilmorog where her grandmother lives, and where she (Wanja) returns to in the end. Near the beginning of the novel, after having lived in the city for years, Wanja goes to Ilmorog to visit her grandmother Nyakinua. Now she is longing to become pregnant but is seemingly barren and also in search of a new beginning. Like Jagua, in this setting she undergoes a transformation which is reminiscent of Jagua's return to Ogabu. In both cases the transformation occurs upon the women's renewed 'contact with the soil:'

> Her eyes become less exaggeratedly bright, more subdued, with a different kind of softness, no longer caressing people in the first hour of contact. She had become a less fully fleshed beauty, more of an angular beauty of a peasant woman. (243)

Again, here Wanja is metaphorically important in her representation of the nation's independence, national struggle, and eventual promise of rebirth, but practically similar to Jagua, she is nothing more than the sum of her sexuality. Thus her claim that "if you have a cunt… instead of it being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore' (293) rings true.

In these texts, prostitution is not used as a method of illuminating the female social condition in a patriarchal society, but rather it is used to further entrap women and to blame women as agents of moral corruption in the society.

The prostitute trope in On Black Sisters' Street is particularly illuminating because the text is all about women's social condition and does not equate prostitution to men's degradation of women. By distancing the text from national allegory written on women's bodies and by recognising prostitution for what it is— a byproduct of national failure as a result of male dominated institutions— Unigwe unmasks the subordination of women in patriarchal socio-political systems both nationally and internationally.

3.2 Women, Strategy and Power

In Unigwe's novel, contemporary Nigeria is represented as an intrinsically patriarchal society where women's bodies are largely governed by cultural, religious, and effectively state policies, and women's choices are easily limited and subjected to masculine interpretation. This section aims to look at the 'tactics' women employ, using the body as a 'tool' to overcome socio-economic marginalization in their various situations within the Nigerian context and beyond it.

Michel de Certeau's theories in The Practice of Everyday Life, explain the distinction between strategy and tactics as two paradigms which interrogate the tension between binaries in regards to power relations. De Certeau defines strategy as "the calculation or manipulation of power relationships (35)." He goes on to define a tactic as a "calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus… an act of the weak" (37). Connecting these notions to power relations and metaphors of prostitution demonstrates how these women use

the tools available to them in the context of social mobility. In other words, in the absence of a proper locus (power) these women have no ability to properly plan or strategise and must then use tactics to overcome situations as they are presented to them.

According to de Certeauian philosophy, everyday practice is the investigation of 'ways of operating' (1984:474) that concerns 'an operational logic' which ultimately comprises a culture. Many everyday practices as well as ways of operating are tactical in character and symbolize 'victories of the weak over the strong' (1984:481). Due to an inability to escape from an imposing and unbearable system, the 'weak' individual must work from within the system to manipulate events and turn them into opportunities. According to De Certeau:

> It [a tactic] has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time; it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing' (1984: xix).

The de Certeauian tactic comprises three parts: a practitioner, a tactic, and a venue by which the tactic takes form.

Sisi, or Chisom is the main protagonist around whose death the novel is centered. Upon arrival in Belgium she changes her name to Sisi (significant as this act of renaming amounts to a claim of her own identity and agency), amid hopes that 'once she hit it big', she would return to Nigeria and 'reincarnate as Chisom' (44). Chisom is a Finance and Business Administration graduate who spends the better part of two years after obtaining her degree, scripting meticulous application letters for numerous jobs announced in the newspapers but all this is to no avail. Due to the restraints of socio-economic class and the lack of social and professional networks that aid social mobility in societies such as Nigeria, Chisom has witnessed from the sidelines as numerous classmates whom she considers to be less intelligent use their 'long-legs' and 'better connections' (22) to acquire employment. In the vicious cycle of

unemployment and lowered expectations, years after graduating from University on the winged hopes and dreams of her parents, she is still unemployed and living with her parents in a one-bedroom apartment.

The narrative describes the squalor of the shared toilets between flats, typical of low income earners in Lagos resident in densely populated areas, broken cisterns with pans overrun with squirmy maggots and days load of waste. This is a city constantly affected by city wide water shortages alongside constant power rationing and cuts. The rich have solved the problems for themselves that the government remains unaccountable for; generators to augment power cuts, water tanks to relieve water shortages. Poorer families are left at the mercy of the state. The narrator describes the walls of the shared kitchen which remain 'blackened by kerosene smoke', a staple of poorer families who cannot afford to purchase cooking gas. It is amidst this poverty and seeming hopelessness that Chisom has her chance encounter with Dele. So, "when she got the offer that she did, she was determined to get her own back on life, to grab it by the ankles and scoff in its face. There was no way she was going to turn it down. Not even for Peter". (23)

Peter is the earnest young boyfriend, who has promised to marry Chisom and take her away from all this – but although he is earnest in his aspirations, he lacks the money to achieve her desires. Peter has a job teaching at a local school. The months he got paid, his salary was barely enough to cover the rent for this flat where his five siblings lived with him. The months he did not get paid he begged his landlord to allow him to live on credit. (28) Chisom sacrifices romantic love in favour of securing for herself a better future and dismisses her lover, Peter. The illusion of the glitz and glamour of a foreign country further serves to highlight the get-rich-quick mentality which permeates the Nigerian society today, fuelling practices of corruption and greed. The problematic aspect of Chisom's story is that although she has not been directly harmed by any male figures in her life, her hopes, dreams and even her failures are closely linked and bound up in the failures of her father. As he begins to lose faith in her and the prophecy of the sooth-sayer at her birth, Chisom begins to lose faith in herself and eventually she acquiesces in her own degradation by desperately seeking to avoid t h e 'why bother' 'defeated' 'unfulfilled' (90) ideology of her father, who 'could have been a big man' (19) she becomes a prostitute largely in order to fulfil not just her own

dreams, but the dreams of her parents too. Through Chisom, Unigwe makes explicit the narrative's link between women's exploitation and state failure as Sisi gets dressed for her first night at work:

> She […] smeared on lipstick. Red. Red like her thoughts. Murderous thoughts that made her wish she could smash things. She had a degree for heaven's sake. […] Dark kohl under her eyes masking the sadness that she was scared to see. Obasanjo's own children, were they being forced to do things just to survive? She had heard they were at Ivy League universities in the US. (202)

Taken together, Chisom's thoughts expose what for Unigwe, are inadequacies and a form of neo-colonialism under Nigeria's democratic president. Nigeria's president, instead of working to establish world class universities in Nigeria, chooses instead to send his children to the best universities in the West, largely representative of the traditions of Africa's educated elite which assumed power at independence. Although Nigeria is independent of colonial rule and also free from military rule, the exploitation of the Nigerian economy and its people for selfish interest by largely male dominated governments still continues. Unigwe gives expression to this class's rejection and suppression of Nigerian educational systems through the president of the country's actions in favour of Western universities for his children. The women in the novel represent particular bodies in a particular place at a particular time. Therefore, it is due to the economic exploitation of Nigeria by the Nigerian elite, that certain bodies are more susceptible to limited choices and exploitation themselves, than others.

Efe comes broadly from the same socio-economic background as Sisi and also resides in Lagos. She does not have the familial comfort of both parents, as Sisi does. Unigwe paints the picture of a young girl, who is forced to take on the role of mother and father in the face of a drunkard father who cannot come to terms with the death of his wife. Efe, a girl of sixteen, is left largely to her own devices, as her father is habitually in the beer parlour, but even at that he 'faithfully gives her money at the beginning of every month, from the wages he earns as a labourer renting himself out to building contractors'. Efe, in her lust for material gain is lured into a relationship with an older man – 'It was not just the money, it was the crispness of it, the smell

of the Central Bank, the fact that he had drawn it out of a huge bundle of like notes so that she believed all the stories she had heard of his enormous wealth. The smell was enough to make anyone giddy.' (50)

The forty-six-year-old man, Titus, gives her money in exchange for sexual favours over a period of time, up until she conceives a child which to him signifies the end or termination of the 'agreement'. This is a story directly concerned with gendered power relations portrayed through the illicit affair with an older man of means.

All of the women's choices (to have a child, or take on a sugar daddy, or to reject a lover) amount to tactics designed to counter the workings of social inequality and patriarchy. All but one of the women were aware of their reasons for going to Belgium and what work for them there would entail, and as such their choice of going to Belgium to prostitute themselves is one such tactic.

For the purpose of clarifying the novel's narrative and how I read it in this chapter, I wish to distinguish between 'human trafficking' and transnational prostitution. The United Nations defines 'trafficking in persons' as "… the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." The protocol goes on to list other forms of exploitation including sexual exploitation and contends that "anyone subjected to the kinds of coercion and manipulation laid out in the definition cannot consent to being exploited (89)." Thereby, legally removing the possibility of 'willing victims.' In order to focus more clearly on the characters in the novel as women who have been exploited, yet have also made a conscious choice of movement in order to participate in the sale of sex, I will not be reading these women as victims of illegal trafficking, but rather as gendered victims of limited choice. In order to avoid the pitfalls of universalization of experience that is sometimes associated with prostitution, I am also hesitant to draw too many similarities between Unigwe's four protagonists and Ekwensi's Jagua. The experience of the protagonists in Belgium is a radically different experience from the

prostitution experience of Jagua Nana in Lagos. For example, Jagua is able to conduct her business as she pleases, gathering clients from amongst the local men, the occasional foreigner and regular clientele at the Tropicana. She and the other girls at the Tropicana are also relatively independent and do not utilise the intermediary of pimps/madams in the process. They attempt to foster long term relationships with clients, (frequently inviting them back to their homes) and depend upon these loyal stream for economic survival and advancement. Regardless of the differences in experience, prostitution remains a disadvantageous life choice. The women in Lagos despite some advantages, have an inferior economic existence to the women in Belgium. In addition to this, they run the risk of being recognised and shamed by family and friends which is less desirable compared to the women in Belgium who have the ability to remain faceless. Whatever material gains they make, the prostitutes of Lagos or Antwerp sacrifice a great deal in terms of emotionally driven love for financial mobility.

Amongst a 'general suspicion of all things foreign' (280) and a lack of brotherhood from 'even (their) fellow Africans' (281), issues of displacement, marginalization and a longing for 'home' plague the characters in On Black Sisters' Street. Each of the four protagonists have left their homes in Lagos, enabled by a series of chance encounters with the central underworld character Senghor Dele, and are transported to a new world of sex for sale in Belgium. There, their Nigerian 'Madam' or brothel manager confiscates their passports to be returned when they have repaid their debt, and sets them to work. The girls begin their trade in the government controlled red light district of Antwerp - the Schþerskwartier which they come to identfy as a city of 'botched dreams' is merely an extenuation of curtailed opportunities from Lagos, which are the result of patriarchal systems unfavourable to women.

Similar to De Certeau's theory of tactics, on applying the anthropology of Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) to the understanding of post- colonial issues and women's bodies I will explore briefly her idea of the body as a receptor of social meaning and a symbol of society. In Natural Symbols, Douglas argued that the human body is the most readily available image of a social system, and suggested that ideas about the human body correspond closely to prevalent ideas about society. Moreover, particular groups within society will tend to adopt approaches to the body which correspond to their social

location, and above all the body is a metaphor of society as a whole. Meaning that in times of social crisis, when national borders and identities are threatened, there is likely to be a concern with the maintenance of existing bodily boundaries and the purity of bodies. (Douglas, 1970:72)

The general theme in Douglas' work is that the social body constrains how the physical body is perceived and experienced, and these perceptions and experiences themselves sustain a particular view of society. So in other words, the ways in which people live, experience and perceive their bodies depends on the positions and categories made available to individuals by the social body. If we consider Douglas's work through the understanding of postcolonial issues, then the categories in which middle class women exist in Nigeria inevitably sets them up for collaboration in man's vision of [their] life. Time and again, the needs of post-colonial nations identify with the interest and aspirations of men [32], and women must seek methods of revolt in order to counter the status quo. Gendered power relations, especially where represented by the stereotypical younger female/older male variety are usually unbalanced in favour of the older, richer, more powerful male and it is through these metaphors and gendered binaries that we can apply Michel de Certeau's theory of tactics and strategy. In order to deal with dominant masculine strategies, the respective protagonists must seize the opportunity in order to develop and utilize tactics, which are informed by class and also by gender.

Another term to consider in analyzing the power relations at play is one referred to as 'shadow prostitution'. I have coined this terminology from Elina Penttinen in *Globalization, Prostitution and Sex Trafficking*, where she describes the relationship between the client and the prostitute a s fundamentally different although both are products of globalization.

