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CHILDHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN FICTION

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy.

July, 2011

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Christopher Ernest Werimo Ouma

-------- DAY OF---------- 2011

DEDICATION

To those who fell on the way, E.O and J.O, as well as my fallen colleague and friend Kimathi Emmanuel Chabari, R.I.P.

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I thought writing this would be easy, but I realise now that it requires me to take a trip down memory lane for five years. This journey started when I arrived in Johannesburg in 2006 for my M.A. The tricky thing though is that time accumulates debts of gratitude as one traverses different places, spaces and meets different people. Therefore, I should say that the few pages allotted for acknowledging the contributions of many people in this activity can never be enough. Nonetheless, as Ben Okri says, "there are many destinies" and that if we fail to keep that appointed hour with one destiny, we are bound to fulfill the next. In this spirit therefore, I hope that this activity is a gesture to our shared yet different "destinies," and that this appointed hour is not the only one. We will have other hours to fulfill many appointed "destinies" – of acknowledgement.

More modestly though, there are many people who have contributed in various ways to my completion of this thesis and inasmuch as I would like to "observe protocol," the list is almost certainly endless, such is my debt of gratitude.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE i
DECLARATION ii
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
CONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD AS A SET OF IDEAS 1
1.1 Childhood, the Contemporary and the Diasporic 1
1.2 Foregrounding the Concept of Childhood in Contemporary Nigerian fiction..... 9
1.3 Reading Childhood: A Literary Historiography 13
1.4 Theorising Childhood: Critical and Conceptual Contexts 27

2.0 CHAPTER TWO
ALTERNATIVE TIME(S) AND HISTORIES. 43
2.1 Introduction: Representation of Childhood as an "architext of memory" 43
2.2 The alternative: Archive, History and Time in the Narrative of Childhood 47
2.3 Narrative Memory and Literary Historiography 52
2.4 Childhood as a Representation of the Everyday in *Purple Hibiscus* 56
2.4.1 the trauma memory of everyday life 67
2.4.2 nostalgia and a liberating memoryscape. 73
2.5 Memory of War: Trauma, Textual Archive and Cultural Memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun*..... 81
2.5.1 a return to the everyday memory of war: composite consciousnesses 88
2.5.2 collective memory and trauma: composite memories of war 95
2.6 Popular Cultural Memory in Chris Abani's *Graceland*: Material Cultures of Memory..... 106
2.6.1 material cultures as a source of memory..... 111
2.7 Conclusion 119

3.0 CHAPTER THREE
DIALOGIC STRATEGIES AND (INTER)TEXTUALITIES IN CHILDHOOD. 121
3.1 Introduction: Childhood, (inter)textuality and the Literary Chronotope 121
3.2 Dialogic Childhoods: Chronotopicity in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* 126
3.2.1 childhood and the literary chronotope 126
3.2.2 "countries of the mind": spacetime chronotopes in *Purple Hibiscus* 135
3.2.3 chronotopicity and cartographies of violence in *Half of a Yellow Sun*..... 145
3.3 Dystopian and Utopian Childhoods: Navigating the Lagos Cityscape in Chris Abani's *Graceland*..... 161
3.3.1 navigating the city: landscapes of desires, poetic geographies entropic realities. 167
3.4 Conclusion 178

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR
GENEALOGIES, DAUGHTERS OF SENTIMENT, SONS AND FATHERS. 180
4.1 Introduction: Genealogies and Father Figures 180
4.2 In Her Father's House: The Sentimental Daughter in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come*. 189
4.2.1 the ontology of fatherhood..... 189
4.2.2 the sentimental disposition of daughterhood 200
4.2.3 the "death" and "falsity" of fatherhood 210
4.3 "In the Name of the Son": Critical Legitimacy of Fatherhood, Sonhood and Masculinities in Abani's *Graceland* and *The Virgin of Flames*. 215
4.3.1 "false fatherhood" and critical legitimacy 215
4.3.2 postcolonial sonhood(s): material dystopia and cultural utopia 218
4.3.3 "a view from elsewhere": cross-gender discourse and androgynous sonhoods 223
4.4 Conclusion 231

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE
CHILDHOODS AS POSTMODERN IDENTITIES..... 233
5.1 Introduction: Childhood as Embodiment of Diaspora 233
5.2 Diasporic Childhoods: Worlds "against interpretation" 237
5.3 "Limitless vistas of fantasy": Reading the Magic and Reality of *abiku* Childhood 245
5.4 The Racialised *Abiku* in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* 252

5.5 Childhoods of the "New Diaspora" in *The Opposite House*..... 281
5.6 Conclusion 296

6.0 CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION..... 298
6.1 Identity and Childhood: Negotiating the Postcolonial and Postmodern..... 298

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 316

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD AS A SET OF IDEAS

1.1 Childhood, the Contemporary and the Diasporic

Fiction coming out of Nigeria during the 21st century seems to be marked by attempts to deal with identity and (dis)placement through the idea of childhood. These attempts are underpinned by the fact that Nigeria has transformed itself from a period of military governance that shaped life in the late nineteen-sixties up to the late nineteen-nineties. From this turbulent and oppressive political history, different narratives have been constructed. These narratives can be traced through the works of writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali among others.[1] Out of the turbulent history, these writers constructed narratives which represented lived experiences. It is important to note that as these narratives were constructed, that of the nation was dominant. As the dominance of narratives of the nation in literature continued to spread, other complex issues related to global currents began to emerge, accelerated by the migration of Nigerians as a result of the turmoil caused by military governance, as well as the oil-related economic gains of the 70s. Indeed, as cultures made contact and bodies moved across national and continental borders, new concerns began to emerge, related to identity in view of an emerging postcolonial Nigerian diaspora in Europe and America. The term "identity" is used in this study largely to refer to the way that "selves" are represented in light of the individual and collective, which, in this study is influenced by the perspective and framework of childhood and by the context and consciousness of diaspora. Diaspora is a word with Greek origins referring to "dispersion" (Kilson, L.M & Rotberg, R.I. 1976: 1-2). It is used in this study to refer to the product – people and cultural products – of the process of dispersal.

[1] The works of these writers featured after Nigeria's independence and have since been included in literary studies all over the world, making them canonical to Nigerian literature.

Concerns with identity began to shift away from their focus on the nation to those of the individual.[2] Yet, individuals invariably felt that their identity was informed by their sense of nationhood. Moreover, migration, as a consequence of social, cultural, political and economic gains and challenges brought about diasporic Nigerians, in Europe and America. These diasporic Nigerians' works grapples with the increasing senses of identities that transcend geographical boundaries.

These writers use the symbolic figures, images and memories of childhood to reflect on their experiences, which are informed by how they choose to identify with Nigeria after migration. They use the experiences of migrant childhoods to grapple with diasporic consciousness. In other words, childhood is used as a trope to grapple with diasporic condition and space and to construct what this study refers to as "contemporary" forms of identities in the twenty first century. The notion of childhood in this study is a set of ideas that refer to images, memories, figures, as well as to social identifications of sonhood, daughterhood, boyhood and girlhood. The phrase "set of ideas" used here echoes Hugh Cunnigham's (1995:1) method of studying childhood as "a shifting set of ideas." However while Cunningham's study focuses more on childhood as a history of ideas, this study intends to specifically construct a theoretical paradigm, that argues for childhood as category of critical analysis more than just a historical vehicle for socio-cultural and political debate. The term "contemporary" is used not only as a temporal but also a conceptual marker in relation to the place/country, viz: Nigeria and the imaginative expressions related to it. In fact, when we speak of contemporary Nigerian fiction, we refer to fiction whose authorship has or identifies with Nigerian citizenship, whose spatio-temporal setting is Nigeria or whose thematic concerns relate to Nigeria. Hence, the noun Nigeria specifies the geographic location for mapping out a particular literary topography. Moreover, even though it can be seen otherwise, we can borrow Van der

[2] The appeal to collective identities began to wane with the period of "disillusionment," moving the focus to the daily struggles of the individual. Even though other markers of collective identities like gender, ethnicity and class remained significant, their importance reflected on the subject of individuality. Indeed, as Anthony Appiah (2005) discusses, one can begin to see the private and the "unscripted" part of individual identity found in aspects such as wit, intelligence and greed becoming central to the concern for identity and informing the other "scripted" and collective part of identity namely; class, gender, race and ethnicity.

Merwe and Viljoen's (2004:3) assertion that "one obvious way of giving meaning to space is through the idea of a national identity." The ascribing of national identity to space is however complicated by the term "contemporary," a temporal marker that implies a shift in space and place, hence delimiting and despatialising Nigeria as an overdetermining marker of national identity. Moreover, the term "contemporary" as a signifier of time, endows that place called Nigeria with shifting meanings, including the subjects and objects occupying it, as well as representations of them. In fact, to represent a place called Nigeria is also to (re)imagine it.

Moreover, Nigeria as a place with a historically-imbued meaning is reflected in the "contemporary" imagination that represents. The eco-critic Lawrence Buell (2005:72) ascribes to these spatial representations the notion of "place-attachment as phenomenology." In other words, childhood, for this study, portrays Nigeria as "the memory place" (Buell, 2005:75) in view of an adult diasporic self writing from outside their geographical upbringing, descent, genealogy or birth. Memory place, as understood by what Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:7) also call "memories of place" is figurative. Therefore the represented memories of a particular place shift from being representations to become recreations in their narrative status. Viljoen and Van der Merwe's ideas are highlighted here in anticipation of this study's examination of childhood as a chronotope[3] - a site in which there are competing narratives of space, place and time. These narratives need to be expressed within the contemporary Nigerian writer's engagement with their migrant and diasporic senses of identity.

The study, therefore, frames itself as an examination of "contemporary Nigerian fiction," with the term contemporary signifying not only fiction coming out at the present, but also what this fiction represents in a categorical process (not just in terms of publication time), in the context of the larger corpus of an existing African literary tradition of imagination and criticism. However, this study is not a pointed attempt at defining this writing as a new tradition or generation. While the issue of grappling with traditions and generations

[3] This term is used by Bakhtin (1981) to refer to the semantic structure of the novel which is organised around the intersection of the axes of space and time.

is something of importance, the choice of texts was not guided solely by that factor. Apart from the idea of temporal coevality and the shared diasporic space, each of the writers selected raise a range of issues that as we will soon see, are critical to the study of childhood. Childhood is therefore examined as a set of ideas that deal with contemporary forms of identity that arise from an embodied diasporic experience, as well as the anxieties and multiple/plural consciousnesses of diasporic experiences.

The narratives that have come out from Nigeria in the 21st century are largely represented through the genre of the novel. There is a proliferation of writing from the Anglo-American Nigerian diaspora. Other than the benefits of access to networks and institutions of publishing by these writers, the issues they are grappling with are informed by their condition of living in the diaspora, their experiences as children growing up after Nigeria's independence and therefore as witnesses to the period of military dictatorship, oil boom and bust. They are indeed, to borrow the words of Waberi "children of the postcolony" (1998:8). Waneri's phrase places the notion of childhood in the context of a postcolonial dispensation – as a product of the conditions of postcoloniality. Let us begin with a quick overview of these works.