Whereas the client exists in the domain of subjects of globalization, the [Russian] woman exists in shadow globalization. For, her, globalization manifests as corporeal constraints, and whereas the client moves through the landscapes of globalization, taking advantages of new opportunities for

[32] See McClintock, A. (92) 1992

consumption, she moves and is moved in the sexscapes of globalization. (Penttinen 2008: xv)

In the same way, prostitution as a profession may provide the individual a regular source of income, and wider exposure to various clients or 'new opportunities' for travel and consumption, where a client is compelled to 'buy' her time, body and services. On the other hand, the girl existing in shadow prostitution may receive only promises of financial gains in return for sexual favours. She is more open to exploitation as the other party is under no formal obligation to fulfil his expected monetary end to the sexual transaction at each occasion, creating a complete imbalance of power. She is also limited to only the opportunities that may or may not present themselves to her (corporeal constraints) and in addition to this, entire she is still abused and stigmatized by society. This form of 'shadow prostitution' which the writer portrays here is not uncommon in Nigeria, where the same 'tactic' theory of de Certeau regarding the sex trade reflects the reality of life for women who in times of poverty and socio- economic instability implore tactics of survival against a system which [they feel] imposes harsh, unliveable conditions on them. So although, Efe was utilizing the tactics of a sex worker at this point, I have referred to this as shadow prostitution as this was not her means of daily 'work' or professional employment.

When Efe tells her older lover, Titus that she has conceived a child. He takes her to a hotel, where she is told to undress and parade naked, before he jumps on her, drags her into the bed and proceeds to have repeated sex with her in which he falls asleep, wakes up and starts again. When he learns of her pregnancy, he abandons her in a strange hotel in an unfamiliar part of town, leaving her with no mode of transport or money. From this exchange he is linked to power which is contrasted with the protagonist's position. She is of a lower class, has no income and in a sense, this affair is equivalent to her 'job' as it is her only source of an income. Also, at the macro level of the State, this highlights the failure of the system which does not enforce laws protecting the (sixteen-year-old) girl-child against this form of statutory rape and exploitation. There is also no form of social welfare system in place to cater for the single mother and her child, leaving the victim vulnerable, powerless and ripe for further forms of exploitation.

It is on the back of these developments that Efe takes up three cleaning jobs, leaving the care of her son to her younger sister. In the face of harsh economic conditions and receiving no assistance or support from her father, the decision to go into prostitution seems a means to manipulate life events as they have been presented and turn them into opportunities.

In Nigeria, the disadvantaged groups are the first to suffer when economic, political, and the environmental deterioration occurs, and are the last to gain when there are improvements. Women's inequality at each level of society-generated by the traditional division of labour, the double burden of productive and reproductive responsibilities, and exclusion from education and training- is reinforced by discriminatory ideological and systematic practices inherent in development policies. Since national development plans do not consider women's problems as deserving serious commitment in terms of allocating resources to them, this trend has resulted in women's continuous exploitation in their struggle to cater to their families and themselves. (Elabor-Idemudia: 1991:129)

Prostitution can also be seen as a form of female social protest against poverty, varieties of exploitation, and domination by men. But it would be incorrect to assert that revulsion against male hegemony and exploitation is the critical driving force. The deliberate need to make money over and above the 'local possibilities' stands out clearly and is probably the greatest motivating factor for most prostitutes. (Naanen: 1991:69)

In On Black Sisters' Street, the characters openly admit to this 'grabbing of a once in a lifetime opportunity' that any girl would die for, especially as the end location is the golden dream that is Europe. Efe will later come to describe the reality of her life in Antwerp as a 'botched dream', even though she is the only one of the girls who remains in Antwerp and adopts the dog eat dog mentality of her exploiters by becoming a Brothel Madam as well. For Efe, alongside the lust for material wealth and money, was the overwhelming responsibility as caretaker of her siblings, and mother-provider to her child. After her lover, rejects the child and Efe is forced to take on three cleaning jobs, she is aware that there is no getting out of the stagnating pool of her poverty. As she is used to manipulating men, as her only vice against poverty, she tries to seduce Dele, who is one of her employers, and offer herself as a

girlfriend in the hopes of an easier life. Taking the long term gains for himself into consideration, he arranges for her to go to Belgium.

Of all the women, it is only Joyce who is unaware of the work she is going to Belgium to participate in. Efe is the only one who tells her sister Rita back in Lagos, exactly what kind of work she is going to take up in Belgium. She is at ease with her situation and is not laden with so much of the guilt and inner turmoil that plagues Sisi.

Ama comes from a slightly different socio-economic background than Sisi and Efe, she is by no means a member of the rich elite. Ama is the character most representative of the Nigerian middle class elites. She has a nice house, housemaids, her own room and bathroom, unlike our other two protagonists that share communal facilities and do not have hired help, which is the norm in Nigerian middle class family settings. The writer makes us aware that not many children her age have their own 'beautiful bedrooms all to themselves' and Ama unlike the others does not seem pressured by constant naggings of material lust. Her struggle is in part connected to her extremely religious and repressive environment, constantly trapped indoors with verses of Biblical instruction. She is a young girl who is discouraged from having friends, and as a result of this becomes introverted, spending her time talking to walls and playing with her sandals - flogging them until she was sure she heard them cry.' (122-123)

Brother Cyril, her father is the suffocating, patriarchal figure who is an assistant pastor at the Church of the Twelve Apostles of the Almighty Yahweh, Jehovah El Shaddai, Jehovah Jireh, one of the biggest churches in the city. The Devil did not belong anywhere near the house of which he was head.
(128) … The things of the Lord were not to be abused. Nor slighted. Nor ridiculed. She knew that her father would put her across his knees and with her mother watching in a corner, tear into her with a treated koboko, the cowhide cane that he nicknamed, 'Discipline'. This is the first of many examples of the mother also being abused by the father figure- 'the way she walked with back hunched when the clothes did not come out clean, and Brother Cyril expatiated her sin with a beating'. (144) The mother was obviously conducting her life according to the patterns laid down for her by religion, after all God had given Brother Cyril 'a Christian wife, a virgin Rose, to ease his journey in this

world,' (131) her mother was an extension of her husband, a silent extension. (145). The mothers' lack of self –esteem and her continued adherence to her idea of Christian values, 'wives submit to your husbands', leads to the event that marks and ultimately destroys her daughter's faith in the religious system that had hitherto governed her life.

On Ama's eighth birthday, her father floats into her room in his white safari suit (132-133) and rapes her. He forces her into submission by demanding "What's the fifth commandment?" to which Ama then replies, "Honour thy father and thy mother", her voice muffled by the collar of her nightgown in her mouth. The abuse continues for three years until Ama reaches puberty at eleven and the father no longer has any use for her.

Years later, as Ama struggles to pass her university entrance exams, as a way to escape the oppression of the home, having failed in her attempt to attend a boarding school, the ugliness of corruption rears its head again. Here also, Unigwe highlights the failure of the Nigerian educational system to reward hard work and diligence, spaces for pupils who had bribed their way into the universities replacing spaces of those who had not paid the corrupt JAMB officials. (146) It is on the back of this frustration that Ama sees herself as stuck in the middle of a 'one-way tunnel' and she explodes. It is here that Ama distinguishes herself from her mother, a woman too timid to flout patriarchal authority.

"You call yourself my father? You call yourself a pastor? You disgust me! I na-aso m oyi.'

In so doing, Ama gains her long sought after freedom as she has directly gone against tradition and challenged her father who is akin to god, while the mother kneels on the floor, hands outstretched in front of her, palms upwards. It is then that Brother Cyril plants himself in front of Ama, his toes big and masculine, (148) and tells her he is not her father. In a patriarchal society such as this one, a woman who gives birth out of wedlock is seen as a social 'other' and akin to a prostitute. Brother Cyril, in rescuing the mother from this social exclusion, takes on the role of saviour and selfless benefactor, so that he can do no wrong in the mothers' eyes and rather is described by her as an exemplary man who out of the 'goodness of his heart' did not drive both mother and daughter out of his house. It is here that we see most clearly not

only the relations of power but also those of gender, that an African woman can never be fulfilled in herself, without being anybody's appendage.

'Just shut up, shut up, Ama before I am thrown out of my husband's house because of you. Mechie onu kita.' (150)

Ama is then sent to Lagos to live with an aunt, Mama Eko, where she listens to 'Devils music' and gains her first taste of freedom in a glass of dark ruby liquid, with a layer of white foam on the top. Ama lives with her aunt, who becomes 'almost like a real mother' to her, but the predictability of her new life, its circular motion… . nibbled at her soul that still yearned to see the world. (159) Ama approaches the decision to go into prostitution with less desperation yet more pragmatism than Efe or Sisi. She reasons that Brother Cyril had taken what he wanted no questions asked. Discarding her when she no longer sufficed. 'Strange men taking and paying for her services, not even in Lagos, but overseas which earned you respect just for being there', (166) was not so bad. After all, she would never be able to save enough money set up her own business by working in Mama Eko's buka.

When Efe tells Mama Eko that Dele wants to send her abroad to work as a nanny for a family there, Mama Eko is sceptical and voices her suspicions, "Me I have never been to obodo oyibo but I am sure that they have enough nannies for their children there without having to import one from Africa. Count your teeth with your tongue. I've spoken. I've said my own." (169) Mama Eko asks the logical questions that you would expect a guardian or a parent to ask. Why does he want to send you abroad? Does he not have relatives who need his help? What does Dele do? Who does he work for? You know how many ritual killings are carried out here every day? Mama Eko could not force Ama not to go, but she could advise her against it.

> People disappear every day and men without obvious means suddenly become rich. I'm not saying Dele is a ritualist oo. Look at my armpit; I have no hair there, nekwa abu m n'aji adiro ya. I'm not calling anyone a ritualist. I'm just saying look before you leap. I've spoken. Count your teeth with your tongue, welu ile gi guo eze gi onu, and tell me what you come up with. You are a grown woman. You make use of your senses. Me, I have spoken. (164)

Mama Eko realises that Ama is determined to go and sees that she cannot stop her, so she admonishes her to look after herself, which is in stark contrast to the portrayal of Chisom (Sisi) whose parents did not show much interest or resistance to her departure.

Before Ama leaves Lagos, she is also abused by Dele, continuing the cycle of user/ abuser that she has grown accustomed to when dealing with men:

> 'I shall sample you before you go!' he [Dele] laughed. The sound that stretched itself into a square that kept him safe. Lagos was full of such laughter. Laughter that ridiculed the receiver for no reason but kept the giver secure in a cocoon of steel. It was not the sort of laughter that one could learn. It was acquired. Wealth. Power. Fame. They gave birth to that kind of laughter.' (168)

This seems to be the bottom line to the story. In line with De Certeau's theory, it is evident that each of the girls is seemingly after a temporary economic strategy to help her achieve that 'kind of laughter'. Wealth, power and fame. Ama seems to accept this as a means to an end, and does not hesitate to admit that she made the choice to go to Belgium with 'eyes wide open' as she cannot see herself doing any other menial job such as cleaning, that many other migrant women might find themselves doing, (114) and at the same time cannot pass over the 'golden ticket' to Europe.

As a result of this, even though she was being used by men, she was in her own mind in the position of power. Because the men she slept with [to her] were [like Dele] just tools, needed to achieve her dream. [33] And her dream was 'expansive enough to accommodate them all'.

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[33] An excerpt from a Nigerian Newspaper describes the average Nigerian as 'a pseudo-aristocrat, flamboyant in material things' and so it is no wonder corruption is rife and the get rich at all cost mentality pervades the people. In a report from the Niger Delta Congress, by Chichi Aniagolu, it stated that most of the girls prostituting in Europe come from Edo State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, once 'the cradle and pride of West African civilisation, art and culture.' Unigwe, herself confirms this in Any Old Antwerp Night, which is a short depiction of the authors' experience researching the prostitutes in the Schipperskwartier. During an exchange with one of the girls, Unigwe asks,

Alek is the youngest of the girls. Her family are brutally murdered by the Janjaweed militia when they come in and ravage her village. She is gang raped by the soldiers and left for dead. Eventually, she ends up in a refugee camp, where she finds it difficult to adapt to the camp life, and resents the other women for 'the ease' with which they adapted to their new envireonment. Three months later and a week before she turns sixteen, Alek meets a Nigerian peacekeeping soldier who is deployed to Sudan as part of the African Union peacekeeping exercise. She falls in love with the soldier, Polycarp, and two months after this, he is re deployed to Lagos, taking Alek with him. Lagos is in excess of everything, too many people, too many houses, nothing was organised. Isale Eko had houses standing lopsided, next to each other like wobbly tables knocked together by an amateur carpenter. (214) Polycarp had told her then that some of the houses had no bathrooms. 'And this is Lagos in the twenty-first century!' Lagos in 2004! All our government is good for is stuffing their pockets. They don't care what happens to the people they're supposed to be ruling.'

Again, Unigwe alludes to the poor standard of living of the inhabitants of the city and the preoccupation of government officials with lining their coffers as opposed to providing basic social amenities/infrastructure for the people, thereby leaving inhabitants to seek out erstwhile 'opportunities'. The author paints picture of life within a city whose streets were 'rutted, gutted and near impassable, yet they were jam-packed with cars; huge air-conditioned jeeps driving tail to tail with disintegrating jalopies whose faulty exhaust pipes sent

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"Where are you from in Nigeria?"

"Bini now" She smiles at me [Unigwe], patronizingly, like I have asked her a dumb question.

Unigwe then goes on to tell how a white man will ask her if there is a reason why so many of the Nigerian girls are from Benin City and she will answer that she does not know. She also finds out that the Nigerian prostitutes are known for trying to exhort more money than is agreed to. "They nag and nag until you cave in." On a slow night, a girl can do two tricks. On a good night, seventeen.

out clouds of dark smoke, making the air so thick with pollution that a constant mist hung over the city and the bit of sky that one could see was sullied with dirt. (Unigwe: 2009:214-215)

Again, the disproportion between the rich and the poor is evident. Lifestyle aspirations and incomes are also grossly disproportionate, coupled by the lack of jobs, low wages (especially for women in the informal sector) and the sheer population growth in comparison to social infrastructure makes the whole economy a mess, thereby making the lure for the West even harder to resist.

Alek eventually settles into married life but is then ousted by a mother-in-law who refuses to allow her son to marry a foreigner. It is then that Polycarp arranges for Alek to be brought to Antwerp to 'work as a nanny'. Her name is then changed to Joyce on her new passport and this is the first and the only elusion Unigwe gives to Benin City as a place linked with the transnational prostitution stereotype:

Joyce Jacobs.

Nationality: Nigerian.

Place of Birth: Benin City (232)

Of all the girls, Joyce is the only one who gets to keep all that she earns because Polycarp faithfully pays a monthly instalment to Dele to clear her debt. This is unlike Sisi, Ama, and Efe who have to pay 500 Euros in a monthly bid to gain their freedom. This type of modern day slave trade is reminiscent of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the only difference really being mode of transport and the ability to buy back freedom. Auction houses, with girls parading naked in front of prospective buyers or 'madams' holding numbers as their names would be chosen by whoever bought them. Names that would be easy enough for white clients to pronounce. (278) Efe would buy numbers five and seven. (279)

Antwerp itself turns out to be a major disappointment to the girls. Sisi describes it as a place with houses that looked sad, giving the area a desolate, mournful look. The sort of place that made one think of death… The dirt was part of what made it familiar. It was a constant. As were the touts. (254) In fact, the poignant description of Antwerp could have been Lagos. 'There are so many run-down houses. And so many people. This is a city that is collapsing under the weight of its own congestion'. (282) Sisi is so disenchanted with the life in Antwerp, the derelict buildings, neglected houses with peeling paint and broken windows, looking like life had been hard on them that she decides to cut loose, and it is this yearning for freedom that ultimately leads to her death.

She falls in love with a young Belgian man, Luc and feels that 'the world is definitely as it should be'. She had the love of a good man. A house. And her own money-still new and fresh and the healthiest shade of green-the thought of it buoyed her and gave her a rush that made her hum' (1) This opening paragraph to the novel clearly summarizes the crux of the ambition of the protagonist which you may not come to understand until engaging deeply with the story. You come to realise that it was indeed the love of the money as opposed to the love of a man that buoyed her and gave her 'a rush'.

The eventual demise of Sisi (for refusing to pay her mandatory quota to Dele) was never thoroughly investigated by the Belgian police. The author draws similarities between the developing world and the developed Western world, in the depiction of the similarities between Antwerp and Lagos, and more sinister still in the corruption of the police and state officials. There is obviously some collusion between government officials and the traffickers (120) when the 'madam' sends Sisi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to declare her an asylum seeker. The request is denied and the document stamped but Sisi is never deported. The madam only slips the paper into her handbag and says, 'All you need to know is that you are persona non grata in this country. You do not exist. Not here.' (182) Leaving Sisi to wonder why the Madam always went through the process of sending new girls to the 'Castle.'

Here the narrative highlights the corruption which is found in all governments, Western or African. So although corruption is widespread in Nigeria, so as to be endemic or systematic, the narrative suggests the weightier issue of corruption amongst the police force in Belgium as well:

> ‘It’s not just the girls. The police too. If you’re too soft they’ll demand more than you’re willing to give. Oyibo policemen are greedy. They have big eye, not like the Nigerian ones who are happy with a hundred naira bill. They ask for free girls. A thousand euros. Ah!’ (40)

Through the narrative all the girls reveal their respective motivations behind their tactics: the want of a better quality of life either for family or solely for themselves. Efe would be “Dele and Son’s Limited’s export, and L.I (her own son) would get a better life (82). Sisi dreamed of starting her own car export business (238). Even though they are not privy to each other’s dreams they are all ‘bound by the same ambition and drive’ (177). Through prostitution, they engage in modes of revolt against their various situations, but still have lower level of agency than the men and (clients) in their lives. Black female bodies in the post colony have been disempowered to the point that those with less socio-economic capital are unable to gain much agency. Young women in these groups are amongst the most vulnerable, and while sex, marriage or men may be used to gain agency, these also prove futile against the backdrop of the larger gendered inequities in patriarchal post- colonial society against the female body.

3.3 Bodies That Harm.

Sisi’s death begets a network of sisterhood which enables the other women through a temporal strategy of sharing stories, to form a cocoon of support around each other. Each of the women’s histories and present is fraught with some form of harm enacted upon their bodies by a male figure. ‘Madam’ also occupies a masculine space in the novel as she self identifies as superior to, and detached from the women (40). She occupies a position of agency and aligns herself to the men, exercising her position of power and control over the women at will. She informs them, “… until you have paid back every single cent of what you owe us, you will not have your passport back. We expect five hundred euros from you every month” (183). Madam, is able at any moment of her displeasure with the girls, to order their harm through her henchman. She is also able to alter the comfort of their working environment, banishing them from their booths and relegating them to bars where they must ‘service’ clients

on a 'tight budget' in dinghy hotel rooms or bar room toilets (8). Madam is unequivocally in control of their fate in Europe and her comment at the news of Sisi's death, "Another one bites the dust" suggests that Madam has participated in the harm of other girls prior to Sisi. Though Sisi's history does not include masculine physical violence, it is ironic that her end is met by a man's hammer which is in a sense, Madam's hammer, operating in the 'beautiful, soft, feminine' hands of Segun.

In discussions of power and subjection, Foucault defines the subject in terms of itsrelation to the dominant power and also in relation to self-knowledge in terms of oneself. Foucault (1983:212) posits that, "The subject means subject to someone else by control or dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self- knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to." This kind of subjection shows how "in our culture human beings are made into subjects" (Foucault 1983:208). I have already emphasized the position of the protagonists in On Black Sisters' Street is a consequence of state failure and also globalization. For it is through increased global connectivity and movement in the context of a 'globalized world economy' that a transnational trade in bodies is made possible. As such, the novel's protagonists are subjectified by patriarchs, pimps or Madams. Nevertheless, they are also exercising a form of agency. Because the girls have not been kidnapped, or forced into prostitution they are also complicit in their expbitation. By subjecting themselves to Senghor Dele and also to the Madame, the girls are enacting a form of agency described by Judith Butler as 'the willed effect of the subject' Butler 1997:14). In other words, this is a subordination that the 'subject brings on itself', which is a precondition for agency. They have willingly subjected themselves to Dele and Madame's power, because through this process they come to gain their own agency.

Returning to Elina Penttinen and her study on the ethnic eroticized body in Globalization, Prostitution and Sex Trafficking, (a study of Eastern girls as sex workers in Europe) Penttinen argues that the body in demand in the current globalized world is the body of an eroticized exotic woman, who adapts to the rugged landscape and fitness tests posed by the globalization process, by travelling or being trafficked to the West for purposes of sex work. Such a woman adapts to globalization by subjecting to sex work and by

appropriating and enacting the position of the exotic erotic girl. This position of the Eastern European girl has emerged as a site that can be appropriated by someone who is both from Eastern Europe and a woman as a product of Western imagination. It is a position that enables also the appropriation of the truly masculine and Western subjectivity. She is an abject body that listens, which mirrors back the masculine subject so that he can gaze at himself in her. These findings are also applicable to Unigwe's novel which depicts the ethnic eroticized body.

The ethnic eroticized body is pure physicality, often in a semi-nude state to attract the western male. Her status is that of an aesthetic, sexual object, a 'dream maker' (202) in lacy bras and racy thongs. It is a demanding job and 'from their glass windows they watch the lives outside, especially the men's' (178) because the men are their source of income. It is firmly a masculine space in which all the girls are interchangeable. It is the very fact of their ethnicity and othered position that gives the girls some form of visibility. The girls' bodies are a 'swirling mass of chocolate flesh; a coffee coloured dream luring the men in with a promise of heaven' (237). Sisi is baptized into her new profession with a rape in a toilet cubicle in a bar. The man examines her closely running his hand over her neck and breasts all the while muttering 'beautiful' in the manner of which one would examine an object for purchase. His lust for her allows her temporal power over him for her to be able to negotiate financial gain. He signals for Sisi to follow him into the bathroom, at which point she decides that she 'does not want to do this anymore' (212). However, she has come to the end of her power and is returned to the domain of subjectivity. Because she has already been objectified/commoditised by the client, she has no voice. Even though she clearly tells him to "stop" her voice is "swallowed by his moans". The man exercises his temporary power over her and rapes her:

> Eyes open, she saw his face, his mouth open and his jaws distended by an inner hunger. Stop! His moans swallowed her voice. His penis searched for a gap between her legs. Finding warmth, he sighed, spluttered sperm that trickled down her legs like mucus […]
>
> (213)

He 'pushes her' against the wall, his hands 'paw' at her, and he 'licks' her skin so that she is left 'feeling intense pain wherever he touched, like he was searing her with a razor blade that had just come off a fire' (213). From this Sisi begins to find her own body as absurd and separated from herself, 'This is not me. I am not here. I am at home, sleeping in my bed. This is somebody else. Another body. Not mine (212). [originalItalics]Throughout her time in Belgium, Sisi continuously separates her 'self' from her body. She spends her spare time wandering the shopping areas of Antwerp pretending to be varying people/personalities on each occasion; 'somebody else, with a different life' (255). The post-colonial text with its affinity for mythology, abiku[34] and 'juju' surrounding good fortune and bad fortune (253) allows Sisi to continue to use her spirit, even after her body has been brutally murdered - her skull hammered. She does not die – her body is hammered, but her voice stays alive:

> In the instant between almost dying and stone-cold dead, the instant when the soul is still able to fly, Sisi escaped her body and flew to Lagos. (293)

Sisi is able to visit her parents as a spirit, tapping her mother on the shoulder and causing the glass to slip out of her mother's hands and shatter. 'The cold breeze' that entered the house is the moment her daughter must have died. In the same way Sisi is also able to travel Senghor Dele's house and place a curse on his daughters. The same as every 'curse' she has suffered in her own life:

> May your lives be bad. May you never enjoy love. May your father suffer as much as mine will when he hears I am gone. May you ruin him. (296)

The novel ends in the same mythological context with Sisi's soul making its journey onwards to another world.

Ama's sexual and physical abuse by her father also has lasting psychological effects on her. In a sense her body had saved her from the nightly molestation from her father, because as soon as she started her period, aged eleven he no longer came into her room (145). She is left with extreme anxiety and insomnia. She tells the walls 'of the pain of the squeezing' and the

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[34] Abiku The word 'Abiku' is Yoruba for 'spirit child' and refers to a child who must die and repeatedly be born again. The idea of spirit children are frequently found in post-colonial Literatures and poetry written by various authors.

'hurting inside' caused by Brother Cyril. Ama has distrust for men and the church which is largely organised around rules that can be manipulated in favour of misogynistic men. It is only the women and children whose sins can be 'expatiated with a beating' (144), and during her rape she is commanded to 'Honour thy father and thy mother' (132). These experiences of bodily harm form Ama's general outlook which is that she would rather trade sex, previously freely taken from her, for money than take up any alternative form of domestic labour.

Joyce also suffers gang rape and violence at the hands of the male soldiers in Sudan. They slap her about and proceed to rape her one after the other, so that she feels a 'grief so incomprehensible that she could not articulate it' (191). Psychologically she is silenced, while somatically she continues to experience 'layer upon layer of searing pain' as the men go in and out of her. Joyce is an interesting and complex character, because although she is harmed in a traumatic experience suffered at the hands of Janjaweed soldiers, ironically she is also healed by the hands of a (Nigerian) soldier and then is subsequently emotionally harmed (by him) again. The narrator tells us that Polycarp touches Joyce 'delicately as if she were fine porcelain that might shatter' (199) and how he 'touches her neck so gently that she almost missed it' (198). Touch is an important part of the narrative for Alek in particular. The night before Alek's family are slaughtered by the soldiers, her mother has a discussion with her regarding kinds of touching:

> 'Touching … in a different way. Do not let them [boys] touch you. […] Girls who let boys see them naked are not good girls. Nobody will give any cow to marry them. Save yourself for the man who will marry you. Marriage first. And then the touching. […], be a good girl, my daughter. Promise me." (186).

Although her mother is long dead, Alek still speaks to her and is able to conjure up her mother's face in her mind's eye. She confesses to her mother that she has slept with a man outside of marriage 'because the rules have all changed now' (199). In this way, sex has become a method of harm and also of healing much in the manner in which extra marital sex is portrayed and used as a metaphor in Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun.