In 2001, Ike Oguine's *A squatter's Tale* was published. It portrays the notion of the "American Dream" and the theme of "brain drain." Preceding this was Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000), a story about the excesses of military regimes. In 2003, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, which also dealt with the brutality of military regimes in Nigeria, was published. It was followed in 2007 by *Measuring Time*, an archival rendition of a community in Nigeria. Two-thousand and three saw the much celebrated emergence of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. It was followed in 2006 by *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a novel based on the Biafran war in Nigeria.[4] Alongside Adichie was Helen Oyeyemi who in 2005 published a novel titled *The Icarus Girl*. Oyeyemi went on to publish *The Opposite House* in June 2007 and *White is for Witching* in 2009. Seffi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* published in 2005, is a portrayal of childhood,

[4] Even though throughout this study I use the terms Biafran War and Nigerian Civil war interchangeably, I am aware that the terms might have contestable conceptual implications. My usage is nominal.

friendship and family in a context of military governance. It was followed by *Swallow* in 2007. Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2005) portrays the marginal economic spaces in the Lagos of the 70s and 80s, through the experiences of a sixteen-year old protagonist. In 2007, *Graceland* was followed by *The Virgin of Flames*, which is set in Los Angeles. Other contemporary works include Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Akinwumi Adesokan's *Roots in the Sky* (2004), Jude Dibia's *unbridled* (2007), Segun Afolabi's *Goodbye Lucille* (2007), Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance* (2010), Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2009) and Unoma Nguemo Azuah's *Sky High Flames* (2005).

Most of these authors write from their experiences of the diaspora or with a diasporic consciousness. Adichie, Oyeyemi, Atta and Abani – the writers selected for this study, saliently foreground the narrative of childhood. As we will see, while their selection in this study does not purport to assume synonymy or claim to be absolutely representative to the times, to Nigerian diasporic experience or to Nigerian literature, their foregrounding of the narrative of childhood, while variant and to some extent individually distinct, presents a case for examining the rising importance of childhood as a set of critical ideas dominating contemporary Nigerian fiction. They choose the novel as their genre of expression for the reason that their experience of different spaces and places requires a medium that can, as Seffi Atta says, allow them to fail.[5] As a form, the novel is considered important to them because it allows for multiple entries of narrative voices, for dialogue as well as grounds to challenge the idea of closure. Indeed, the literary theorist Bakhtin (1981:3) refers to the novel as a "genre-in-the-making" and as "the genre of becoming" (1981:22). He refers to the languages of the novel as those that are "not only alive, but still young". These contemporary Nigerian writers' concept of their time – its contemporaneousness – is defined by the process of growth and by childhood figures, images and memories. Thus, while the novel, allows them multiple points of entry and exit, it also affords them space to proceed with their literary growth. These writers, having grown up as children in Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s

[5] Atta says "Novels give me space to fail" in an interview with Ike Anya titled "Sefi Atta: Something Good Comes to Nigerian Literature" [www.sefiatta.com/news .html accessed 20 January 2008]

experienced the brunt of the military regimes, including the oil "boom" of the 1970s and "bust" of the 1990s. It is against this background of childhood that these writers are writing while also presenting a different set of experiences from their older predecessors. Significantly, the experiences that come with migration and living their adult lives elsewhere influences these writers' narratives of childhood. Moreover, the challenges that come with having to grapple with their country's troubled political and socio-economic history as they grew up is affected by the different places they have traversed, which continuously demand them to re-negotiate what it actually means to be a Nigerian.[6] It is instructive to indicate here that each of the writers selected for this study migrated for different reasons: Adichie and Atta migrated to study and build professional careers, Oyeyemi migrated at the age of five, Abani migrated after political detention and coercion. Each of these explain the dis-junctural nature of diaspora – it not a homogenous and linear experience.

The selected works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helen Oyeyemi, Seffi Atta and Chris Abani are instructive in examining the emergence of a (trans/multi)cultural and diasporic group of writers who, through their writing, are not only mapping out a particular *zeitgeist*,[7] but are also offering alternative perspectives of identity, through their experiences as literary and literal "children of the postcolony". Mediated by their imagination of childhood, these writers confront their condition of diaspora, the challenges of a multicultural and transcultural childhood experience, and how it related to what they found as prescribed modes of behaviour and thinking. Childhood, as it is portrayed in their works, presents a discursive field of memories, times, places, spaces, heritages, legacies, traditions and genealogies that are motifs of evolving contemporary experiences and constructions of identities. Thus, these elements form the core set of ideas in the discourse of the represented childhood(s) used in this study.

[6] In her short fiction like "You in America," "My mother the Crazy African" and "The Grief of Strangers," Adichie for instance creates characters of Nigerian descent in America who are grappling with problems of cultural adaptation in romantic relationships.
[7] Zeitgeist, a word whose etymology is German in origin means, "spirit of the times".

While the concept of childhood is not new in African literature, it has evolved through time, becoming an instructive thematic concern that generates newer ways of examining the changing forms of identity and ways of identification. In examining why the narrative of childhood appeals to these writers, we can hypothetically say that firstly, the time of childhood is endowed with the potential to experiment with a constantly shifting and fluid sense of identity. Secondly, childhood, a terrain of open consciousness but which has in fact been the burden of cultural transition, is now a significant marker of the consciousness of postcoloniality and postmodernity in the wake of diasporic contexts.[8] Thirdly, childhood is a terrain of contemporary identity formation which complicates other normative categories of the analysis of identity like gender, race and class among others. In light of these hypothetical ideational strands, the study aims to explore a range of things. Firstly, it seeks to examine childhood as an alternative experience of time through its memory and therefore the source of an alternative history and archive. More specifically, childhood will be seen as presenting alternative perspectives from the memory of everyday living that are equally complex and significant in influencing and problematising normative frameworks of collective identities (ethnic, nation and nation-states for instance). These memories are also an untapped archive from which is found untold stories, nostalgia and trauma that help in understanding forms of diasporic identities and the anxieties of their constant mutation.

Secondly, this study seeks to look at childhood as a site for dialogue. The diasporic and mobile world of the child makes it traverse different spaces and places, hence encountering multiple cultural worlds which it constantly negotiates with in the process of growth. This constant process of negotiation is a form of dialogue with already created regimes of authority and of life by the adult world. Growth is therefore a process interaction with multiple worlds, cultures and epistemes for the child to grow into, while affecting the construction of its own world. Moreover, the idea of dialogue is central to childhood because the articulation of identity is found in the process of dialogue.[9] Spaces,

[8] I engage with definitions of these terms in the section "Theorising Childhood."

[9] Charles Taylor's (1992:25-74) seminal essay "The Politics of recognition," deals with the idea of dialogue as central to formation of identities. It is picked up by Appiah (1992: 149-164; 2005: 1-36) and also by Watson (2000) as influencing the study of identity and multiculturalism.

places and times that influence the narrative of childhood, will be seen as chronotopes of meaning in the immanent dialogic structure of the novel. The notion of dialogue, which essentially signals to negotiation and conversation in the process of identity formation, is also contextualised in Bakhtin's (1981) ideas about the dialogic structure of the novel.

Thirdly, this study sets out to examine the micro-relationships which define the world of childhood as overdetermined by the discourse of the father,[10] in relation to sons and daughters. This discourse (of the father), which would seem synonymous to history and genealogy is re-examined through the dyadic and micro-relationships of fathers and daughters and fathers and sons. The problematisation of this paternal framework of genealogy is found in how sons and daughters seek agency, in their differently gendered roles and expectations in an arborescent familial lineage. The dialectic nature of these dyadic relationships allows for the foregrounding of the process of dialogue, growth, negotiation and of understanding for the child. It is through these works that the process of constructing orthodox understandings of genealogies based on gender will be explored. Moreover, while the notion of genealogy is used in this study as grounds in which to engage in the formation of childhood identity – in reference to family histories and lineages, it also signals to these writers awareness of influence from forefathers and foremothers in the familial genealogy of African literature.

Fourthly, in light of an alternative history provided by the world of childhood, this study aims to look at childhood as a transcultural theme embodied the idea of diasporic identities. The study realises that the world of the child interacts and is woven together by multiple worlds, heritages and legacies. Through the contexts of trans/multiculturality and the idea of childhood as a process, the notion of postmodern identities is highlighted, especially in the context of diasporic experience, which as differentiated from the first three aims mentioned is complicated by being more than just a consciousness.

[10] "Discourse of the father" refers to the image of the father in literary representation and the debates that have arisen, including that of patriarchy.

Childhood in these works seems to create portraits of a *zeitgeist,* which the next section seeks to map out in relation to the selected works for this study.

1.2 Foregrounding the Concept of Childhood in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction

In view of the foregoing, childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction can be seen as a world constructed to deal with diasporic anxieties, consciousnesses and experiences. It is a set of ideas that preoccupies the discursive terrain of the contemporary works outlined above. Therefore, the notion of childhood is explored through the figures of children in these works, as well as the images and memories of childhood from adult protagonists. These various elements are portrayed as constructed through spaces, places, times, genealogies, traditions, heritages and legacies that point to anxieties of identification in contemporary Nigerian fiction. In this way, childhood becomes a discourse where new forms of identities are being represented and which are a product of mobile bodies, histories, memories and times on the part of this group of writers. It demands therefore that this study engages with the notion of childhood not just as a theme but as an idea which helps to construct new ways of identification. In this manner, the works selected for this study present particular dimensions that help to locate childhood as an intriguing and complicated notion in the examination of contemporary forms of identity as represented in the fiction to be studied.

Firstly, while childhood has been used in creative and imaginative expression in African literature, a sustained critical examination of it, as will be shown soon is lacking. In Nigerian literature, critical works have been dealing with the challenge of Nigerian nationhood through aspects like gender, class, ethnicity and religion. While the point of focus for these issues has remained from the perspective of adult figures (as also represented in the creative works), the memories, images and sensibilities of the child have remained subsidiary to the larger issues. Thus, it is time the discourse of childhood "came of age" as a substantial area of critical analysis in Nigerian literature to explore the themes /issues affecting identity today.

Secondly, the works studied here provide a critical impact as new writing that is diasporic in context and consciousness. These works break fresh ground in a post-independent and post-military Nigerian context.[11] Their imagination of the memories of childhood and use of child figures demonstrates the possibility of engaging with fragmented histories simultaneously through conjunctions, disjunctions and mutability foregrounded by the *process* of growth that is definitive of childhood. Childhood memories and symbolic figures have helped these works to transcend the polemics of nationalism that have been an imaginative and critical pastime in Nigeria literature, yet achieving the possibility of footnoting them as part of the *process* of growing up. Therefore, childhood is instructive in justifying the need to approach the construction of post-independent, post-military imagination in Nigeria through a diasporic context, consciousness and experience.

Thirdly and of historiographic importance, this new writing from the diaspora is preceded by an already established writing in African literature. In this way therefore, while this study is not directly engaged in mapping out generations of writing, it draws upon an existing historiography specifically related to childhood, to locate the different writers in this study, positioning them at points of intersection and departure in the representation and criticism of the discourse of childhood. It is in this sense that in an interview after the publication of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie says that the work is supposed to "provoke conversation".[12] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has always invoked conversations between her works and those of Achebe and other earlier writers. In fact, Adichie strategically links herself with Achebe in her first text *Purple Hibiscus*, where there is an intertextual relationship.[13] Adichie's other text *Half of a Yellow Sun* is also significant because it deals with the Nigerian civil war, a topic that has been a preponderant theme in past fiction, non-fiction and criticism. Adichie not only pays tribute to early works on Biafra

[11] I use the term post-military here to refer to the end of Nigeria's long period of military rule marked by the "third republic" of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 after the death of the last military ruler Sani Abacha.
[12] Refer to Adichie's interview "My Book should provoke a Conversation" - http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/bookshelf/book-reviews/my-book-should-provoke-a-conversation-chimamanda-ngozi.html (accessed 30 January 2008)
[13] This is through the striking similarities between Eugene Achike, Okonkwo and Ezeulu. *Purple Hibiscus* invites this comparison through the invocation in its first page of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* through the statement "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère."

but also insists that Biafra is still a terrain of many silences and in light of this, she strategically draws upon the early works on the topic.[14] Adichie's works are therefore important in aiding continued conversations, imaginatively and critically with previous works, giving them currency and influence in contemporary imagination. Adichie's works eventually create and extend critical trajectories in Nigerian, literature while dealing with contemporary diasporic experiences.