Like Joyce, Sisi also finds emotional love and sexual healing through Luc in Antwerp, who she describes as one of the few people who makes life in Antwerp bearable for her (261).

Although the narrative is an interrogation of gendered power relations, and male versus female subjugation, it does not hold all men as the source to underlying problems for (African) women simply because they are (Western) men. Also, the use of prostitution as a method of resistance is problematic from a feminist point of view. The desire and freedom to use one's body as one chooses is feminist in itself, but does not take away from the limitations, constraints and lack of freedom of such choices. The complicated interplay between the female protagonist who decides to take autonomy over her own body as a form of resistance fails. At times resistances may fail and result in undesirable outcomes, such as murder as in the case of Sisi. The novel then leaves us with the unsettling question: resistance to what end? The protagonist's resistant action does not enable her to grow or change, but counter effectively her resistance destroys her. The non- action of the other protagonists allows them to 'serve out their sentence' with limited risks, and eventually make something of themselves in future. Perhaps this is due to the histories which the women have now shared, forming a new bond of solidarity as a means of empowerment.

3.4 Bodies that Heal: Women's Friendships and Time.

Many feminists have written about the healing bonds that come about from forging friendships with other women. "Sisters of the Heart: Women Psychotherapist Reflections on Female Friendships" (2013) is a collection of essays written about female friendships as a source of healing, solidarity and development. Laura S Brown discusses the notion that "women's solidarity with one another as a threat to larger cultural structures is both new awareness for many women, and an empowering frame into which they can put their past struggles." She notes that suspicion towards other women is especially common in the lives of women who have been victimized by men, although once these women discover the power of female friendships (for her through feminist therapy) solidarity is formed that is unequivocal. In forming such bonds especially where the women concerned have connected through shared memories and 'face to face mutual confession', this is how women learn to

trust each other. Absent from such a friendship is shame /humiliation. For Ama, Efe, and Joyce, each of the three are aware of the others' most difficult encounters. Potentially shame inducing experiences and to each of these disclosures the women have not responded in judgement but in love:

> […] sitting here huddled together on the couch as if they were seeking the heat of each other's bodies, listening to Efe's story usurp the silence. Their arms touch and the fight earlier is all but forgotten.

Although the text is a tale of four young women trying to make sense of themselves and not necessarily their connections with each other, Sisi's death opens up the possibility of a powerful and transformational friendship that endures for the rest of their lives. They are in unknown territory because they 'have never before stirred each other enough to find out anything deep about their lives' (239). Sisi in some ways is the scapegoat whose isolated act of rebellion shatters the careful separation that exists between the women. Separation in itself is often used as a strategy based on the assumption that it is easier to break a body acting individually than it is to break bodies acting collectively. Sisi's death as with other themes in the novel is therefore simultaneously good and bad. Her death can be interpreted as good because it begets a network of sisterhood which enables the other women for one day, to escape their life of prostitution, reliving memory and using narration as a coping mechanism and avenue for bonding. When Joyce narrates her story, Ama puts a hand out and touches her on the cheek. "It is a warm touch" (239) which is a new experience for the women. Previously they have only touched each other in anger or violence, when they are threatening to fight each other in petty quarrels. The scratch marks from Ama's last fight with Sisi are still visible on Ama's forearms:

> You are sisters. You are all the family you have here and yet you cannot live in peace. (110)

This statement coming from Madam is ironic. If women's relationships are fraught with anxieties regarding power, the binary of empowered versus disempowered is illustrated clearly within the text in Madame's own relationship with the girls. Susan Morris notes in her study on "Women's Friendship and Power (160:2013)," that feminist theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza ascribes "the connection between women's friendship and power as

informed largely by a markedly ambivalent investment in kyriocentric systems of power." Kyriocentrism focuses on interrelated power structures: "cultural-religious-ideological systems and intersecting discourses of race, gender, heterosexuality, class and ethnicity… produce legitimate inculcate, and sustain kyriarchy. So "kyriarchy" is Schussler Fiorenza's explanation for a "socio-cultural and religious system of domination […] constituted "by intersecting multiplicative structures of oppression." Susanna Morris chooses not to emphasize what Schussler refers to as the "b i n a r y male- over- female" domination which is implied in the term patriarchy. Instead she uses the notion of "kyriarchy" to "emphasize the complicated confluence of interlocking oppressions" at work in women's relationships. In other words, as a way to illustrate how women participate in female over female domination through "insubordination, support, and other interactions within society." Morris notes that this in turn "allows for a more nuanced interpretation" of how women interrelate in a sexist society.

Unigwe's text portrays the relationship between Madam and the girls as estranging to one another but at the same time embracing of one another. There is an interdependence there, as both Madam and the girls rely on each other to survive. Madame is both reviled yet admired by the girls. Sis dreams of one day being like Madame, speaking like Madam whose accent was 'sophisticated' without 'a trace of roughness' (117). Efe who goes on to become a Madam herself, comes to understand why Madam behaves towards them as she does, because in order to avoid being thwarted by the police or your girls you must retain control of power at all times. Joyce is angered that Madam does not come in to mourn Sis's death with them and carries on with her business as usual. Although, Madam shows the girls occasional isolated acts of kindness such as commissioning Segun to make a birthday present for Joyce, or nurturing them to health with chicken soup when they are ill, these acts are not enough to form bonds. Ultimately, friendships based on kyriocentric concepts of power are unsustainable and necessarily fail.

With Madam representing far reaching abusive power and the girls as largely disempowered, this relationship becomes a symbol to which Efe in particular returns to imitate. In order to make sense of her relationships with her own girls in future, she unfortunately returns to Madam's template of power relationships, thereby continuing the vicious circle of abuse. Unigwe thus

presents women's early experiences within kyriocentric relationships as similar to what Susana Morris finds in her study as "pivotal in shaping how women form relationships with one another" (2013:161).

Uniting against kyriocentric's female figure head is a way for the girls to strengthen each other and develop their friendship:

> We work hard to make somebody else rich. Madam treats us like animals. […] We can be free. Madam has no right to our bodies, and neither does Dele. I don't want to think that one day I will be dead here and all Madam will do is complain about how bad my death is for business, […] I don't know what will happen to us, buy I want to make sure Madam and Dele get punished.
>
> (290)

The impassioned speech by Joyce allows the girls to consider for the first time the implications of their work, right to their bodies and freedom. On this day, 'time stands still' and Ama declares, "Now we are sisters." Though the women are marginalized in the larger community both as prostitutes and then as foreigners, their friendship enables them to overcome life in Antwerp and 'gives them relief':

> She stands up and spreads her arms. Joyce gets up and is enclosed in Ama's embrace. Efe stands up too and puts one around each woman. Their tears mingle. (290)

The women band together, console each other in the wake of Sisi's death and in that moment they know 'that they will be friends forever' (290). Through her illustration of Efe, Ama, and Joyce's friendship, Unigwe insists upon the primacy of women's connections to each other.

3.5 Gender and Friendships

Friendship often differs in its meaning for men and for women. According to research conducted by Diane Felmlee, Elizabeth Sweet and

Colleen Sinclair (2012), women tend to place a higher value on their relationships and interconnectedness to others than men do. [35]While women's friendships are characterised by more intimacy, self-disclosure, and emotional support, men's relationships are more "practical." [36]Contemporary gender stereotypes frame women as more communal in their relationships which for a reading of On Black Sisters' Street is useful, as it is this 'community' of women's friendship which saves them. Feminist scholars emphasize how women's friendships with each other are able to provide a location for social change. "It is empowering to receive emotional support from the friendship of other women which in turn helps women to cope with various forms of oppression such as sexism and racism". [37] Lillian Comas-Diaz and Marcella Baker Weinur (2013) consider story telling as a path to women's healing and empowerment (Anderson & Jack, 1991). "Story telling can be life saving and a reason for living (Kay 1998). Indeed, as a therapeutic technique, storytelling facilitates women's integration of fragmented experiences (Aron, 1992; Cienfuegos & Monelli 1983)." Moreover, in Unigwe's text, storytelling opens up a testimonial space which enabled the women to remember and reconnect with their ambitions. Each of their gender related experiences are situated in a hierarchal stratification which intersects at the point of race, gender, socio-economic status, age, and ethnicity. These links all further serve to enhance the similarities that the women share and have previously ignored. Prior to sharing their stories, 'the silence is the community they share' (39). Efe experiences 'an urgency' to tell her story because Sisi's death has 'reinforced an affinity' that they share with each other but have never experienced in this way before.

Oral traditions and stories retained in memory especially by women, have always been a way of passing down the material realities of life for many third world women. "In oral testimonies the body speaks, and women find

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[35] Lugar 2005 Russian and American sample

[36] See Reiss 1998
See also Baumgarte and Nelson 2009
Fehr 2004

[37] Pratyasha Tummala-Narra in her study Growing at the Hyphen: Female Friendships and Social context focuses on immigrant women and friendship. Immigrant women who are more likely to experience discrimination are prone to emotional distress and the internalization of negative self-images about the self and the physical body.

voice in narrating their lives (2006, Ketu H. Katrak)." Katrak notes that women's oral testimonies in stories is the first step in order "to put the story out there, to externalize the pain of body exile and marginality." Speaking orally is another act of resistance which the women utilize, consciously i n order to survive their time in Antwerp because as Efe notes, "… families that know so little of each other are bound to be dysfunctional. (41)" In terms of location, the women who are already displaced from home— the only family they have in Europe is each other. The community in which they find themselves, in the room on Zwartezusterstraat is un -nurturing but it also 'home' and provides the location in which they are able to re-belong.

3.6 Conclusion

Although feminists are deeply divided on the issue of prostitution, literary work on "sex work" is necessary and important. Female prostitutes are socially constructed as an 'othered' class of persons and as such are vulnerable to varying degrees of abuse and violence. As Julia O'Connell notes in her essay, "The Rights and Wrongs of Prostitution"

> […] the vast majority of those who enter prostitution without being coerced into it by a third party do so for economic reasons, and that prostitution therefore represents a form of work. At the same time, […] none of the data from my research have made me want to celebrate the existence of a market for commoditized sex; rather the reverse.
> (O'Connell Davidson 2001)

The notion that prostitution— the selling of one's body for sexual labour, can represent a form of resistance to gender inequality and injustice may seem problematic to some analysts. This work does not aim to argue the rights or the wrongs of that, but simply to interrogate the possibility of corporeal strategies. As can be illustrated in Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street, women in the third world are beginning to explore the possibility of separating sex from emotion in order to bridge an economic gap between themselves and the West. This enables them to use prostitution as a tactic to overcome socio-economic

inequality beyond African borders in a separate geographic location. The novel does not attempt to condemn or to glorify the case for prostitution of third world women in the West, but rather seeks to expose a problem that already exists in the shadows. On the other hand, On Black Sisters' Street works to remove biases and prejudices of prostitution by speaking for the experience of women in their own right.

What I have tried to do in this chapter is to show the differences in the ways in which African male writers and African women writers negotiate female sexuality, and whilst not attempting to valorise prostitution, attempt to consider the politics of it in an alternative and nuanced manner.

Chapter 4: Nigerian Female Bildungsroman: Feminist Narratives of Self-Discovery in Seffi Atta's "Everything Good Will Come"

This chapter examines Seffi Atta's Everything Good Will Come as a female Bildungsroman within the wider context of the Nigerian novel. In order to trace the strategies that Seffi Atta as a female African writer employs to engage with the politics of post-colonial Nigeria and also to account for the feminine Nigerian experience from girlhood into womanhood, this chapter focuses on the political story of the individual in relation to the larger social space. The reason for this lies in the fact that the reality of Enitan, Atta's child protagonist, is always mapped in relation to the nation.

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigerian fiction has tended to engage with explicitly political issues and predicaments of the post-colony. Many of these authors showcase the perspective of a child protagonist as the chosen method to depict resistance against the aftermath of colonial rule and post-colonial violence. Many of the classic first generation texts such as Ngugi wa Thiongo's Weep Not, Child (1964), Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and

Ben OKri's trilogy The Famished Road, Songs of Enchantment, and Infinite Riches are all examples of the significance of the child in African literature in their usage of the perspective of a child protagonist. Anti-colonial texts such as Camara Laye's L'Enfant noir (1953) and Ferdinand Oyono's Une vie de boy (1960) also place the child in a critical position – as a central figure in their texts of resistance against colonial violence. The figure of the child as protagonist also features prominently in many of the more recent third generation fiction novels. For example, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus fifteen-year-old Kambili is the central character who navigates her way through multiple paradigms of religion, class, education, and politics to discover her 'self' and 'voice' within the sphere of family and also in Nigerian society. Similarly, Adichie's Ugwu in Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), Helen Oyeyemi's Jessamy in The Icarus Girl, Chris Abani's Graceland and Becoming Abigail, Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of No Nation, Dulue Mbachu's War Games and Unoma Azuah's Sky High Flames are all novels in which the protagonists are young adults who are 'coming of age'. There is also a long standing tradition of the female bildungsroman in African literatures. Prominent amongst them are, Buchi Emecheta's Bride Price (1976), The Rape of Shavi, and So Long a Letter by Mariam Ba. Two authors whose works allow their female adolescent protagonist to make tough decisions as they search for their identities are Tsitsi Dangaremba's Nervous Conditions (1988) and Zaynab Alkali's The Stillborn (1985). Since each of these novels[38] examine varied and complex themes such as war, trafficking, immigration, human rights abuse and sadistic violence, and what Joy Bostic[39] refers to as "multi-dimensional oppression", they provide a lense for the reader to come to a clearer understanding of Nigerian issues through the eyes of a child growing up within that specific space.

In this chapter, my intention is to examine the Nigerian female bildungsroman in relation to the female protagonist's coming of age story at

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[38] The following novels: So Long a Letter by Mariam Ba, The Bride Price by Buchi Emecheta, The Rape of Shavi by Emecheta, and Yoruba Girl Dancing by R. Bedford. Also, Angelita Reyes Mothering Across Cultures, where she uses an interview with Ba to demonstrate the author's position on the role females play in African communities. She notes that "Ba focuses on the spiritual being of mother-women who despite having undergone emotional crisis and humiliation, are able to reaffirm faith in themselves and their females through the daughters – the next generation. (162)

[39] Bostic implies that besides gender issues, black women must deal with reace, class, colonialism, and other forms of oppression.

several levels: sexuality, education, political awareness, and finally agency and voice in a public space.

Everything Good Will Come is a novel which is set in a tempestuous period in Nigeria's history. The novel spans over twenty-four years between 1971- 1995 at a time when politically, the Nigerian nation was crippled under a series of successive and bloody military coups. Both military juntas of 1966-1979 and 1983-1998 were a pair of brutal regimes led by the Nigerian military. The first bloody coup of 1966 led to the Nigerian civil war, Biafra, which lasted between 1967-1970 and upon which my previous chapter that explores women's experience of war in Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun is based. Although Everything Good Will Come is set in post-colonial Nigeria, and is also post-Biafra, the legacies of these two national events, (the military coups and the civil war) weigh heavily on the narrative. More so the fact that the second wave of military regime occurred in 1983, when democratically elected president Shehu Shagari was ousted from power in a bloodless coup by another military dictator, General Buhari. The Nigerian military continued their wave of oppression through successive regime changes by military coups until 1999. It is within the framework of post-Biafra political instability, national oppression, government corruption, and temporary democratic rule shattered once again by military brutality within which Seffi Atta's Enitan experiences her childhood. Struggles which seem overwhelming even to the adults in Nigeria at the time are presented to the teenage girl to navigate as she makes her choices within a patriarchal, male-oriented society. As African women struggle against roles provided for them in a patriarchal society, young girls must make a decision early on; either to accept the limited options available to them or to find alternative ways of creating identities of self with which they do not feel at odds with.

Everything Good Will Come (2005) is the debut novel of Nigerian writer Sefi Atta. Atta was born in Lagos, educated in England currently lives in the United States of America with her family. Born in Nigeria, While still retaining strong roots to her native Nigeria, Atta's early life as a young Nigerian girl in a boarding school in England away from home is not entirely dissimilar to that of her protagonist, Enitan in that respect. While Atta denies that her characters are direct portraits of her own experience, she makes it clear that details of her own life experience have contributed to the themes in Everything Good Will

Come, as she explains to the interviewer Elena Rodriguez Murphy (2011) when questioned on how physical distance from her homeland affects her perspective, "'I think everyone lives between different cultures […] distance can be a physical distance, but it can also be a distance in time, distance in maturity, and an emotional distance. […] But as I said, this is the only experience I have had. So if I had something else to compare this with, I might be able to tell you how this affects my writing.'" The themes of perspective affected by some form of growth, are as this comment suggests, prominent in the novel, and so although there may not be a simple transcription of a real life person, autobiography is relevant.

Where Atta does not readily accept that her writing aims to change perceptions and misconceptions of Africans by the Western world, she readily accepts that her primary audience is Nigerian, while taking into account a "world audience" as well. Her second novel, Swallow was published in 2008 and her collection of short stories Lawless (2007) has also been published in the UK and Nigeria under the title News from Home. In 2006, Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come (2005) was awarded the inaugural Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature and the author is also the winner of PEN International's 2004/2005 David TK Wong Prize.

Like Adichie and Unigwe, Sefi Atta's writing explores fictional accounts of women's identities and the tensions that occur between traditionalist and modernist views of what women's lives ought to be in post-colonial Nigeria. In Everything Good Will Come, Atta attempts to subvert the stifling cultural practices and socio-economic imbalances which affect Nigerian women opens up a broader critique through continuously questioning the patriarchal structures in place.

In this chapter, I trace the directions in which Sefi Atta represents girlhood in her fiction as a 'linear unfolding of time and a movement through initiation rites that are associated with Bildung traditions '. Atta's[40] bildungsroman is presented in the novel on two levels: On one level, Enitan, the female protagonist grows up as a child in post-independent, post Biafra

[40] Phrase taken from The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development on "Bildung" traditions.

Nigeria in the midst of instability and political events. At this level, as the protagonist negotiates adolescence, self- identity is closely related to the physical body, as girls' bodies undergo physical changes and become more visibly 'sexed'. On the second level, the protagonist's journey is one of internal self- discovery and a growing realization of her political environment, self agency and discovery of her feminist voice which eventually leads her towards political activism.

The novel can also be read as a double bildungsroman as the protagonist's best friend also grows within a parallel space.

4.1 Importance of Bildungsroman for Third Generation Writers

In Atta's Everything Good Will Come, the function of the Bildungsroman is connected to nation building and is used as a strategy to critique the corruption in post-independence Nigeria which has not lived up to the national aspirations of the middle and working classes. Writing on the German Bildungsroman, Julia Kushigan states that "the goal of the German Bildungsroman was to inspire the middle class to a life of public service, with obvious benefits for the state." Traditionally the Bildungsroman is connected not only to nation building but also to the socialization of 'good' citizens. Identity formation and its manifestations with regards to nation building is one of the main focal points in Sefi Atta's narrative. What differs here from the conventional (western) template of Bildungsroman is the specificity of the protagonist as a female post-colonial child and the effects that gender, culture and post colonialism have on both the individual and national identity. Many studies of traditional Bildungsroman are associated with the growth process of a (western) male character "who achieves a harmonious relationship with his social surroundings after a more or less conflictive process of acculturation" which leads to his maturation. Nadal M. Al-Mousa defines the Bildungsroman as "a type of novel in which action hinges on the fortunes of an ambitious young hero as he struggles to live up to his poetic goals against the negative

forces of prosaic reality."[41] He goes on to describe the typical male character of Bildungsroman and the circumstances that usually surround his development into maturity as one "endowed with an adventurous spirit" and usually from a humble back ground in the provinces who ventures out into the world seeking his fortunes and eventually "realising his ambitions". Other critics[42] such as Mikhail Bakhtin also take the view of the Bildungsroman as linked to masculinity where he describes the Bildungsroman as presenting to the reader, "the image of a man in the process of becoming [he] emerges along with the world and reflects the historical emergences of the world itself."[43]

In view of the focus of this chapter, it is important to note that all of the above definitions of the Bildungsroman genre refer to the protagonist as 'he'. According to Idette Noome, "literary histories and classifications of this genre of novel in critical discussions suggest that the genre does indeed appear to be dominated by male protagonists[44]." Since this is historically the case, and female protagonists do exist within similar plot structures in post- colonial

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[41] Nadal M. Al-Mousa, "The Arabic Bildungsroman: A Generic Appraisal," International Journal of Middle East Studies 25.2 (1993) 223-240, p.223.

[42] The essential characteristic of the classic Bildungsroman is bound up in a young male protagonist who according to Breon Mitchell is a young man who "must encounter life, and be formed by that encounter." According to Mitchell, the prototype for this genre is Goethe's Wilhelm Meister as it portrays a young man as a protagonist who progresses toward fitting in to bourgeois German society and is eventually reconciled with that society. Abrams (1981:121) translates the German term "Bildungsroman" as a "novel of formation" or a "novel of education". He states that in novels such as this, "the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences - and usually through a spiritual crisis – into maturity and the recognition of his identity and role in the world" (Abrams, 1981:121) .[42]

[43] Bakhtin, p.23

[44] Noome, I. "Shaping the Self: A Bildungsroman for Girls?" Literator25 (3) p.128

Nigerian texts, it becomes clear that not only are these narratives important but that they also form a model of resistance in women's writing. The Nigerian variant of the Bildungsroman reflects the lived realities of the adolescent girl and by deliberately tracing development and negotiation of feminine subjectivity subverts the cultural narrative that implies that girls are passive victims of patriarchal societies.

Most novels deal with individual characters that may have some form of inner or societal conflict as they engage with their surroundings, which possibly ends in some form of growth through education or lesson from the situation. However, novels of development tend to focus "primarily on the change" that the protagonist undergoes from childhood to adult hood. It is a gradual process through which the protagonist develops his personality through the 'key stages of life' from adolescence to maturity.

As such, scholarship on third generation Nigerian writing has identified the experience of the child and growing up as a 'recurring theme' and a major trait of Nigerian novelists[45]. The figure of the child as protagonist features prominently in many third generation fiction novels as I have earlier mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Indeed, Chikwenye Ogunyemi in her analysis on traits of a Bildungsroman has suggested that the genre "educates while narrating the story of another's education. Therefore, both the hero and the reader benefit from this education."[46] These third generation Nigerian writers who are mostly educated in or residing in the West have caught the interest of a much wider audience of English speaking and Western readers, than their predecessors have done and have adapted a different strategy to engage and 'educate' them about Nigerian post-colonial contemporary concerns through the use of the figure of the child protagonist. Since the Bildungsroman has been extensively studied in the West, but scholarly work on it with regards to African literatures are very few, this chapter aims to add to the body of research tracing the novel of development specific to the African context. This is mainly to highlight the fact that although growth and development are universal experiences, the human experience of them differs according to context, gender and geographical spaces.

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[45] See Hron, M.

[46] O. Chikwenye Ogunyemi, "Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man as a Novel of Growth," Nigerian Journal of the Humanities 4 (1980) 5-15,

In the next part of this chapter, I will analyze the Nigerian female bildungsroman on two levels. The first level will be a critical analysis of Enitan, growing up as a girl in Nigeria post 1970 which is after the Nigerian civil war, amidst political events that are always intrinsically enmeshed in the collective psyche of the cultural and social community. The child's own quest for sociocultural identity is often manifest in the context of violence, silence or repression, thereby linking identity formation to national issues such as [come back to this]. The second level of analysis will explore the growing realization of feminist voice in opposition to the silence of male oppressors, pre and post motherhood for Enitan.

4.2 Politicizing the Narrative of the Girl. 1971.

Set in Nigeria, Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come focuses on relationships and self-discovery that lead to the formation of strong feminine voices against the backdrop of the larger social, economic and cultural factors which collude to stifle women's agency. Atta's novel begins with a declaration by her protagonist which alludes to the young girl's attempt to make sense of her role in life as a female growing up in post-colonial Nigeria:

> From the beginning I believed whatever I was told, downright lies even, about how best to behave, although I had my own inclinations. At an age when other Nigerian were masters at ten-ten, the game in which we stamped our feet in rhythm and tried to outwit partners with sudden knee jerk, my favourite moments were spent sitting on a jetty pretending to fish. My worst was to hear my mother's shout from her kitchen window: "Enitan, come and help in here" (11).

This scene sets up the collision between traditional or expected behaviour and Enitan's individual desires. It is the mother-daughter conflict that drives the narrative of Enitan's girlhood. The eleven-year-old Enitan must learn to navigate within a multiplicity of shifting paradigms— religious, social, cultural and educational, in order to understand her place as a young woman in Nigerian society who questions nothing. As domestic crises and designated tensions begin to mount in the private sphere, these are also echoed in the political sphere as instability and backlash against a brutal military regime

quietly mount. The novel unveils the different stages in Nigeria's socio-political life and amidst the varying tensions, also presents the reader with the notion that these tensions motivate, or at least characterize the experience of Nigerians 'at home'.

Sectioned into four parts, the novel follows a linear chroniclisation of the protagonist's life from childhood to adulthood. Each section begins with a particular phase in eleven-year-old Enitan's journey to self-discovery by situating the character's experiences within the time frames of 1971, 1975, 1985 and 1995. The first two sections of the novel explore Enitan's adolescence years and will inform the first part of my analysis. The novel charts the physical and psychological development of the protagonist Enitan alongside her best friend Sheri who at age eleven appears more sophisticated and worldly-wise than the seemingly shy and reticent Enitan. 'Everything changed' for Enitan, when as an only child who is not allowed to have friends (40), she stumbles across Sheri, the oldest of the seven Bakare children from next door (16). Readers are introduced to the beginnings of the relationship between the two girls early on through a political lense. The first conversation that occurs between the two girls is steeped in the political atmosphere of post-Biafra Nigeria when Sheri asks Enitan whether she had watched the execution of the armed robbers on the television the previous night:

> Sheri smiled. "Ah, it was good. They shot them on the beach. Tied them, covered their eyes. One, two, three. Dead. Pafuka" and drops her head to one side (18).