Helen Oyeyemi's fiction portrays multi-racial and multinational childhood(s) in the context of diaspora. One of the styles that she uses, which foregrounds her articulation of complex diasporic identities is the combination of the animist, the magical and the real. Her fiction is experimental in tone and structure, as seen in *The Icarus Girl* where she uses the *abiku* motif. This motif is complicated by racialised cultural difference and the frustration of the child protagonist in not neatly fitting into any of the "black" or "white" racial categories. In this story, Jessamy Harrison who is eight years old has never been to Nigeria (her maternal antecedents), but is haunted by the fact that she is half Nigerian. Her journey to Nigeria unveils a twin spirit by the name TillyTilly and from this point, the magical world opens up for her, as she not only moves from her intermediary cultural space but also between the spirit and real world propelled by TillyTilly. Oyeyemi's second novel *The Opposite House* attempts to engage with transnational and multilingual identities.[15]

Seffi Atta has an interesting perception of the family as a grand narrative. When she was growing up, she points out that the prospect of wives seeing their in-laws was more dreadful than soldiers picking somebody up for detention.[16] Her text, *Everything Good will Come,* is concerned with interactions within the family at the level of friendship,

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[14] In the Author's note at the end of *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie points to the influence of early works on Biafra on her creation of characters and what she calls "the mood of middle-class Biafra". She also gives a long list of books on Biafra that informed her research.

[15] Maja the protagonist's Father and mother in *The Opposite House* are black Cubans. However, her mother constantly reaffirms her Yoruba origins by the altar of Yoruba gods she has built in her house. Maja's boyfriend is a Jew who grew up in Ghana and speaks Ewe. While they all reside in London, Maja's mother speaks Spanish and English and also teaches German. All these characters are constantly haunted by "space" – their origins (Cuba) and the London they are living in at present. In this text Cuban and Yoruban mythologies intermingle.

[16] Interview by Ike Anya in her website – www.sefiatta.com/news (accessed 20 January 2008)

religion and other aspects of culture told through the childhood figure and the memories of the adult protagonist.

Chris Abani, the other author in the study presents a different perspective compared to the rest. Abani's *Graceland* focuses on marginal city spaces and slum dwellers in Lagos, depicting a different perspective of childhood in postcolonial Nigeria. *Graceland* demonstrates the influence of popular artistic cultural products of American, Indian and Latin American origin on the narrator Elvis Oke. These products include music and movies which Elvis grew up consuming. While the plot moves alternately through the past and present, the military background works as a metaphorical sounding board.[17] Abani's *The Virgin of Flames* on the other hand seems to transpose his earlier concerns to a different cultural context in Los Angeles. Here, the protagonist Black, who can be considered an older contemporary of Elvis, also lives in the marginal spaces of the Eastern part of this megalopolis. Elvis's childhood memories seem to inform the marginalised position of his present life.

In order for us to locate the foregoing concerns as either complicating or extending critical debates on contemporary identities, it is imperative to map out how childhood as a theme, debate, concern, style or ideological position in African literature generally and Nigerian literature particularly has evolved. In this way, the study acknowledges that representation of child figures, images and memories is not new in African literature. Instead, the focus and intention of this study lies in highlighting the evolution of the construction of these child figures, images and memories but also the lack of a sustained examination of it as an independent and influential category of the analysis of contemporary identity formation. Indeed, the increased return of the writers to the narrative of childhood presents an opportunity to examine childhood as a set of ideas for

[17]The text represents the daily struggles of slum dwellers for food, occupation, shelter and clothing. Fantasy is a dominant element in *Graceland* with the characters moving from one video world to another. *Graceland* works through the popular video image, the intense cultural energy of the slum landscape depicted in the fantastic worlds these characters move in and out of, as well as the daily struggle for survival. Yet the father and son relationship between Elvis and his father Sunday Oke is significant in locating the space of the family as a great influence in Elvis's perception of the transcultural world he is living in.

understanding how contemporary forms of identity in Nigerian literature are (being) constructed.

1.3 Reading Childhood: A Literary Historiography

The exploration of childhood is not a new development in African literature because the family has been a regular template in African narratives. However, the representation of childhood has evolved across time. It is this evolution that makes childhood in the 21st century a significant and distinct literary discourse worthy of concern. This development has run parallel with the construction of identity against the background of colonial history and critical attempts to conceptualise this epistemic landscape that Mudimbe (1994) calls "the idea of Africa".

In African literature, the demarcated representation of childhood started with Camara Laye's use of the child protagonist in his text *The African Child* (1959). This was due to the rise of Negritude in African literature in the 1950s and 60s (Okolie, 1988:29). Negritude was a movement that influenced francophone African writing in an attempt to (re)symbolise blackness through a discourse of decolonisation. Laye's the African child portrayed childhood through this consciousness of Negritude. Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (1966) is another account told through the child protagonist Toundi living in colonial Cameroon. Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1971) and *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1971) are other examples of Francophone texts that deal with gendered childhood in the advent of new bi-cultural worlds that pitted the city against the country, the traditional against the modern and the colonial against the colonised worlds in Africa. The representation of childhood in these works was as Maxwell Okolie (1988:30) says "a psychogenic impulse of self-assertion and self-search," within the context of the larger African society. The child was represented as an iconic symbol for the cultural tensions in the African world in the wake of colonialism. Laye's *The African Child,* for instance, was a picturesque representation of "infantile" Africa in innocence and purity (Abanime,

1998[18]; King, 1980). Laye, the protagonist, is in a process of acculturation through colonial education. His family agonises over the thought of sending him to school in the city. In these examples, the African child is seen as caught in between the polarised worlds of the village and the city, symbolic of tradition and modernity.

In these early representations, there existed a dialectic where whilst writers like Camara Laye represented the child as the ideal image *for* Africa in its process of decolonisation, Mongo Beti on the other hand sought to represent a realist image *of* the African child in conflict with patriarchal authority. For instance, Beti's, writing as Alex Biyidi, about the African Child in *Presence Africaine* asks: "Did this Guinean, a person of my race, who was, according to him, a very sharp boy, then never see anything other than peaceful, beautiful and maternal in Africa?" (Biyidi, 1954:420). Beti's works went on to pit sons against their fathers "not for access to the mother but over the figurative equivalent of a sister" (Kortenaar, 2007:187). Hence Beti paints a realist image of the presence of conflict in the process of maturation for the African child, whose absence Marete (1998) also decries of in Laye's *The African Child*.[19]

The representation of childhood in the 1950s and 60s in Francophone African literature was therefore marked by the contrast of innocence and conflict. Cultural retrieval was a major aim of these portrayals of childhood. This aim was aided by the racialised consciousness brought about by the Negritude movement that swept across francophone West Africa. Hence, childhood was symbolic of a collective African identity by virtue of it being a means of retrieving a collective pastoral psyche that was believed to be "African". Camara Laye uses the image of the child to rewrite perceptions of Africa that were dominant in colonial discourse. The innocence of this childhood is akin to what Blake does in *Innocence and Experience* in the Romantic imagination: as a "symbol of imagination and sensibility" (Coveney, 1957:31) and as "a utopia of time" (Heath, 2003:20). But as Biyidi (1954) and Marete (1998) argue, the presence of conflict in the representation of childhood cannot be ignored, and they decry this romanticisation of African childhood. Indeed, in looking at the "theme of childhood in commonwealth

[18] Abanime "Childhood `a la Camara Laye and Childhood `a la Mongo Beti" pp. 82-90.
[19] Marete "Absence of Conflict in Maturation in The African Child," pp. 91-101.

fiction" Desai (1981:45) argues that the African child in these narratives is in fact "no romantic angel" but "a bundle of impulses […] trying to piece together his fragmentary experiences". Desai says that the child is a complex being, in fact "often more complex than the adult, subjected to an unpredictable process of growth."

It is in view of the complexity of childhood that this study aims to point out how the works of Laye and Mongo Beti also highlighted the relationship between sons and fathers. *Mission to Kala,* for instance, portrays the haunting presence of the father of the protagonist through his (father's) absence. During his "mission," the protagonist constantly worries about his father's expectations of his results from school. There is an internal conflict in the protagonist's mind throughout his mission. This omnipresence of the father is a significant trope in representations of childhood that this study intends to pursue, albeit in a more complicated context of cultural plurality in a postcolonial world.

The representation of childhood in Nigerian fiction can be traced back to Okonkwo's family in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This is through the childhoods of Ikemefuna, Ezinma and Nwoye; with Ikemefuna, to borrow Michelle Wright's (2004:8) definition of the black diaspora, as "Other-from-within," Ezinma occupying both a terrestrial and extraterrestrial world and Nwoye's childhood contested by Okonkwo using the social construct of gender. All the three childhoods are actually marked, to use Stuart Hall's (1996) words, by an "internal diaspora,"[20] an "other-from-within". Moreover, Achebe's *Arrow of God* engages childhood as a site of experimentation, for example when Ezeulu's concept of the mask dancing is demonstrated through his attempt at using a child to make contact with the world of colonial missionaries. Hence the child is constructed as the object of change. In fact, the concept of the "mask dancing" refers to changing time, to transitions – the mask becomes ontological.[21] Childhood in *Arrow of*

[20] Refer to Hall "When was the post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit," p.242-260. Okonkwo wishes for a composite of Nwoye and Ezinma as an ideal child. Yet as Achebe seems to be demonstrating, childhood is not as homogenously constructed as the Umuofia society and indeed Okonkwo expects it to be; it is not only gendered, but also complexly layered.

[21] The trope of the "mask dancing" is highly gendered and an inscription of patriarchal authority, considering that only titled men could wear it and the masquerade ceremonies too had strong gender connotations. Its importance here is its connection to change as well as its relation to the child. Ezeulu perceives that the best way to understand a world that is like a mask dancing is to create rapport and he uses

God is an object for mobility – of "being". Indeed, as Richard Coe (1984:17) says "[m]obility is the very essence of childhood". In the early works of Achebe, childhood is constructed within bi-cultural and sometimes tri-cultural worlds in which identities are relatively stable and fixed. But what is significant here is the image of the child as symbolic of transience, mobility, becoming, as an icon of transition, and as experimental, even though within singular, dual or triple socio-political and cultural milieus that are distinct. This symbolic capital has persisted in the contemporary narratives in this study, signaling to the *processes* that define childhood, and which give it the agency that this study attempts to foreground.

Childhood in Nigerian fiction has also been represented and critically examined through feminist dimensions in the works by Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali among others. Childhood in these writers' works takes on a gendered perspective, using the representation of "girlhood" to further concerns related to feminism. The criticism that comes out of these works hardly examines childhood as an influential discourse by itself but rather as an appendage of the aspect of motherhood (Ikonne, 1992; Agbasiere, 1992;[22] Okereke, 1992;[23] Uwakeh, 1998;[24] Alabi, 1998;[25] Nnaemeka, 1997). Moreover, African feminist literary criticism does not do much in foregrounding childhood as a significant discourse but rather as a sub-discourse that affirms the rise of the adult female figure in African literature.

Motherhood is discussed within the political dimension of gender (Stratton, 1995; Schipper, 1987) and as an entry point into dealing with what Anne Oakley (1994) calls "malestream" literature. In a sense then, the rise of African feminist literary discourse has remained "adultist," while it argued that motherhood was an ironical "pedestal" in works by male writers (Schipper, 1987; Anne McClintock, 1995; Nnaemeka, 1997). Consequently, the figure of the child has remained obscure and the ideas that childhood

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his son to make contact with this world. In this act is the importance of childhood as a site of experimentation and transition.

[22] Agbasiere "Social integration of the child in Buchi Emecheta's novels," pp. 127-137.

[23] Okereke "Children in the Nigerian Feminist Novel," pp.138-149.

[24] Uwakweh "Carving a Niche: Visions of Gendered Childhood in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, & Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*," pp.9-21.

[25] Alabi "Gender Issues in Zaynab Alkali's Novels," pp. 22-28.

and its worldview presented remained peripheral. Perhaps, as Shulamith Firestone argues in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1972) motherhood was to be problematised as a social construct, with the female adult figure divorced from childhood because of her worth and worldview as an independent adult female figure rather than for her ability to be a mother.

The rise of African feminist literary criticism has howver brought significant attention to the idea of "girlhood" in literary childhood studies, thus dispelling the idea that childhood is a homogenous concept in African societies. Childhood's gendered dimensions are therefore crucial in the development of feminist criticism. Gendered childhoods have become significant in imaginative literary expressions and scholarship, especially those in diasporic contexts. There are accounts of growing up male or female in a global world: for instance, in the anthology edited by Faith Edise and Nina Sichel titled *Unrooted Childhoods: Memoirs of growing up Global* (2004) accounts are given about female and male childhoods. Another anthology edited by Franklin Abbott (1998) *Boyhood: Growing up Male* is important in representing gendered childhoods.

I am aware of pointed attempts by some scholars at examining childhood at critical levels in African literary criticism and even as they are available, they are not sustained examinations but rather related examinations within other larger concerns. Ikonne, C, Oko, E, & Onwudinjo, P (1992) for example, edited a book titled *Children and Literature in Africa*. Apart from the concerns of children's literature and its criticism, there are essays in this volume that attempt at foregrounding childhood. In this book, Oguike examines the "power of childhood" in Francophone West African novels and points out initiation and the other totalising discourse of colonialism as markers defining childhood. Agbasiere examines childhood in the works of Buchi Emecheta with the aim of arguing a case for societal integration while pointing that the child is "important in the continuity of the group […] the link between the past, the present and the future" (127). Okereke looks at children in light of motherhood in a telling title "Children in the Nigerian Feminist Novel". This criticism echoes Ezeulu's idea of the "mask dancing," where the child is used as a figure of transition but within bi-cultural and at best tri-cultural worlds that are characterised by colonialism as an overdetermining meta-narrative. Yet the overriding

concern for most of this criticism remains the representation of colonialism, feminism – in its debunking of patriarchy – and nationhood.

The representation of childhood in Nigerian fiction can also be examined through the genre of the autobiography. An example is Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981). The young Wole presents a more complex image of the child. Being the son of a headmaster, he gets education earlier than children his age. His exposure to the international media through, for instance, news about the Second World War and his initial movement out of the parsonage's walls are important in helping him develop a mind of his own. Through the media, cultures acquire easy mobility, creating a transcultural world for the young Wole. It is the same movement from the city to the village that makes Achebe's childhood memorable in *Home and Exile* (2000) – that helps him rationalise the difference between tribe and nation.

The years of military governance in Nigeria are significant in contributing to newer and interesting dimensions of childhood in Nigerian literature. During this time, the concept of the Nigerian nation took centre stage. Childhood is made an allegory of the growth, innocence, struggles for independence and fragmentation of the Nigerian nation. Therefore, the *abiku/ogbanje* (spirit-child) is re-invented to symbolise the fragmentation of this time. In a special edition of *African Literature Today* (1988) themed "Childhood in African Literature," Jones traces the *abiku/ogbanje* motif from Ezinma the *ogbanje* in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, through the poems of J.P Clark and Soyinka, to Ben Okri's Trilogy *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*. Even though Jones's historiography of "the child before and after birth" is important in pointing to a new image of childhood, it does not dwell on childhood as an alternative and independent discourse other than an allegory of the nation, with the conclusion that the portrayal of childhood is ultimately about social responsibility. The other articles in this edition, pointed as they seem in discussing the notion of childhood, still construct it under the category of feminism (Uwakeh, 1998; Alabi, 1998). For others like Okolie, Inyama,[26] Abanime and Marete childhood is discussed under the notion of negritude.

[26] Inyama, N. F "'Beloved Pawns': The Childhood Experience in the Novels of Chinua Achebe & Mongo Beti," pp. 36-43.

Nonetheless, the *abiku* child as represented by Ben Okri heralds an important rupture of time and space in which the child is not the usual cultural icon, or merely a subject of cultural transition but an iconoclast. Azaro, the *abiku* child in Okri's much acclaimed *The Famished Road* defies both his spiritual companions and also his earthly relations by staying on earth. Even though Okri's worlds in his *trilogy* are essentially bi-cultural and bi-partite, as in the spirit and human worlds, and no different from the city/country, colonial/anti-colonial, innocence/conflict worlds in earlier representations, the *agency* of Azaro is a concept this study highlights as significant in marking the evolving portrait of the child. Agency is crucially enhanced by exposure and the availability of mythico-physical choices. Azaro has the world(s) at his feet and his fluid movement from one to the other provides him a sense of agency. It must be pointed out as Hawley (1995) does, that Okri's predilection for youthful protagonists parallels many of his contemporaries. The fiction coming out of Nigeria in the 21st century is characterised by the use of children and youthful protagonists. For example: Kambili, Jaja, Ugwu, and Baby in Adichie's works, Enitan in Seffi Atta's work, Elvis in Abani's and Jessamy in Oyeyemi's works are all protagonists in childhood and youthful stages. They represent an array of worldviews at different stages of their lives.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* tells the story of Kambili, a thirteen-year old girl, who struggles with an overbearing father: a man who is fundamentally Catholic, publishes a newspaper that is against oppressive military governance but ironically inflicts physical and psychological abuse on his family. Kambili not only struggles with a conflicting attitude of fear and reverence towards her father, but also with voicing herself as an adolescent and female child. *Half of a Yellow Sun* tells a story about the Biafran war and the role of Igbo intellectuals, who are caught in the daily struggles of raising children. The story is partly told through an adolescent houseboy Ugwu who is later drafted into the war, and whose voice is examined later in this study as Adichie's construction of a conceptual persona.

Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* is the story of Jessamy Harrison, an eight-year old girl, living in London and struggling with a dual parentage history. Her maternal origins are in

Nigeria while paternal are English. Jessamy's quest is related to her sense of identity, as she struggles with belonging to both worlds that are racially and culturally different. In *The Opposite House*, Oyeyemi's second novel, this identity politics is extended further through an even more complicated family set up where multiple languages, histories of dispersal, living and migration define the daily life of the protagonist Maja.

Chris Abani's *Graceland*, set in Lagos Nigeria is the story of Elvis Oke, presently sixteen year old, which goes back to his formative years, alternating it with his present life. Elvis struggles with a feminised sense of belonging, which is influenced by his dead mother, but which his father despises. At the same time he is caught in a maze of transcultural, virtual and fantastic worlds that help him cross spatio-temporal worlds with the ease of imagination. *The Virgin of Flames* is a story about Black, an American of Nigerian and Salvadorian descent, whose memories and images of childhood influence his choice of economic livelihood which is also intricately linked with his multiple sexual identities.

Seffi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is the story of Enitan, a lawyer who follows in the footsteps of her father, an ever-present figure in her familial and professional world. She struggles to reconnect with her maternal genealogy, until secrets of her father's past life come out.

In view of the earlier representations and critical examinations of childhood I have already drawn attention to, these writers' (Adichie, Abani, Atta and Oyeyemi) imaginative representations of childhood figures and memories redrafts earlier accounts and criticisms because of migration and a resultant diasporic context, not to mention an increased expansion of the idea of the postcolonial and its continued experience. It would therefore be interesting to trace these shifts in representation, how they converse with previous texts that influence them and how they ultimately, at an imaginative level provoke new critical paradigms, affected by the postcolonial, postmodern and contemporary world that they engage with.

In literary critical circles, the emergence of these writers' works marks the beginning of what has been classified as a "third generation" of Nigerian writers. This group of writers is defined as "third generation" with the idea of children who have "come of age". The symbolic figure of the child which is used to classify these writers as a new generation does not however give sustained critical value to childhood as a significant discourse in these works, other than a little more than being symbolic of putative literary growth. A special edition of *English in Africa* (May 2005) was dedicated to these works.

Adesanmi and Dunton, in the edition of *English in Africa* set out what they call "preliminary theoretical considerations" for these works. The editors point out the emergence of the novel in Nigeria since the turn of the 21st century as a shift in genre that has consolidated the presence of this "third generation". In an illuminating statement, they summarise what they see as an order of knowledge in which these works have been crafted, providing conceptual contexts for these works. They also suggest critical tools for the examination. They say:

> The first obvious theoretical implication is that we are dealing essentially with texts born into the scopic regime of the postcolonial and the postmodern, an order of knowledge in which questions of subjecthood and agency are not only massively overdetermined by the politics of identity in a multicultural and transitional frame but in which the tropes of Otherness and subalternity are being remapped by questioning erstwhile totalities such as history, nation, gender and their respective symbologies. (2005:15)

The notion that these works remap the ideas of subjectivity and agency is important. It implies that these works deal with an alternative order of, as the critics above say "totalities such as history, nation, gender and their respective symbologies." Heather Hewett, in the same edition, takes the debate further by her examination of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* as a *bildungsroman.* Hewett's salient point, which I find instructive, is that this coming-of-age narrative is characterised by intertextuality. She demonstrates that

Purple Hibiscus is characterised by "transnational intertextuality," something which for Hewett and which is important for this study "suggests the presence of a heterogenous, diasporic dimension within contemporary Nigerian literature" (2005:75).

In this edition of *English in Africa,* Eze Chielozona makes a case for these writers enacting what he calls (in his title) "cosmopolitan solidarity". For Eze, these writers symbolically experience Ezeulu's notion of the mask dancing. Eze demonstrates this using Chris Abani's alternation of the past and present time in his text *Graceland*. For Eze these writers are the products of an embodied transculturality. Eze points out that "transculturality implies the existence of interstices, or the state of endless crossing of boundaries" (100). What underpins this transculturality, according to Eze, is the the process of migration and its consequences. He says:

> Migratory process involves not only the movement of people from one place to another, but also their being brought into contact with knowledge, ideas, and material cultures of other places through the instrumentality of the principle vectors of the information age, notably cable television and the internet. (2005:102)

Migration and other processes of mobility are influential contexts for these texts and particularly for contemporary childhood. In fact, as Richard Coe (1984) points out:

> The coming of the railways, the motor car, and the airplane-even the intervention of wars, persecutions, and exiles have made it easier to conceive of childhood as a separate, autonomous state of being. The child who was born, grew up, lived, and died in the same village or hamlet was less able to distance his adult from his immature self than the child who, having passed his early years on some remote farm, estate, or sheep station unidentifiable from the atlas, came later to roam among the great cities and capitals of the world. (17)

Transculturality is characterised by mobility and therefore by (re)definitions of concepts of space, place and time. Adichie, Abani, Atta and Oyeyemi write from the diaspora, a space that is far removed from their places of birth, therefore providing impetus for distinguishing their childhood from their adult lives at present. Moreover, when we talk about childhood we are talking about time, what Okolie (1998:31) refers to as "one undivided entity across time and space". For instance, a scholar like Phillipe Aries (1960) examines childhood across "centuries," pointing out that the idea of childhood has evolved across art and culture and that it has always been defined through chronology. He points out that this chronology is represented in aspects like dates of birth and biographical timelines, where for instance, pictures or paintings were always dated. Alison James and Allan Prout's (1990) idea of the construction and reconstruction of childhood also emphasises the significance of time in childhood.