Rather than experience trauma at the sight of such extreme violence, Sheri reminisces on the events as though they are a pleasant thought to be ruminated on and cherished. Similarly, she speaks about her mother's death with a blasé finality that leads Enitan to question Sheri's emotional wellbeing, "Didn't she care?" she wonders as she compares this to her own experience of her brother's death which she cannot bring herself to articulate. Enitan is a child who has been nurtured by her father's values and she must always reconcile her view of the world to that of her father's values. Her father is against capital punishment and so subconsciously, even though Enitan is not explicitly aware of this, so is she. Even though she has 'not been allowed' to watch, her political views have already begun to form. As opposed to becoming

what Enitan's father refers to as a 'kitchen martyr in the making,' (42) like her mother is (24), Enitan is encouraged early on by her father and his friends to listen in on their heated political discussions.

For Enitan who did not experience Biafra, directly, the civil war only exists by way of overheard conversations and also through stories told to her by way of past rumours. By age seven, she has amassed as much knowledge about the events in her country – federalists, secessionists, the bloody British, and military coups- as any child could hope to grasp. As a child she watches her father's deep friendship with her favourite uncle later killed in the war, (Uncle Alex) disintegrate over the Nigeria/Biafra divide. She mimics her father and his two friends Uncle Alex and Uncle Fatai, who 'bent their heads as if in prayer' to listen to the radio:

> Over the next months, I would listen to radio bulletins on how our troops were faring against the Biafrans. (13)

Though Enitan is not physically affected by the war, she is more than just a passive observer of it, signified by her childish affiliation with 'our troops'. Through Enitan's narrative voice, Atta refers to the diversity of the many cultures and ethnic groups in Nigeria, and therefore the folly of the British in creating it as one country:

> Uncle Alex had always said our country was not meant to be one. The British had drawn a circle on the map of West Africa and called it a country. (49)

Three years later when the war is over, Enitan oblivious to the horrors of war, only misses Akanni's stories about the 'far away' warfront where Biafra legs on landmines were blown up and crushed like tomatoes, and of Biafra children eating lizard flesh. Although, Enitan in the space of childhood cannot empathise with the horrors of a war which she has not witnessed, she is able to listen to such horrors without feeling frightened and instead experiences an illicit 'thrill' from the story telling (13). Madelaine Hron discusses childhood in third generation Nigerian novels as being 'reflective of Nigeria itself.' Enitan listens to stories of Western Nigeria where 'people threw car tires over other people and set them on fire' simply because they bebnged to a dfferent

political faction. Or of the bloated bodies that usually showed up in the river, days later, stiff and rotten. Hron suggests that childhood as represented in third generation texts is no 'playground of cultural difference or no game of identity formation'. Rather, she argues, when the space of childhood is carefully considered 'it more accurately reflects a no-man's land' of repression, corruption, poverty or violence that Nigerians often experience daily.[47] The combination of failed democratic rule, military dictatorship, state violence, corruption and war on those who were children at the time or even unborn, dictate the tone of novels written by authors post 1960. Independence and the Civil War as themes reverberate through the literature. Atta further signifies this when Enitan declares, 'I was born in the year of my country's independence, and saw how it raged against itself'. (330)

Enitan's father is a significant political filter in shaping Enitan's identity from girlhood to womanhood, and much of her view of the world. For the adult reader, he embodies everything that 'a good parent' should be. Readers are told of how hard he works at his law practice to "put clothes on Enitan's back, food in her stomach, pay her school fees and meet all her whims such as new jeans, Enid Blyton books, or ice cream" (24). This is in sharp contrast to her relationship with her mother, who we are told "never had a conversation" with her daughter (23). The repression and fear that Enitan feels at even the "sound of her mother's footsteps" was not as a result of any form of physical abuse, but rather as a result of her strict church principles which lead her to be holy, strict, and unhappy— with a face chewed up by a frown (25). In contrast to the 'calm' of her father in the face of her mother's 'shouting' and 'rage', Enitan's mother is presented as unstable, preferring to take Enitan's terminally ill brother to the church for prayers instead of to the hospital which eventually leads to his death. We are told that her mother had joined the church 'to cure him' and by so doing had renounced the logical imported Christianity, 'Anglicanism' and by so doing, renounces 'herself' or her sanity.

> In my mother's church they wore white gowns. They walked around on bare feet, and danced to drums. They were baptised in a stream of holy water and drank from it to cleanse their spirits. They believed in spirits;

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[47] See Hron, M. 2008, p.30

evil ones sent by other people to wreak havoc, and reborn spirits which would not stay long on the earth (14)."

Her mother's church is a cocktail of Western and African traditional religion. The priest who wears 'a long cassock' declares Enitan to be a 'reborn spirit'[48] like her brother and therefore requires "cleansing".

The spirit-child is also a prevalent theme and cultural tradition in Nigerian Literature when exploring the child figure in texts. The spirit-child is represented by Azaro in Ben Okri's trilogy The Famished Road, Songs of Enchantment, and Infinite Riches and also by Ezinma in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. The child is in an interminable cycle of death, and return and has featured in Nigerian authors writing from Soyinka's poem "Abiku" (1961), Euba's play Abiku (1967) Ajiboye and Kotun's novels both titled "Abiku" to Oyeyemi's Tilley-Tilley in Icarus Girl. As Chikwenye Ogunyemi explains, abiku denotes a "politicizing mythology" and "underscores the terror and despair that are concomitant with colonialism, with the human condition the fear and fascination of that other place linked with difference and death" (664). The priest pronounces his visions in chants that sound like Yoruba words for butterfly, dung beetle, and turkey: labalaba, yimiyimi, tolotolo. He seems to experience manic episodes as his eyes "roll back into his head" as he is about to have a godly vision. The effects of colonialism on religious practices become a signifier in the novel as in other texts, of the precarious post- colonial condition symbolic in this type of extreme over –religious behaviour. The tendency to obscure reality by 'holiness' in a show of puritanical behaviour emphasises the effect the colonial missionaries have had on traditional religion, so that Enitan's mother in her reformed self becomes a tyrant, mimicking the attitude of the British colonial missionaries by adopting the Church, Biblical tenets and strict gender roles, albeit with a difference. "Throwing her hands up and acting as I'd never seen her act in an Anglican church (14)," the Nigerian equivalent for the Church of England. Enitan always thought that in her church gowns, her mother "resembled a column, "tall" and "squared"- unbending. Enitan's throw away comment may be viewed as a reflection of the struggles of Christianity in Nigerian society, where the fusion

[48] The notion of the reborn spirit, common in Nigerian literature otherwise known in Yoruba language as abiku.

of Western and traditional norms, and the added often overwhelming economic disparity causes people to grasp at religion as a crutch and often enforce unnecessarily rigid religious strategies as a means of transcending reality as penance for the afterlife:

> Holy people had to be unhappy or strict, or a mixture of both, I'd decided. […] There wasn't a choir mistress I'd seen with a friendly face and even in our old Anglican church people had generally looked miserable as they prayed. I'd come to terms with these people as I'd come to terms with my own natural sinfulness. How many mornings had I got up vowing to be holy, only to succumb to happiness by midday, laughing and running helter-skelter? I wanted to be holy; I just couldn't remember. (23)

It is apparent that in her portrayal of the mother— who is "holy" yet strict and always unhappy with an expression as if she was sniffing something bad (23), senselessly quarrelsome and easily enraged (25), bitter and broken (174)— Atta is critiquing religion, and concluding that even through the eyes of a child, it is evident that religious piety is not the answer. Later in the novel as Enitan matures and her relationship with her father is ruptured for a time, Enitan comes to realise that the broken crystals she imagines in her mother's stomach is caused by deep pain and resentment over the death of a child. "Never make sacrifices for a man" (173) her mother tells her:

> He said I was angry all the time. Of course I was angry. It was like swallowing broken glass. You can't expel broken glass from your body. It will tear you apart. It's best that it remains inside you.

On reflection, Enitan comes to realise that her mother may have been suffering from a form of depression and perhaps if she had been in another country may have received counselling or therapy, but "here people were either mad or they were not" (174). In many ways, the father is somewhat of a paradox. A human rights lawyer, he is fanatical about women's liberation (24) and freedom of speech. He often takes on cases pro bono, as he later does for Sheri and her stepmothers (139). He is the one after whom Enitan fashions her attitude of constantly questioning the patriarchal cultural systems in place. He

is the one who plants the seeds of feminism in her as a child, although she does not recognise her questioning of structures as feminist at the time. At the same time he is accused by the mother of only "being for the liberation of all women except his wife" and also a "wicked man" who had "always been wicked". We discover how Sunny, Enitan's father, would go out drinking abandoning his wife and child who was suffering from a terminal illness. Enitan herself, as a grown woman, experiences the shocking discovery that not only was her father controlling and a serial cheat, he also had a secret family in another town. The silence that he once used as a tool against her mother, turning his back on her and constantly walking out, is the same manner with which he responds to Enitan's questioning. Unlike her mother, and because she has been "raised by her father" Enitan resists his instructions to curb her speech and does not allow him to "take control of the argument" (152) as he is prone to do. She is cautioned by Sheri on the behaviour of fathers in Nigerian culture, "Our fathers, we know what they're like. We just have to accept them as they are" (171). Enitan rejects this, and severs the relationship with her father until he is eventually taken into prison as a political prisoner. Through Enitan, by demythologizing and deconstructing the stifling structures of patriarchy in a male dominated society, Atta demonstrates how women must struggle to find their voices, lest they die "choking on [their] humility" (184).

4.3 Disrupting Girlhood: 1975

In examining the portrayal of adolescent girlhood by women writers with female adolescent protagonists, Barbara A. White[49] argues that "the adolescent girl, yet to fulfil her function, is crucial to the replication of the social system. Whatever her present goal, whether it be 'social integration' or not, her society will insist on integrating her… " (italics, original) As long as the main function of women is seen to be bound up in marriage and child bearing, and motherhood and wifehood carry a lower societal status than male pursuits, "the adolescent girl will be in conflict with society"(197) Barbara White suggests that despite the 'feminist consciousness' that informs many of the recent (American) novels of adolescence the overwhelming picture of growing

[49] Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction. 1985.

up female is largely negative. Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come certainly does not shy away from the tensions and violence which sometimes occur in adolescent girls particularly as they are discovering changes in their bodies and "boy-ology" (42) as Enitan's father describes adolescent girls' awareness of the opposite sex.

Clearly, adolescence is not the first time in which girls experience their bodies but it is the stage at which their self- identity becomes most closely linked with physical body or 'body image'. It is at this point as the body takes on a more 'sexed' physical appearance, that adolescent girls begin to struggle with socially proscribed gendered identities. Feminist theoretical efforts to recognize female subjects as a corporeal being has proved to be a useful framework in attempting to understand the body of the adolescent girl as a site of struggle. For example, feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz writes in her study Volatile Bodies about the link between subjectivity and corporeality and how such a link can become problematic to girls "who have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body." Grosz points out, that because the link between subjectivity and corporeality is not a straightforward one, and is very complex; it is more worthwhile to examine body image, because this is the subject's representation of "to the self of the physical body". In other words, body image is the measurement of the degree of the female subject's narcissistic investment in her own body and body parts, measuring not only psychical but physiological changes the body undergoes daily. Body image is not self- contained but is fluid and takes into account perceptions of others' bodies and external objects, such as clothing and cultural contingency.
Focusing on body image when considering female adolescence allows for bodies to be considered in their sexual, racial, ethnic, and class particularities. Adolescence is simultaneously a fragile and crucial time since during this stage the body image or sense of self is particularly susceptible to political and ideological inscription (44). According to Brenda Boudreau, Grosz' insistence that body image is relational offers "a useful way to read alternative narrative possibilities' in contemporary novels of development". If the focus of the novel is not solely on the adolescent girl's body, but on women's bodies in general including mothers, friends, siblings, this can serve to link the adolescent girl to a 'community of women' which is potentially empowering for her. In Enitan's

case, adolescent years spent in a boarding school housing five hundred other girls and sharing a dormitory with about twenty 'were like balm' (47). Their communal living and shared experiences are likened to 'the spirit of samaritanism' which Enitan prefers to staying at home. At boarding school, Enitan learns about 'women in her country' through her association with girls from the North, the Niger Delta and Western Nigeria. It is at school that Enitan begins to experience Grosz's theory of relational body image as the result of 'shared sociocultural conceptions of bodies in general' and 'interpersonal fantasy about particular bodies' (84). Enitan is intelligent but she longs to be 'one of those' chosen for beauty pageants instead. Her breasts had not developed, nor had her calf muscles, and her arms were like "twisted vines". She had inherited the nickname of 'panla' which meant a dry stinky fish. Enitan reinforces the differences in cultural acceptance of body image when she declares that 'girls overseas could starve themselves on salad and oil' if that was how they desired to look— thin. In her country women were hailed for having huge buttocks. Her desire was to be 'fatter, fatter, fatter, with a pretty face— the description of Sheri— so that the boys would like her.