Hence childhood, an embodiment of transculturality becomes "a shifting set of ideas" (Cunningham, 1995:1). The idea of shift connected to the process of migration and mobility is crucial in understanding the concept of childhood in the imaginative representations of this century. What this special edition of *English in Africa* that deals with the writing from diaspora does is to give conceptual contexts for reading these works. Even though their main purpose was to argue a case for the emergence of a new generation of Nigerian writing, their idea of the "coming of age" of childhood calls the reader to recognise the need for more emphasis on the materiality of childhood in these selected works. For them, the idea of a child is used as a means to achieving a categorical and generic end – to systematise these writing for curricular reasons. This strand of analysis is extended in the other special issue of *Research in African Literature* by Adesanmi and Dunton (2008), also dedicated to a "third generation" of Nigerian writing.[27]

As an emerging discourse, childhood has not received sustained examination in the criticism of Nigerian fiction. However, as pointed in the earlier sections, while

[27] In this edition, Madeleine Hron's article "Ora na-azu nwa: The Figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels," pp. 27-48 can be singled out as directly dealing with the notion of "transcultural" childhoods which occupy liminal cultural spaces that allow them to be creative and to enact what Hron calls "possibility and most importantly resistance."

representations remained present in African fiction, the criticism of childhood has subsumed it into other larger and totalising categories. In more recent scholarship in other parts of Africa though, it is emerging as a significant discourse. In Zimbabwe, Robert Muponde (2005) does an interesting study of "Childhood, History and Resistance," looking at the "Images of Children and Childhood in Zimbabwean Literature in English."

Muponde's (2005) work examines Zimbabwean fiction through a period of three decades while tracing the evolution of the image of the child and the idea of childhood through this period. This study is significant in pointing out how the worldviews of childhood rupture singular and "adultist" perspectives and therefore provide an alternative order of things. Muponde interrogates aspects of history and resistance in the long process of Zimbabwean journeys to independence, using the representation of the child and childhood in Zimbabwean fiction. As incisive and pointed as this study is, there is a sense in which the ideas of childhood as represented by the writers he examines are still shackled by the concerns of colonial and anti-colonial discourse. Muponde's study however aims to foreground the evolving representation of the child in Zimbabwean fiction since 1972, in reflecting the intricacies of what he constantly refers to as the "nation-family". Muponde's study is significant as not only underlining the relevance of sustained work on childhood criticism in Zimbabwean literature, but also in giving the concept a practically dynamic background by being sensitive to its multi-facetted nature. Indeed, while he examines childhood as a site for the alternative, subversive and negotiable, he pays heed to Oakley's (1994) ideas about the danger of treating children as a homogenous group and therefore creating childhood as a totalising discourse. Muponde's examination of "girlhoods" and "dystopic childhoods" for instance, portrays a deeper insight into the theoretical examination of dimensions of represented childhood.

Muponde's work is an important and sustained study that is based on the proposition that childhood provides groundwork for an alternative order of things and therefore making it possible "to think of the constructedness of place and belonging, and the tactical selection of options and items that signify belonging to a place, where no absolute stability and identity is possible" (2005:92). This means that childhood as a set of ideas is also about the imaginative possibilities. In fact, in a seminal study in *African Literature Today*,

Richard Priebe (2006:41) makes the point that "In writing about children, no less than in having them, we think about possibility".

Priebe's article is an examination of "Transcultural Identity in African Narratives of Childhood". He attributes transculturality to the nomadic nature of the family today, which constructs childhood as increasingly affected towards the discourse of identity formation. The kernel of Priebe's argument lies in this statement:

> The earliest works of childhood were addressing concerns about new bi- or even tri-cultural identities against an emergent print culture. The most recent writers of childhoods appear to be addressing a concern that a shift has taken place, that instead of living in a multi-cultural world made up of easily identifiable cultures, we are living in a more fluid transcultural or even transnational world. (50-51)[28]

That there has been a rupture of worlds for the child is crucial. Contemporary childhoods are therefore beyond nationalisms because a rupture has occurred due to conditions of exile and increasing migration. Hence, childhood has become a transnational theme, defying geographical boundaries and as Priebe says:

> The genre continues to be written by writers who come from almost every geographical area in Africa, a fact that likely reflects an increasing presence of the transcultural theme and the likelihood that we will see an increasing number of works written in this genre well into our new century (50).

A general caveat for Priebe's argument about transcultural and transnational childhoods is in the idea that regional, territorial and even geographical locations of childhood act as

[28] Priebe "Transcultural Identity in African Narratives of Childhood," p. 41-52. This study recognises, as Priebe does that multiculturality implies some distinction while transculturality signals to more fluidity, indeed as childhood itself is a mobile, shifting world especially in the context of diaspora.

an axis for different childhoods – as in the case of Nigeria as a distinct geographical identity with a potentially different experience of childhood compared to other regions.

What I hope to have demonstrated from the above discussion is that the examination of contemporary childhood has to be located in a variety of conceptual contexts. Initial debates, as examined, about the group of writers selected for this study, point at "transculturality," "transnational intertextuality" and "cosmopolitan solidarity" as preliminary critical contexts and conceptual backgrounds. Influential resources have been drawn from the childhoods of the writers this study examines. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is categorical about her childhood influences. Having grown up in the same house that Achebe lived, at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, she has followed in the "footsteps of Achebe," implying that she is his protégée. Achebe's reciprocal statement that "she came almost fully made"[29] lends some meaning to the idea of an alternative genealogy of the father and daughter they have created. Chris Abani is also categorical about the childhood influences from television and video that influence his text *Graceland*. Sefi Atta invokes her genealogical connection to the poet Christopher Okigbo but most importantly, in her writing, she was excited by her childhood days when the military regime was less dangerous than the visit of a mother-in-law. Helen Oyeyemi admits that a lot of her childhood experience is reflected in the "anxious" and "weird" characters of her texts. Her childhood life has been highlighted by an attempted suicide and a hermitic school life affected by anxieties of identification after relocating to London from Nigeria at the age of five.

Childhood for these writers therefore determines the multiple meanings that arise from their texts. Their texts are transcultural and multicultural by virtue of the writers' diasporic consciousness and intertextual in view of the presence of literary foremothers and forefathers, with whom the writers affirm or deny influence. Childhood is therefore a significant set of ideas which they use to negotiate often conflicting worldviews,

[29] Refer to www.themorningnews.org/archives/birnbaum. (Accessed 22nd September 2008)

concepts, ideology and in which they are using to construct a significant discourse, as a critical evaluation of their texts.

As might have been gleaned from the above, this study's examination of childhood is located in a dense matrix of ideas, concepts and themes. Indeed, I have introduced a collage of concepts – postcolonial, postmodern, diaspora, transcultural, multicultural as related to the narratives of childhood this study examines. It would therefore be logical to define and delineate how these concepts influence the study of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction, in relation to the objectives the study has set out to accomplish. The next section attempts this process of delineation, while foregrounding the notions of space, place, time, memories, genealogies, heritages, legacies and traditions which are sub-conceptual levels of analysis that underline the texts of childhood that the study examines.

1.4 Theorising Childhood: Critical and Conceptual Contexts

Segun Afolabi's 2005 Caine Prize winning story "*Monday Morning*" in his anthology *A Life Elsewhere* (2006) is a portrayal of diaporic life. The story deals with the protagonists' feeling of estrangement and alienation. In this anthology, he creates portraits of migrants, immigrants, exiles and asylum seekers in Europe and America, predominantly the United Kingdom and particularly London. Segun Afolabi's portraits reveal the uncertainty that comes with living a life elsewhere. They reveal the artificiality and unrootedness of belonging and of non-attachment. These portraits point to the creation of various diasporic identities. Migrants, immigrants, exiles, expatriates and asylum seekers present variations of diasporic identity relative to the cause and effect of their movement from putative "homelands". In fact, the movement of people delimits spatial locations. Fredric Jameson (1991:37) attributes this deconstruction to "the technology of the reproduction of the simulacrum" – television, video, camera and other media. As Jameson (1991:160) later discusses, space is increasingly becoming defined by utopianism. In other words, imagination as well as the actual movement of people and

cultural products has redefined notions of the temporal and the spatial, by making them boundless.

This study examines fiction written by writers in the diaspora. Like Segun Afolabi, the fiction of these writers is influenced by their migration to Europe and the United States of America. Here, influence does not necessarily mean that these works are exclusively about life in the diaspora. It means that these works are informed by the diaspora as a condition and experience, which becomes also a consciousness in the texts. It is also to say that these writers grapple with history through their alternating experiences of space and place. Therefore, to read their works means to examine the intersections of the different interpretations of history which produce diasporic senses of identity.[30] In her examination of colonialism and colonial discourse for example, Ania Loomba (1998:40) points out that literary criticism no longer examines history as simply a background but as an essential part of textual meaning that is fundamental to the construction of culture.

History in the imaginative and critical levels of this study is engaged with through the idea of childhood, which in African literature has been read as a minority discourse (Jones, 1998). Innocence has been the dominant theme in the examination of childhood in African literature (Okolie, 1998).[31] The image of the child was initially pitted against the structures of colonial power. However, it could be argued that in the case of Toundi in Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*, the portrayal of naive childhood was also used effectively to ironize and satirize the colonial regime's use of authority. Moreover, colonialist discourse itself was guided by the binaries of colonizer versus colonized (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1978).[32] Childhood, as set of critical ideas, remained a minority, like feminism. But with a new postcolonial dispensation, perhaps a new dimension of theorising childhood can be developed.

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[30] The concept of diaspora is historicised as Paul Gilroy (1993) argues in his exploration of the "Black Atlantic". Avtar Brah (1996) also examines the convergence of different trajectories of history within the concept of diaspora in its idea of "homing" or eliciting a desire for home.
[31] Maxwell Okolie, "Childhood in African Literature: A Literary Perspective," pp.29-35.
[32] Fanon's idea of the "Manichean," and Said's concept of how orientalism is founded on a geographical binary of the East and West lay grounds for a critique of colonialist discourse

The emergence of the idea of childhood as the subject of this study comes from writing that is in the critical scope of the postcolonial. While the term and concept, postcolonial' has come under discussion in numerous critiques (Appiah, 1992; Hulme, 1993; Williams & Chrisman, 1994; Chambers & Curtis, 1996; Quayson, 2000; Gaylard, 2005), it is taken to mean the temporal locations of the texts. This does not only mean the time of publication as considered postcolonial but also the textual context as postcolonial: the term here refers to texts set in postcolonial time after the receipt of independence. In this way, the term is used as a spatio-temporal signifier. However, all criticism and theory on the term and concept postcolonial seems to converge on the idea that "postcolonial" involves an engagement with colonialism and its consequences in the past and present, as well as global developments that are viewed to be the after-effects of the empire (Quayson, 2000:2; Huggan, 2001). A reading of the works this study examines is primarily seen through the notions of "postcolonial discourse" and "postcolonial criticism". I use the term "postcolonial criticism" in line with Moore-Gilbert's (1997:12) definition as "a set of reading practices […] preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination – economic, cultural and political." While Moore-Gilbert (1997) instructively distinguishes between "postcolonial theory" and "postcolonial criticism," Robert Young's (2001) historiography of "postcolonialism" as a creolised and hybridised concept helps in explaining why it is suitable for this study – because childhood memories, images and figures, are situated in material conditions that are postcolonial. At the same time, their diasporic consciousness opens a wider plane of discussion on concepts of mobility, borders, places, spaces and times that can be approached through an understanding of the postcolonial condition as a conjuncture and a disjuncture, as multicultural and transcultural – concepts that this section seeks to unpack further.[33] Moreover, there are particular aspects that the novels present as I will discuss, that bring relevance to the specific ways in which such a theoretical approach can be constructed.

[33] Ania Loomba (1998:180) argues also that migrations have become a marker of contemporary livelihood and that therefore "in crucial ways diasporic identities have come to represent much of the experience of 'postcoloniality'".

This study's aim to examine childhood as an emerging discourse means exploring how the world of the child in the texts is central to the production of meaning. Bringing the world of the child as central to textual analysis is also invoking postmodern readings of the texts.[34] This postmodern dimension of childhood is underlined by the notion of mobile childhood which creates anti-foundational conditions that are complicated by the diasporic space. In fact, for us to connect the idea of mobile childhoods to the context of diaspora, it would be crucial to foreground the methodology or critical approach for this kind of scenario. In this way therefore, some critics of globalisation and diaspora realise the necessity of a pedagogical shift in theorising diaspora. Arjun Appadurai (2003) for instance argues that disjuncture and difference are the appropriate ways of approaching the concept of diaspora because the binary of the centre and margin is not enough to capture the politics of difference and the fluid and shifting determinants of social and cultural life.

In the texts to be studied, diaspora is a conceptual context and when we talk about it, notions of place and space become important, especially because of the idea of home inherent in the conceptualisation of diaspora. Moreover, being in the diaspora as Bhabha (1990) discusses, involves inhabiting marginal spaces and therefore identities in the fabric of that particular nation. The marginal identities, according to Bhabha, are engaged in a continuous erasure of national boundaries. Bhabha underlines the irony inherent in these marginal diasporic identities by arguing that they might be at the centre if examined in the context of the "homeland". Hence if examined in context diaspora ruptures the specificity of space, place, centre, margin and therefore identity because of how these aspects shift. In this case, therefore, the 21st century experience of diaspora can be read as postmodern: since its presence constantly erases national boundaries and makes them fluid, it subsequently rejects the exclusivity of the centre and the margins. Similarly, Appiah (1992:235) posits that postmodernism is characterised by the rejection of the exclusivity of "mainstream consciousness" and a "multiplication of distinctions". The culture of the postmodern, Appiah posits, is influenced by transnationality and is

[34] While postmodernism as a definitive marker remains fairly nebulous, it is usually appropriated into a mélange of concepts. It can be a condition, a temporal marker, a descriptor of identity among other appropriations within different readings – there can be different postmodernisms.

therefore global, a concept that he later elaborates in his text *Cosmopolitanism* (Appiah, 2006). Diaspora invokes anti-foundational sentiments. Adichie, Abani, Atta and Oyeyemi by virtue of writing in the diaspora, write with a postmodern consciousness. This postmodern consciousness is enhanced by their need to engage with migrant life; the need to influence their writing by the different places they have traversed through their childhood. The condition of diaspora, by rupturing space and time, obliges these writers to look back through the time of childhood, to reconcile their multinational, transnational and multicultural identities.[35] Hence, childhood is characterised in their writing by aspects of space, place and time.

To examine childhood is also to deal with the aspect of time because childhood is a set of ideas about a particular time. Moreover, to foreground childhood as a significant discourse in Nigerian literature means to open up alternative critical *space* that converses with *time*, in this case that of adulthood. As writers who are "coming of age," the idea of a time of childhood is significant in plotting a narrative of their growth. It is through the time of childhood that this writing can be seen to engage with the process of growth. However, this time is constructed as a composite of events in historical narratives and those outside them – alternative accounts from the everyday living of childhood. Therefore, we can foreground the use of time in Kambili's *Purple Hibiscus*. Spent in the house in Enugu, Kambili's time is characterised by daily religious rituals and affected by culinary ceremonies in the context of a very brutal military regime, which she experiences indirectly and which is used as a metaphorical sounding board. Similarly, Jessamy Harrison's use of time in the *Icarus Girl* is portrayed as being spent in the cupboard and around her house in an uncannily precocious and delirious state. Elvis Oke's time in *Graceland* is spent trying to be an Elvis Presley impersonator in a bid to eke out a living against the background of a brutal military environment. All these are alternative times that also tell us something about the fragmented positions (Quayson,

[35] An instructive theorisation of the concept of diaspora as distinct from such concepts as "transnational" and "multinational" is found in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (2003:8) in which they posit that as distinct from the other concepts, diaspora is more anthropocentric while transnational includes cultural artifacts, NGOs, capital and other non-anthropocentric elements. This is similar to Appandurai's (2003) idea of the "ethnoscape" as an anthropocentric dimension of the different scapes of global cultural flows (technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes) which he argues, are in a disjunctural relationship with each other.

2000), of a postcolonial and postmodern subjectivity.[36] These "times," as it were, are in fact inscribed in the ordinariness of daily life and as this study examines, through the ideas of Michel De Certeau (1984), they become "tactics" that open up spaces for resistance, for irony and therefore agency for the figure of the child within an adultist regime. Subsequently, the authors rewrite orthodox experience of time and history and therefore ways in which archives are processed.

In Helen Oyeyemi's works, the element of time is also captured by the medley of nationalities. Jessamy Harrison's time of childhood in *The Icarus Girl* is spent in trying to understand her English and Nigerian nationalities. Maja's family in *The Opposite House* is also a boiling pot of nationalities and histories. Her father is a black Cuban and her mother can trace her antecedents in Yoruba while her boyfriend is a Jew who grew up in Ghana. They all live in London. Her mother, called Chabella, teaches German and speaks Spanish, which all of them speak, as well as English by virtue of living in London. There is, in postmodern terminology, a pastiche of nationalities and languages in this household, making the postmodern concepts of dispersal, hyper-reality and metafiction relevant interpretative contexts for these works.[37] Aspects of dispersal and hyper-reality are essential in defining diasporic identities. In fact, in this text, there is an intra-diasporic dimension of worldviews, portrayed in the patchwork of nationalities as well as heritages, legacies and myths that comprise various simultaneously influential genealogical frameworks. At the same time, diasporic identities are processed meaningfully through memories of childhood; a time of rapid mobility, scattering of cultures, selves and geographies as in the case of Jessamy Harrison and Maja in Oyeyemi's works; desire and successful attempts at mobility in the childhoods of Elvis Oke and Kambili in Abani and Adichie's works respectively. Furthermore, one encounters an obsession with space in the works of these writers as they rack through the childhood memories of their characters. In Adichie's work for instance, her upbringing in Nsukka, a university town in Nigeria is *leitmotific* of her own childhood as represented in both *Purple Hibiscus* and

[36] See Ato Quayson (2000) "Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," pp. 132-155.
[37] While dispersal basically implies the instability and potential for multiple meanings, hyperreality in postmodernism refers to the blurred lines between fiction and fantasy. These concepts therefore inform the meta-fiction that characterises postmodern writing.

Half of a Yellow Sun. In this way, Nsukka becomes Adichie's "country of the mind" (Tindall, 1991) – a textual mindscape where she negotiates spatial and temporal planes of existence. Nsukka is therefore read as not only a toponym that maps out a particular textual topography, but as a literary chronotope – a stylistic engagement with the notions of space and time as planes of meaning in the text.

Furthermore, "residual and emergent" cultures (Williams, 1977[38]; Jameson, 1991) are also found in the Yoruba shrine that Maja's mother in *The Opposite House* builds. Moreover, at the level of the mythology, there is a syncretism portrayed in the contrast of the Yoruba pantheon that Maja's mother believes in and the Cuban mythology that derails the family's attempts at settling in London. Maja's familial genealogy is contextualised in the black diaspora that spread all over Europe through dispersal and the long history of slave trade.[39] In this mixture of nationalities and languages, the subject positions of characters are fragmented. These positions are problematised by the way that subjects are a composite of multiple times and multiple places. For instance, the characters in Oyeyemi's works do not just speak or write with what Du Bois (1994), Paul Gilroy (1993), Gates Jr (1984), Quayson (2000) and Cudar-Dominguez (2009) refer to as a "double-voiced consciousness". Instead, they speak in a multiple-voiced consciousness as an attempt to transcend the politics of race. This transcendence is reflected in the multiple histories which do not only stop at slavery but through other aspects of dispersal in the twentieth century that are triggered by global forces and politico-cultural movements of revolution like the one in Cuba that forces Maja's family out. These characters are faced with a multi-faceted reality which is complexly engrained in the forces of history and transient material conditions that are triggered by the need to deal with diasporic identity. It is this fragmented context that is used by these writers as they attempt at finding a narrative with which to order reality. Therefore, because centres and

[38] Raymond's Marxist dialectic of residuality and emergence presents the point that the residual and the emergent form a synthesis of something new without the residual just being obsolete as is always thought.
[39] It is important to note that the African and black diaspora in Europe and the Americas has continuously generated scholarship on cultural politics into the Euro-American academy. Multiculturalism as a field of study has historically grappled with an increasing non-European and non-American diaspora and a shifting of perception of identity that previously defined nation-state culture even in Europe and North America. Ronald Segal (1995) for instance does a detailed study of the formation of the black diaspora in Europe and the Americas through the idea of dispersal, ranging from the time of slave trade to the present.

the ideas that underpin them are being unmasked by manifest experiences of migration and the possibilities of multiple consciousness, multiple realities and multiple identities, a style of representation that allows for the possibilities of hyper-realities is used. The world of childhood offers possibilities for the use of animist and magical realism through the *abiku*, as in the case of Ben Okri's trilogy and Oyeyemi's works, and fantasy through the image of the popular video portrayed through Elvis Oke in Abani's *Graceland*. Thus, childhood offers possibilities for dealing and ordering these multiple consciousnesses and multi-facetted realities. It is indicative of a kind of childhood that is in constant flux between fact and fiction, spirituality and mortality. It is a childhood that is in the words of Faith Edise and Nina Sichel (2004) "unrooted," which, according to them is defined by estrangement and rootlessness in the search for identity.