A positive body image, however, does not always guarantee positive outcomes. It is not always empowering and the girl's body becomes a target for and a means of humiliation and control especially by men. Sheri's rape is a pivotal moment in the novel for both girls. It represents "the misfortune that binds" them, and which both of them are unable to speak about well into adulthood. Silence marks every aspect surrounding the rape. The three boys hold Sheri down, gag her, and then proceed to silence Sheri through the rape which she is unable to articulate. Enitan describes it as "a silent moment; a peaceful moment" while the capacity for language escapes Sheri. "N-nm," is the only sound she is able to make as Enitan wipes away the blood and semen from her body with the sand. Consequently, she wonders if "their journey" would last and never end (66). Although Enitan does not experience the rape physically, she is emotionally and psychologically scarred by it; her innocence disrupted. She is confused by what she has seen and as a result of this feels anger towards Sheri who is the victim. She internalizes the blame against Sheri until "the fist in her stomach explodes". Unconsciously, it is the teachings of her mother that surface and influence Enitan's interpretation of events: Bad

girls got raped (68). Sex was a filthy act and she must always wash herself afterward (27). It was Sheri's fault. In a move symbolic of her own future healing from Sheri's rape after pouring out the story to a boyfriend who also tenderly 'washes away' her associative hurt (136), Enitan washes Sheri in the bathtub because 'once the water ran clear' they 'would have survived (67).

The rape has far reaching consequences and is detrimental to the psyche of both women. Sheri becomes pregnant as a result of the rape, and attempts to self-abort with the use of a hanger (70), thereby damaging her reproductive system, leaving her unable to have children. The narrative reminds us that in Nigeria, it is better to be ugly, crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren. Women are linked to the sum of their reproductive parts and while 'marriage could wipe out a slutty past, angel or not a woman had to have a child' (105). This sets up Sheri's future as a 'sugary girl' (100) because she is convinced that 'no single man from a normal home' would want her. Enitan on the other hand, is sent to boarding school in England upon her parent's discovery of her role in the ordeal. Again, her silence (70) regarding the incident shocks her father who then passes her over to her mother for punishment. Through Sheri's rape, Enitan learns the brutality that women can occasionally endure at the hands of men. This is a step in her journey towards growth and awareness. As Enitan is driven towards her mother's church to undergo her cleansing ritual, she witnesses the brutal and gratuitously violent assault of a fellow driver by a truckload of soldiers with horsewhips, and feels "some assurance that our world is uniformly terrible" (72).

4.4 1985 - 1995: Discovering Nigerian Masculinities

England is a site of external growth and development for Enitan outside of the influence of 'home', both formal and informal in terms of independence, identity formation and sexual experimentation. It is here that she experiences her first heterosexual relationship outside the tense atmosphere of Nigeria and the equally tense moments that engulf her time at home. Ogaga Okuyade writes that "the process of finding voice and gender development are mutually inform each other." Therefore, sexual independence and the ability to

negotiate sexual identity provide Enitan with the necessary agency in order to access language and voice. Although Enitan is still unable to tell 'about Sheri and me that awful summer' (77) she is able to engage in a sexual relationship despite her ongoing trauma regarding the rape:

> The first person to tell me my virginity belonged to me was the boy who took it. Before this, I'd thought my virginity belonged to Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large. Anyone but me. [He] assured me that it was mine, to give to him. (77)

Even though, Enitan's sexual experiences become more varied while she is in England, she is still tainted by Sheri's rape and the puritan voice of her mother. She 'could not bear' the thought of semen leaking out of her 'rolling down her thighs', the visual reminder of the rape from memory, and so she always needed to wash afterwards because as her mother advised sex was a 'filthy act' (26). Her experience of the opposite sex is still largely uncomplimentary; Nigerian men who "took" from women and did not give much back in return. The boy who takes her virginity leaves her when he complains that she is sexually repressed "just like other Nigerian women" (77) and that her "frigidity" was a form of mental illness. The narrator draws our attention to the treatment of Nigerian women by Nigerian men, so that whether at home or in the diaspora the cultural implications that implicitly allow men to treat women as sexual objects continues in the next generation of boys. Atta critiques this generation who were more "traditional than their parents" resulting in girls who were willing to date boys who called them their "wives" staying at home to cook, while the boys went out with other girls (81)—similar to her own parents' marriage and also the polygamous marriages common in Nigeria. The narrator alludes to the effects of colonialism on post colonial children "defined by the economics of their childhood" where parents 'of the sixties' having adopted the Victorian standards of the British, with their structured gender roles for men and women in society had raised a generation of children caught between traditional and Western modes of living. As children of a particular class of people, mainly those who had benefited from Nigeria's oil boom, political activism was unusual. Westernised, yet lackadaisical this generation's most ferocious acts of rebellion were to spend pocket money on "leather jackets or unusual shoes." Enitan's next Nigerian boyfriend, 'Stringfellow', a Nigerian student in England, who berates her for

reading black, feminist writing, "women who ought to straighten their dreadlocks and stop complaining" (81) also proves to be the same as these other men. He cheats on her throughout their relationship, and lies to her "out of respect" for what he knows will be her dislike of a two-timing man. Her first introduction to activism is suggested by Stringfellow who invites her to a vigil for democracy outside of the Nigerian High Commission in London. Enitan rejects this call to activism by Stringfellow as a result of his insincerity to the cause of Nigeria's democracy as well as his personal hypocrisy.

Atta's accounts of Enitan's sexual encounters with Nigerian men both in and out of Nigeria open up connections between culture, location and behaviour suggesting the transient nature of love and the complexities of betrayal that mark heterosexual relationships across generational gaps, linked to intrinsic Nigerian masculine behaviours in the novel. Through this repetitive behaviour between generations, the narrative suggests that women are socially conditioned to believe that they have no right over their sexuality and also that men similarly lack control over their impulses because "these things are nothing [...] Half of Lagos had an outside family (155)." Stringfellow's actions echo those of Enitan's father's because although Stringfellow's infidelity has led to the breakdown in their relationship, he thinks nothing of it (80), in the same way that Enitan's father is constantly 'confused' about her mother's bitterness toward him. The father's infidelity is implied in the narrative through his prolonged and unexplained absences from the home (277), compounded by the mother's accusations to that effect:

> "Sunny, whatever you're doing out there, God is watching you. You can walk out of that door, but you cannot escape His judgement" (25).

The mother lacks the agency to contest what is portrayed as the father's dominant position in the family and therefore, she relies on religion as a shield, using God to fight for her, where her earthy powers cannot. Enitan as a child "knew that he strayed" choosing "not to think about it" (145). Eventually, while Enitan is in school in England her parents, separate. The mother is marginalized in the fall out of the marriage as the father's positioning as male and also a legal professional enables him to have more control of the situation. The mother, in her rather restricted domestic role has no access to 'executive

power' or funds that would enable her to battle for property or custody of Enitan. The marginalization of the female in postcolonial Nigeria largely ignores women's rights in favour of traditional, patriarchal structures which are also applicable in marital relationships where the husband dies, or in the case of a divorce:

> My father explained that my mother would take his duplex in another suburb of Lagos, and she would live in one unit while collecting rent from the next. There were no phone lines in the area so I couldn't call her. I was to stay with him (79).

The father, who thereafter completely ignores the mother, still exerts control over her, through his silence and also his refusal to sign over the property in her name. Even though he has allowed her to live in the property, he still retains ownership of it and cannot be legally compelled to divide his property with her as part of a divorce settlement. His actions contradict his position in the narrative as a human rights advocate who fights for justice from the oppression under successive military and democratic governments. "The man still hasn't put my houses in my name. What about my rights?" her mother muses. Native law takes precedence over civil law and has "no moral grounding, no design except to oppress women" (141). The narrative critiques these cultural practices that allow men to disempower women in every aspect of life and to short-change them out of what— under civil law, should be their rightful entitlement. A dead man's property is dispersed amongst his children, according to how the man lived his life and wives are entitled to nothing. Enitan questions her father about these cultural practices that treat women as "chattel":

> Show me one case, [...] Just one, of a woman having two husbands, a fifty-year-old woman marrying a twelve-year-old boy. [...] a woman cannot legally post bail. If I were married, I would need my husband's consent to get a new passport. He would be entitled to discipline me with a slap or two, so long as he doesn't cause me grievous bodily harm. (141)

Moments of frustration with the Nigerian state are illuminated through Enitan's heated discussions with her father: "Can you change our culture for me?" Enitan questions, "Can you change the culture?" (141). Through her

urgent argument and questioning, the narrative reminds the reader that although Enitan, as a Nigerian woman in Nigeria, has had a good education, and been encouraged to fulfil career goals by her father, all these achievements are devalued by a system where educated and powerful men like her father who "conspire" (142) in the continual oppression of women.

Upon Enitan's return to Nigeria, after nine years in England,

Enitan enters into another romantic relationship, this time with a fellow youth corper, Mike Obi. Unfortunately, history repeats itself and Enitan again discovers that her partner, Mike Obi, is seeing another woman. Although he acknowledges this, his only complaint is for the extent of her anger (155) as she has smashed one of his beloved paintings. "Not my work", he said, "Not my life" I answered (155). The narrative highlights through Enitan's words the selfish nature of men in the text. His belief that his work is somehow more important than Enitan's emotional wellbeing is striking and once again evokes that sense of the fickle nature of men in their treatment of Enitan:

"Tell her," […] "Tell her she should be running away from you, not me" (155).

The protagonist questions the validity of heterosexual relationships and concludes that happiness or fulfilment cannot be found in them. It is during this time of heartbreak over another failed relationship on the grounds of infidelity coupled with the discovery of a brother through the lifelong infidelity of her father, that Enitan reconnects with her childhood friend, Sheri. Sheri has "survived as a sugary girl" (157) thus far. Even though Enitan encourages her to start up her own catering business alongside her dead father's wives, Sheri still prefers the security of her relationship with the elderly Brigadier. She limits her involvement with the family business in order to please her Brigadier, who requires Sheri to be completely dependent on him: "He wants me to have nothing, except what he gives me" (170). The narrative once again is exploring gender relations and power through the older man versus younger woman binary. Implied in Sheri's rhetorical question is the man's socio-political importance, "Hassan, the Brigadier. Have you heard of him?" (103) The reader is then made aware that he is a man of means "who played polo" indicative of his class and social position; a man who "is always in the papers during Lagos tournaments" and is also a collector of polo ponies and "women as young as his daughters" (103). The illicit nature of Sheri's affair is not lost on Enitan who

asks her, "Isn't he married?" But Sheri's tactics are straightforward. She is not in a relationship with the Brigadier because this is what she wants, she is here because her father died and her uncles took all her father's money (104) and she is "getting what I want in return" (107). She equates men with an opportunity to improve and maintain the quality of her life, so when Enitan questions if she is doing this for sex, she is exasperated, replying "I beg which one of them can do[50]" (107). This option is chosen as a way of livelihood for Sheri despite the fact that she has already been through formal education and has a degree in education:

> We had both been raised to believe that our greatest days would be: the birth of our first child, our wedding and graduation days in that order. (105)

The death of Sheri's father has left Sheri at a disadvantage in a male dominated society, seemingly without agency and Enitan concludes that despite all these things, Sheri's beauty has made her lazy:

> Sheri was the Nigerian man's ideal: pretty, shapely, yellow to boot, with some regard for a woman's station. Now she was a kitchen martyr, and may well have forgotten how to flaunt her mind. (107)

Women such as Sheri are in a position of weakness, while the men wield the power. Sheri cooks various meals for Ibrahim a week in advance in case he shows up alone or with friends, and "there has to be food" in the house. Enitan questions this behaviour as condescending towards Sheri, but Sheri responds, "You've been away too long"(106) suggesting that Enitan has forgotten traditional roles for Nigerian women in male/female relationships. The Brigadier's economic advantage over Sheri causes him to exert measures of control over her such as limiting her mobility. She is not free to come and go as she pleases, otherwise he will "take it all back" (170). The tipping point for Sheri, which also marks the end of the relationship, comes when the Brigadier becomes physically abusive towards her for going out of the house. She

[50] 'Do' in this context refers to the act of sexual intimacy as understood in Nigerian pidgin English.

becomes a "whore" for exercising her right to freedom of movement (169). The reader is almost triumphant as we are transported back to an earlier time, before her rape, when Sheri was "the most powerful girl" Enitan knew and Sheri beats the Brigadier "for every person who had crossed her path in life" (169). Sheri's journey of 'womaning', in the context of heterosexual relationships ends here as the reader is no longer told of Sheri entering into any other affairs or marriage. Instead, Sheri focuses on the growth of her business, devotes herself to her enduring friendship with Enitan and also uses her 'celebrity' to raise awareness for charitable causes involving children.