To deal with this sense of rootlessness, fantasy, animist and magical realism create space for the mixing of physical, spiritual reality and material and imaginative conditions. Brenda Cooper (1998) demonstrates in her concept of "seeing with a third eye," that magical realism captures the interstices between the boundaries of time and space, while Harry Garuba (2003) provides a metacritic of magical realism by constructing a more encompassing term, "animist materialism." In a global world, where through the hyper-reality of imagery one can access images from all over the world through the press of a button, these images eventually substitute reality for the subject who then thrives on the possibility, through fantasy, of living as an avatar. Elvis Oke in Abani's *Graceland* for instance lives a virtual reality by impersonating the legendary American pop icon Elvis Presley. Indeed, the condition of childhood is convenient for belief in avatars and Elvis and his friends demonstrate this for us. In fact, we can go back to Cooper, who makes a significant point by connecting magical realism, fantasy, postcolonial discourse and postmodernism:

> Magical realists are postcolonials who avail themselves most forcefully of the devices of postmodernism, of pastiche, irony, parody and intertextuality; they are alternatively recognized as oppositional to cultural imperialism […] In other words, magical

> realism and its associated styles and devices is alternatively characterized as a transgressive mechanism that parodies Authority, the Establishment and the Law, and also as the opposite of all these, as a domain of play, desire and fantasy. (1998:29)

In agreement, Gerald Gaylard (2005) writes that the postcolonial condition is about imaginative activities because it is difficult to point out a specific time when there is a cessation of the effects of empires, nations and colonies. Hence the condition of postcoloniality for its subjects, is highly influenced by *imagination*, and therefore reflected in their deepest fears and dreams, giving it postmodern dimension. This postcolonial context, Gaylard writes, is rife with "childhood fears, repressions, social taboos, secrets, neuroses, traumas and the repositories of wishes, dreams, the fantastic, the fabulous and the transcendent" (2005:3). Gaylard concludes that postcolonial time is a "pressured hybridity" containing elements of the postmodern which leads to a rupturing of monochromatic visions of reality.

The ideas of Gaylard (2005), Cooper (1998) and Garuba (2003) will be important for this study in charting out an argument on postmodernism through the elements of the fantastic, fabulous magical and animist realism that are found in the works of Oyeyemi. However, as we will see with these works, the diasporic childhoods portrayed in Oyeyemi's works seem to problematise the assumptions of magical realism as espoused by Gaylard and Cooper, enabling us to interrogate further, the new critical tools provided by Harry Garuba (2003) on "animist materialism".

As the postcolonial and postmodern interact through elements of the fabulous, animist and magical realism, the interaction is also characterised by a mixture of the residual and the emergent. In a chapter titled "old gods and new worlds," in Appiah *In my Father's House*, he posits that elements of what is perceived as traditional always reside in the emergent forms as a marker of continuity. Indeed, the adult self experiences childhood as a residual element carried into adulthood. Childhood as we will see is also a set of ideas that uses the symbol of the *abiku* as an allegory of the postcolonial condition. Another

reason why childhood is important in this study is because of the canonical debates on generations of Nigerian writers (Adesanmi &Dunton, 2005; 2008). In fact, for the writers in this study to be labeled as "coming of age" assumes a connection with previous generation from which particular "ages" are set as a background for the emerging writers selected in this study.

The rupture of time and space which is represented in the stylistic choices of the fantastic world of animist and magical realism is also largely contextualised and realised in the notion of intertextuality. The concept of intertextuality is broad-based in this study, and will certainly have far reaching implications at different levels of interpretation. When time and space cross each other through imaginative activities and a diasporic context, they engage in what Julia Kristeva (1974:59-60) refers to as "transpositions of one or more systems of signs into another".[40] The system of signs that creates meaning through the concept of time is transposed by that of space and the boundaries for these two become fluid and endless: spirituality and mortality intermingle as well as the real and the imagined. The idea of childhood comes to embody all these imaginations and experiments. Since these writers can be examined as "coming-of-age," Adichie, Abani, Oyeyemi and Atta are preceded by literary forefathers and foremothers – Achebe, Soyinka, Ekwensi, Emecheta among others. Indeed, as Worton and Still (1990:1) point out, writers are readers of texts before they create new ones. For instance, Adichie makes explicit her acknowledgement of Achebe as her literary progenitor, which she demonstrates in the striking dialogue between her text *Purple Hibiscus* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Achebe, on his part makes it known that Adichie is his daughter of sentiment.[41] We notice in Achebe's comments, an affirmation not only of the element of the new in the old – "new writer endowed with the gift of old

[40] An instructive exploration of Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality is found in Graham Allen's text *Intertextuality*, in which he historicises the term through Bakhtin's notion of "dialogism," a concept that he says comes from the intersection of the "outer' and 'inner' meaning of texts. Hence the concept can be invested with a melange of other concepts. This study therefore uses the term intertextuality to mean a conversation across time, space, fact and fiction.

[41] In the blurb of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* there is a comment by Achebe which reads "We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers […] Adichie came almost fully made."

storytellers,"[42] but also the significance of the alternative genealogy of the father and the daughter, something that this study seeks to explore in discussing the image of the father as problematically eponymous to familial genealogy, heritage and history of the postcolonial and postmodern Nigerian context.

Hence, the above idea of a socially oriented notion of intertextuality can be further extended into the representations of fathers and sons and fathers and daughters in the texts to be studied. The texts represent these relationships in new ways, to give a deeper meaning into the idea of childhood. Kambili as well as her brother Jaja in *Purple Hibiscus* are in a complex relationship with their father Papa Eugene. Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come* struggles with the influence of her father against her mother and her career choices. Elvis Oke in Abani's *Graceland* engages with his father's masculine prejudices about him.[43] Jessamy Harrison in *The Icarus Girl* and Maja in *The Opposite House* also struggle with racial and ethnic genealogies from both their fathers and mothers.

The discourse of the absent and yet dominant father as it will ultimately be realised is not just about the fictional fathers in this study but also the "absent fathers"[44] – those whose influence creates "daughters of sentiment," in the words of Lynda Zwinger (1991. In this manner the study invokes, at a meta-theoretical level, a Lacanian reading of symbolic, imagined and real fathers. Ultimately and as Adichie demonstrates in her texts, there is a danger of the daughter (literary or otherwise) being a "patriarchal alibi" (Zwinger, 1991:8), an acolyte of the father who is acquiescent. To say "coming-of-age" logically means having reached a specific point in ones development that allows one to be given responsibilities of adulthood. It also implies that one has to follow a particular pattern of expected growth.

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[42] See footnote above

[43] In Abani's other text *The Virgin of Flames*, Black, the protagonist, constantly flashes through memories of his Nigerian father as he grapples not only with his complicated familial genealogy but also his sexual orientation.

[44] Robert Con Davis (1981) refers to them as "fictional fathers," whose manifestation in the text is a rediscovery of the absent fathers.

The representation of the child in the works to be studied here engages with the increasingly psychological nature of the family. The portrayal of the protagonists in these works and how they deal with father figures indicates how the novel, like the family, has over time resisted nucleation. The novel has also played a role in providing alternative genealogies, a role that has allowed it to resist critical frameworks that read narrative closure. The novel has therefore moved from the eighteenth century picturesque representation to a deeply psychological one in which childhood becomes not only a period of transition to adulthood but also a significant in Bakhtinian (1981) terms "speech type".[45] As a "speech type," childhood is a set of ideas within the novel that adds up to the novel's heteroglot nature.

Childhood, in the texts to be studied, is contextualised at a time when the orthodox definitions of the concept of family have been problematised by newer unions like gay and lesbian families and single parent families. Traditional gender roles increasingly get challenged by material realities. Childhood is a time for the reproduction of gender roles through societal institutions. However, the reality of newer unions of the family means grappling with these roles. Chris Abani for instance, has been curious about transsexuality as he mentions in a talk.[46] In *Graceland*, he portrays Elvis as having an affinity to feminine lineage – an influence from his mother. His father Sunday detests his impersonation of Elvis Presley, seeing it as something un-manly. In Abani's other text *The Virgin of Flames* set in Los Angeles, transsexuality is a salient thematic concern. Chris Abani's other novella *Becoming Abigail* is written from the perspective of a woman. Abani therefore constructs alternative genealogies, for instance of mothers and sons and in a sense begins to instructively problematise literary psychoanalytical conceptions about fathers and sons and mothers and daughters. By problematising gender and portraying its extremes as a social construct, Abani begins to create a cross-gender space through the idea of transsexuality, by collapsing the social and biological concepts that define maleness and femaleness.

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[45] Paula Marantz Cohen (1991) describes the novel as having become domestic by virtue of it having increasingly adopted an intricate, intensely psychological form in recent times. Cohen posits that novels, like families have genealogies and are part of culturally established canons and traditions.
[46] Talk at Wits, May 5th 2006.

In view of the above, Freudian psychoanalysis is therefore informative in analysing the creation of the unconscious at the time of childhood, relating it to the object relations theories of critics like Melanie Klein (1949), Ronald Fairbairn (1962) and the structural theory that divides the mind into the id, ego and superego. However, and as post-Freudian psychoanalysis has come to argue, there are certain changes in the formation of societal institutions that challenge some of Freud's earlier conceptions: newer familial set ups like the ones mentioned earlier are an example, notwithstanding other strata like class. Post-Freudian psychoanalysis in the works of Stephen Frosh (1987; 1991; 1994) will be relevant in understanding how the evolution of childhood now works to challenge genealogies, traditions and normative gender constructs, within specifically postcolonial and postmodern contexts in the fiction to be studied.

The alternative histories (to adultist, regime-centred ones) provided by childhood, intertextuality and alternative genealogies pursued through the relations of fathers and sons and fathers and daughters point to postcolonial discourse, criticism and identity formation in interesting synergy with aspects of postmodern theory. Childhood itself as represented in these works, continuously grapples with (re)definitions of cultures, races, ethnicities, nationalities, families, genders and histories in the quest for identity formation. These identities are postmodern in representation in the works to be studied.

Implied in examining childhood is also the notion of cultural politics. The connection between childhood and diaspora is through the broad idea of multi/transculturalism. It is ironical as well that while multiculturalism is a point of connection it is itself one of difference by virtue of eliciting a mapping of boundaries between the multi-cultures: this is through the prefix "multi-". As broad as the concept is, it challenges the concept of nativity, particularly after the resurgence of migrants in the metropolitan Europe and America. This is important in historicising the emergence of postcolonial studies in the Western academy, of black intellectualism and the burgeoning scholarship on "residual," "subaltern," "alternative," "marginalised," and "other(ed)" ethnicities and cultures.

The conceptual contexts delineated above therefore form an interpretative framework for examining childhood. Indeed by their density, they reflect the notion of childhood as as a process as well as a set of ideas that forms a discourse for the analysis of contemporary forms of identity as reflected in contemporary Nigerian fiction. The chapters of the study therefore foreground childhood as a set of ideas that reflect on the images, memories and figures of childhood set in spaces, places, times which are influenced (but which in turn problematise) by specific people – fathers, mothers and other family members, who embody genealogical, traditional, heritage and frameworks of identification for the child. The frameworks set by these people remain adultist, a perspective that is problematised by the marginalised one of childhood that seeks agency.

The next chapter therefore foregrounds childhood time and memory as constructing an alternative time, history and therefore an archive. In examining the childhoods of Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Elvis in Abani's *Graceland*, the chapter foregrounds the ordinary and daily lives of these child protagonists as presenting nostalgic, traumatic and popular memories. These dimensions of memory, grounded in the everyday routine of childhood life seem to signal to an alternative experience of time and history in the turbulent socio-economic, political and cultural period of military governance in Nigeria.

Having foregrounded the "memoryscape" of the different childhoods in chapter two, chapter three moves on to examine the memory places and spaces of the childhoods of Kambili, Ugwu and Elvis. This notion of space and place is read through Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the literary chronotope. The reading foregrounds spatio-temporal elements in the novel as grounds for a dialogic discourse. Bakhtin's conceptual framework allows us to see the dialogism immanent in the world of childhood, which the novelistic text of childhood aids in foregrounding because of its equally dialogic structure.