All the male characters in the novel are morally flawed in one way or another despite their other admirable characteristics, and display a disdain for women which accounts for gender imbalances in the relationships portrayed. For example, Peter Mukoro, a client of Enitan's father, is caught up in a "love triangle" that is embarrassingly reported in the local tabloids. Enitan points out that a "social crusader practicing bigamy" is at odds with what it means intrinsically to be a social critic. Her father rejects her opinion and responds that this is a "private matter" in which Peter Mukoro's wife has "disgraced herself" by going to the papers (140). Atta shows the extent of patriarchal mindsets that are ingrained in the society when her father's staff regard her as though she is laughable for suggesting that Peter Mukoro be sued for his hypocrisy and deception:

> So sue the lawyer who is representing you. [...] Sue the judge hearing your case. Sue the driver who carries you from court to your house after your case has been dismissed. Then when you get home, sue your landlord. Sue everybody. (143)

Mrs. Kazeem, one of her father's staff informs her, "Welcome Home", while another female staff "sighs"- a tone that signifies the emotionaly disconnected voices of some of the women in the novel, resigned to patriarchal structures. The novel shows that patriarchy is deeply rooted throughout every facet of life and cuts across class boundaries— "sue everybody, sue God" (143). As though by divine ordination, men have been placed in a position of power and women are always to be subject to men.

The vestiges of colonialism are deeply embedded in her psyche as she ponders "the God of her childhood, the one who looked like a white man" (115)

who "kind as he was, he was still a God [she] feared beyond reason". In adulthood, Enitan finds that although she is able to question misogynistic structures supported by religion, she is unable to strip herself of spirituality altogether:

> Between my mother's worship of religion and my father's disinterest, I too, have found my own belief, in a soul that looked like a tree covered in vines: vanity, anger, greed, I stripped them off before I prayed. […] God was the light toward which my tree grew. (115)

Enitan eventually concludes that her mother's fixation with religion was "nothing but a life-long rebellion" against marriage and her father's treatment of her mother (178). Had her mother turned to alcohol or sex for comfort, she would have been castigated by society as a drunkard or a slut:

> It was sad to see women acting out like their fathers, because they were so determined not to be like their mothers; worse, to see women joining born-again churches, seeking refuge from their marriages as some mothers had. (242)

The novel portrays marriage as especially restrictive for women, so although religion acts in the novel as a mode of resistance for the mother, it is also an avenue of safety both for men and for women albeit in different ways. Men are protected by the patriarchal structure of religious rules, while women are accepted as part of a 'family' which they otherwise may not have access to for one reason or the other within the society.

The nuanced psychological portrait of the mother as a woman who seemingly battles depression, 'wicked and false allegations about her sanity (277), swallowing pills regularly (96) which eventually kill her (306) could be read as symptomatic of the post- colonial condition. According to Madelaine Hron[51], 'post- colonial literature has often been characterized by its creative schizophrenia (Gilkes) or by its schizophrenic imagination, a state of divided identity' (Saghal). … In Black Skin Whte Masks, the theory of the

[51] Fascinating accounts of children in Nigerian Literature, analysing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, Helen Oyeyemi's Icarus Girl and Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of No Nation. Hron, M., "Oran a-azu nwa: The figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels", Research in African Literatures, 39.2 (2008) 27-48

"psychoexistensial complex" of the post-colonial condition was first alluded to by Franz Fanon (12). The refusal to acknowledge psychological conditions in Africa, and ascribe them generally to "madness" and evil spirits to be cast out by spiritual cleansing, further increases the suffering of the clinically depressed and socially outcast. In this way, the church becomes a family, so that even though Enitan's mother recognises the inconsistencies in her church cleansings and questions them (282), she allows herself to be manipulated into pretending that it is good to ignore some bad things, unlike "the mad" (105) are likely to do.

4.5 Finding Feminist Voice: Women's Networks, Female Bonding and Activism, 1995.

As is the nature of the bildungsroman genre, there has been a build up through Enitan's personal growth and persistent questioning of patriarchal structures to the moment of her discovery of feminist voice. The pivotal plot shift occurs when Enitan states in the opening paragraph of the section '1995', "I only ever remember calling out to my voice" (177). Enitan tells us, "In my country, women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest." The voice that Enitan calls out to is her right to speak up for herself, to protest those patriarchal structures in place that are unfavourable to women. According to Ogaga Okuyade:

> "The process of finding voice and gender development mutually inform each other. Therefore, the assertion of one's sexual independence and negotiating one's sexuality provides the feminine subject with the necessary agency for accessing language and voice."[52]

Within the family, Enitan has begun to find her voice and in this section of the novel she takes her speech out of the private sphere and into the public sphere.

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[52] Ogaga Okuyade, "Narrating growth in the Nigerian Female Bildungsroman", The Anachronist 16 Winter 2011, 152-170

Enitan meets Niyi, a divorced father of one and agrees to marry him. On the day of her traditional engagement, as is customary she kneels before him, even though she "did not want a dowry and did not want to kneel" (178). Her mother in law was one of those women who "swallowed her voice from the day she married" (180) but Enitan is determined that she [Enitan] will "not let go until [she is] heard" (197). Enitan's quest for self-fulfillment, interpreted as feminist by her neighbours, is a term which at first, she does not understand. All she knows is that she is not satisfied with being boxed into a category of silenced women, choked to death by humility (184). Enitan's marriage is plagued with double standards much as her relationship with her father is. On the one hand her husband, Niyi, encourages her to show strength and not be "pushed around", "to be tough" at her place of work (179) and in private demands that she "show him respect" (184). Niyi's method of control against Enitan is through his drawn out silences. Male silence as a weapon is a common theme in the novel. The reader is told that Enitan's father-in law "stopped speaking" (181) to her after she challenges him on a point of law. Every time that Niyi perceives that his masculine authority is being challenged by Enitan, she is met with total silence (182) because in his family they "do not raise their voices" (183). Niyi's father stops speaking to him for a year when Niyi chooses to leave the family firm and Niyi himself would "ignore [Enitan] for days" (183).

Enitan experiences miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy and convinces herself that she is being punished for something she had "done or said" (186). Although she has become increasingly aware of her own oppositional feelings towards traditional attitudes regarding women and motherhood, she is pressured by society in the face of her infertility and shrinks to the size of her womb (186) swallowing her voice for penitence (187) rendering her voiceless again and therefore without agency. Ironically, it is while she is pregnant that she falls under the notion that her priorities are "best kept at home" to "have her baby in peace" (190) which contradicts her earlier feminist assertion that women can exist outside of motherhood:

> I asked why they harassed women this way. We were greater than our wombs, greater than the sum of our body parts. (185)

Atta challenges stereotypical ideologies surrounding pregnancy and motherhood, eventually allowing Enitan to grow into her role as human rights activist despite her pregnancy, and the subsequent birth of her child. Her first experience in a prison cell occurs around the time that she is four months pregnant, having attended a 'reading' hosted by female activist Grace Umeh, who is pivotal in guiding Enitan's emergence as gender assertive activist. In the hope of gaining knowledge regarding her imprisoned father, Enitan continues to challenge the military government's use of ambiguous laws to detain innocent civilians who spoke out against them. The repressive behaviour of various Nigerian dictator generals, Buhari, Babangida, Abacha, Abubakar or Obasanjo who also self-styled as "fathers of the country" perpetuated systems of tyrannous patriarchy which even for Nigerian adults, rendered them child-like. Atta also alludes to the detainment and eventual murder of Abiola which took place during General Abubakar's regime in 1998. Through Enitan the narrative, illuminates the political issues of governance in Nigeria. Numerous military coups such as the 1996 coup, which inaugurated the "Age of Pestilence", and corrupt democratic regimes add to the calamity, poverty and denigration that ordinary Nigerian citizens face. The arrest of Peter Mukoro, editor of the underground newspaper The Oracle, alludes to the muzzling of the Nigerian press during that period which also led to the assassination of Newswatch editor, Dele Giwa, by a letter bomb during the Babangida regime. It is in the midst of these references to political instability in the novel, that Enitan ponders:

> […] yes, people should be allowed to say what they want. But it was one thing to face an African community and tell them how to treat a woman like a person. It was entirely another to face an African dictatorship and tell them how to treat people like citizens. (276)

Atta's female characters possess a fighting spirit which develops within them and becomes more apparent at every subsequent stage in the novel; Sheri, Enitan, her mother, Grace Ameh. Although, Enitan declares that she would "no longer speak for women in my country, because quite simply, I didn't know them all," (277) she continues to do so:

> In a democratic system, with a constitution in place, a citizen could challenge injustices, even if the system itself was flawed. With the military in power, without a constitution, there was no other recourse besides protest, peaceful or violent. (293)

Enitan continues to fight for rights of illegally detained political prisoners, most of them women. When Niyi tries to dissuade her from her activities, telling her that he "only cares about his family" (317) Enitan challenges him on this, "So did I once. But that has changed now. The state our country is in affects everyone" (317). Niyi's reaction to Enitan's bold step into the political foray is in sharp contrast to the reaction of Sheri, her lifelong friend. Sheri feels pride for Enitan's progress and in the absence of support from her husband, Sheri is there to bridge the gap:

> She was my oldest friend, my closest friend. We had been absent friends, sometimes uncertain friends, but so were most sisters and she was the nearest I'd come to having one in this place where families were over-extended. (208)

When Enitan eventually leaves her marriage because Niyi will not "let her" continue in her political activism, Enitan concurs that "freedom was never intended to be sweet. It was a responsibility from the onset for a people, a person to fight for and to hold on to" (321). Here, she is referring to Nigeria's freedom but also to her own freedom from marriage. The micro link between the protagonist's development as an index to the macro sphere of culture, political and socio-historical conditions is clearly shown in this passage where Enitan links the year of her birth to the year of her country's independence, seeing "how it raged against itself". Consequently, Enitan's growth and development is inexplicably bound up in Nigeria's growth and development as they battle the various stages in their history together.

4.6 CONCLUSION: EVERYTHING GOOD DOES COME

As I have outlined in this chapter, Atta's narrative is a quest for autonomous female identity within the sphere of the nation. In Atta's narrative like Adichie's, women are portrayed as actively taking part in nation building.

The text does not only celebrate the coming of age of the protagonist, but also portrays her development as inseparable from the national political agenda. Through Enitan, Atta critiques the social and cultural flaws of the people, the political instability and corrupt nature of Nigerian governments. A "motherland that treated her children like bastards" but contends that this motherland is "still hers" (310). The complex formation of Enitan's identity as an individual against the back drop of Nigeria's socio-political situation is the underlying theme on which the novel relies. Readers are able to witness the history of a country through the eyes of an individual as opposed to the collective, which is central to the protagonists bildung. The other underlying theme of the novel lies in the depiction of women's friendships. Janet Todd describes women's social friendships as a "nurturing tie, not pitting women against society but rather smoothing their passage within it" (4). Enitan and Sheri's friendship within the novel is one which, at the times when they are together, works to sustain and aid each other. The female friendship in the novel outlives the heterosexual romance, and also defies Enitan's parental consent. "Had I listened to my mother, that would have been the end of Sheri and I, and the misfortune that would bind us" (47). By the end of the novel, there is a complete turnaround. The misfortune or the rape of Sheri allows both girls to overcome a myriad of obstacles in adulthood as a result of recognizing their strengths. When Enitan's father is finally released from prison after ten months of campaigning, Sheri is the first person Enitan thinks of (324). Women's friendships as portrayed in the novel are a source of empowerment, enabling the protagonist to transcend the social standards their societies have constructed for them. Sheri as an unmarried and childless woman, Enitan as a single mother with a failed marriage behind her, and the baby would have two mothers (322). The novel ends on a hopeful note; Enitan has managed to negotiate her individual identity outside of the confines of marginalized spaces unlike her mother.

This Bildungsroman in its feminist contemporary state provides new ways of understanding Nigeria's post-colonial culture and offers alternative routes to success and happiness outside of traditional roles. The Nigerian variant of the Bildungsroman portrays the struggle for autonomy and the hurdles that girls face growing up in a society that intrinsically and externally favors men. The negotiations of feminine subjectivity whilst portraying the plight of women

shows that their plight is not insurmountable. The novel ends with Enitan dancing in the street, because she knows that she had been a "stupid woman" (326) but the realization that "the shrinkage she experienced" in her marriage "was never worth it" (321). The development of Enitan's political and personal agency as a mother, daughter, friend, and wife all come together simultaneously and move beyond traditional stereotypes. Enitan experiences her happiness as a sense of agency. She is free, and the men are free. The novel portrays the climax of Enitan's bildung as strong. Her feminist voice comes to an end as strong and free and this freedom illustrated in her dance moves. She freely mixes in the Western flamenco and can-can with the traditional palongo. This display of joy leaves the reader with a sense of hope, not only for the protagonist but for the post-colonial nation as well.

In the end, it is perhaps this that makes Everything Good Will Come a novel of serious consideration: for its awareness of the difficulties of what it means to be a woman coming to political consciousness and negotiating patriarchal norms in Nigerian society in the face of prejudice, bureaucracy and cultural oppression. And above all, the novel is important for its celebration of the attempts of ordinary women with ordinary lives accomplishing the extraordinary.

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