Chapter four deals with a crucial aspect that builds on from the "memoryscape" and "memory place" of childhood: the people who influence and define these memories and

places. Here, the chapter foregrounds the discourse of (the) father(hood) as a central problematic in the childhoods of Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come*, Elvis in *Graceland* and Black in *The Virgin of Flames*. These various childhoods, examined as "daughterhoods" and "sonhoods" in relation to the discourse of the father, seem to challenge paternal and "false" genealogical frameworks by the sentimental disposition of the daughter towards her father and the construction and performance of sexuality and gender by the son. These daughterhoods and sonhoods would seem to create alternative genealogies that are foregrounded by an agency-enhancing postcolonial and postmodern environment which avails more choices to construct alternative heritages, in the form of symbolic and imaginary fathers.

Chapter five attempts to interrogate the notions of time, history, archive, space, place, time and genealogies that the previous chapters have explored through diasporic childhoods in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* and *The Opposite House.* This chapter presents classification and analytical challenges by examining childhoods that have actually transcended continental boundaries of identification but which simultaneously and strategically enact and identify with multiple traditions, heritages, legacies and therefore genealogies through their occupation with multiple times, spaces and places. These "diasporic childhoods" are constructed through mythological histories that bring together *abiku* and twinning mythologies of Yoruba cosmology, multiple personality disorder discourses of European modernity, and Santeria mythology and ritual practices of *Afrocubanismo* origin. These childhoods, are presented as postmodern in how they are constructed and therefore in how they construct ways of identification with the multiple worlds they inhabit.

In light of the previous chapters, chapter six concludes that childhood, in view of how it has been represented in the texts studied, is developing as a significant discourse in contemporary Nigerian fiction and criticism. Through the aspects of alternative memories, times, histories and archives defining the everyday life of childhood; the spaces, places and times defining a childhood world; the people (fathers) whose genealogical legacies are problematised; as well as the diasporic childhoods which embody multinational, transnational and therefore multicultural and transcultural

intertextualities and its engagement with the image of the father, childhood is profoundly dealing with new forms of contemporary identities at the intersection of the postcolonial context and postmodern experience, attitude and consciousness.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO

ALTERNATIVE TIME(S) AND HISTORIES.

2.1 Introduction: Representation of Childhood as an "architext of memory"

Childhood in this study is a discourse, which involves the reconstruction of a time in the past. I use these term "discourse" in view of Michel Foucault's (1972) definition of it as a product of "statements" and "propositions" but which affect how the notion of "archive" is examined. Most significantly, Foucault points out that the notion of discourse in the novel can be examined as "propositions" of a dispersed authorial self. This act of dispersion occurs in time and space within the plotting of subjectivities in the novel. Taking Foucault's ideas in mind, examining the representation of childhood is therefore through a set of ideas that shifts in time and space. This is because the present "self" that reconstructs this past is an adult one that seeks to "re-member" a childhood one. In this chapter, childhood is examined in the context of a reconstruction of histories and times related to spatial locations of experience. The discourse of childhood shapes itself through the activity of representation, which constructs images and figures in the novel that are interpreted for the production of meaning. In representing childhood, the notion of memory is critical. In fact, as Evelyn Ender (2005) has argued, representation of memory is the act of constructing an "architext". This notion of an "architext" refers to writers as masters of mnemonic devices because they give shape to memory and recollection. This chapter uses Ender's idea of an architext to foreground memory's complex and influential role in the narrative of childhood.

In contemporary Nigerian fiction, childhood is represented through child protagonists or figures at a particular time and place, and also through the images of childhood in the memory of adult protagonists. Memory is therefore an important process in construction of the self. Memory reflects on history by bringing it to the present. Memory entails an intentional selection of images from the past, and also a selective reconstruction of those images. Memories are amorphous, and through the works of fiction are given language and narrative shape. Therefore, Nicola King (2000:13-14) argues, memories are

interpreted and translated from the form of subliminal images of the past into the present form of the text. Memories therefore acquire an ordered narrative status that is not necessarily bound by chronology – this is how memory relates to representation of the fragmented subjects of contemporary Nigerian fiction. The child figures and images represented in the fiction studied here are informed for instance by traumatic conditions, making the contexts in which they are presented to us as fragmented, creating similar forms of subjective consciousness.

This chapter will aim to firstly establish how childhood experiences of time and history are different from those of adulthood, because of how childhood is constructed in the context of the ordinary, the mundane or everyday slices of life. Secondly, the chapter aims to establish what an "alternative" experience of time and history means in the context of the everydayness of childhood memories. These memories provide childhood with narratives that *compete*, *contest* and create *composite* memories, histories and times. The narratives are defined by the subjective and inimitable personal archives of the authors. Thirdly, the chapter explores how these narrative memories are defined by the nostalgia, trauma and popular experiences in the daily life of childhood. The represented childhood therefore re-contextualises trauma, nostalgia and popular memories within its everyday world. This re-contextualisation seems to be a signal to an alternative archive of experience defined by childhood and is therefore in consonance with the conclusion I make in this chapter that childhood creates the space for an alternative time and history. The chapter therefore sets out to examine these three aims through the texts of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Chris Abani's *Graceland*. The aims set will follow specific strands of argument that will be delineated below.

Firstly, the chapter examines the meticulous attention to the detail of everyday life, in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Being a novel Adichie wrote after staying five years away from home, there is a nostalgic mood to it. Kambili's subjectivity is constructed through the emotions of loss and nostalgia that oscillate between her family's home in Enugu and her paternal aunt's home at Nsukka. The traumatic memory of her violent experience

with her father, which influences the trajectory of remembering in the novel as well as her growth, independence and freedom through her daily regime of reciting novenas, cooking, praying before and after meals and doing homework are constructed through an emotional and imaginative memory. The everyday, will be read, as Michel De Certeau (1984) says, a "tactic" in the context of a history of defiance and resistance towards a sense of liberation and freedom. Kambili's emotions are also read in the context of Chimamanda Adichie's imagining of home after being away for almost half a decade. Therefore Nsukka, the psycho-physically liberating place for Kambili is also a memory-place for Adichie's authorial nostalgia.

Secondly, memory-places such as Nsukka in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are significant in reflecting on the notion of childhood memory. Nsukka as will be discussed in the next chapter is a toponym of meaning, while in this chapter it is an "architext" of memory in Adichie's works. In Nsukka, meanings converge and diverge through the semantic structure of her texts. Place names are evocative of Adichie's familial genealogy, history and identity. This is for instance reflected in the controversial Biafran war, in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is also characterised by authorial nostalgia. This nostalgia does not only come from the triumphant excavation of a nation's (Biafra) heritage but also out of the trauma of the perceived loss of a cultural identity. In this sense, the memory of Biafra is considered cultural. Hence, the idea of memory in Adichie's works is a collage of macro and micro memories of families, homes, ethnicities, nations and nation-states as represented within the discourse of childhood.

In the last part of this chapter, I examine popular cultural memory through the urban landscape of Chris Abani's *Graceland*. Abani's idea of memory is derived in the portrayal of a childhood in the 70s and 80s where the image of Elvis Presley defines the popular imagination of that time. Popular culture becomes therefore an alternative form of existence and experiencing of time in *Graceland*.[47] History and time are contextualised in the challenges of poverty in the informal settlement of Maroko in Lagos, where time is

[47] I use the term popular culture here to mean Abani's use of videos and films, as well as the music of Elvis Presley among others as cultural elements that define the texture of the everyday life of the protagonist.

lived in a continuum of utopia and dystopia, in the context of a landscape of desires derived from the consumption of popular culture. At the same time, the narrative is set along the normative construction of historical time, with the infamous event in Nigeria's urban history of the destruction of Maroko, which signified the gentrification of land in Lagos and the subsequent continual consolidation of the status quo in the land economics of the city.

These issues provide the basis for the argument that contemporary Nigerian fiction is significant for its interrogation of history and time. Childhood as a discourse can be read as a site of interrogative memory where contemporary Nigerian novelists are re-constructing history through childhood memory by re-visiting the times and spaces of growth and using these to not only reflect on the migrant senses of the self but also create an alternative source of memory from the inimitable position of their autobiographical subjectivities. While the notion of the nation-state in Nigerian fiction has been, largely, the concern of a previous generation of writers – Achebe, Soyinka, Emecheta, Nwapa, Okri and others, for contemporary Nigerian writers like Abani, it is an implicitly reference. Contemporary Nigerian fiction, while set in a time of military dictatorship and political turbulence, provides an alternative perception through the world of childhood. Moreover, the concerns of the world of childhood, lead us to experience macro-histories through a different yet complicated angle – via the subjectivities of a diasporic authorial presence.[48] Childhood provides for the representation of imaginative memories that affect the perception of historical factual efficacy. The representation of childhood therefore creates unofficial sources of memory– which is an alternative means of archiving. In fact, as Hamilton (et al., 2002: 10) posit, "Literature, landscape, dance, art and a host of other forms offer archival possibilities capable of releasing different kinds of information about the past, shaped by different record-keeping processes." Hence through representing childhood, the novel engages in the notion of an alternative archive and history, which the next section seeks to explicate.

[48] I prefer to use the term "macro-histories" to refer to Histories at a normative, collective level, say of the nation-state and "micro-histories" for smaller "proliferations" that perspectives of childhood provide us with.

2.2 The alternative: Archive, History and Time in the Narrative of Childhood

In their introduction, Hamilton (et al., 2002) underscore the significance of "(re)figuring" the archive, by examining it as a site of contested knowledges. In theorising the word "refigure," they advocate, within the South African post-apartheid context, a reconstruction of the content, form and pedagogy that the archive is discoursed. They underscore the different "record-keeping processes" of literature, landscape, dance and art as forms that offer "archival possibilities capable of releasing different kinds of information about the past" (2002:10). In this sense then, they open up this discourse to what they call "marginal archives" that also constitute "everyday activity of identity formation and maintenance by ordinary people" (2002:11). This is important in their argument, and in the idea of an alternative archive and processing of history. While this argument is aware of the fact that the marginal or excluded is no less constructed, as is the mainstream, it is instructive in espousing the idea of an *alternative*, through not only the content and form of the archive, but also the *processes* of constructing it. Memory is an important part of this process.

Memory as used in literature is a process, not only specific to narrative formations, but also as an entry point for narrative formations into the discourse of the archive.[49] Hence memory as it works in literature is specific to the way a discourse about the archive can be engaged. Yet memory within the representation of childhood provides an interesting examination of the idea of an alternative archive. This is because childhood in literature, works through imaginative use of memory, through a process of re-construction and re-figuring. It works through what Ender calls "emotional memory" – a process of remembering that involves both voluntary and involuntary attempts at recollection. Ender examines the act of writing as one that reaches into the depths of forgotten memory, what she describes as "beyond memory's ken" (2005:174).[50] Writing about childhood allows for the "birth of memory," where long forgotten emotions bring forth new images through writing's power to "give shape to subliminal images" (175). The process of writing about childhood therefore creates a vast field of implicit and explicit memory, the

[49] Narrative formations is used here to mean, ways in which "constructions" are made.
[50] For further details, see the section "Remembering the Forgotten: The Power of Emotional Memory"

former being the unconscious, long forgotten involuntary memory, and the later, conscious and voluntary memory. This continuum, defines the ontology of autobiographical memory. In this sense the representation of memory, in childhood, is the terrain of an autobiographical archive that can reflect quite interestingly on the record-keeping processes of archives, their individual or collective subjectivities and ultimately, their constructed nature.

While representing childhood can be seen as a "self-archiving" process, writers can be viewed as constructors of inimitable versions of history. James Ogude's (1999) examination of Ngugi's "Concept of History" for instance, argues for the re-construction of history by Ngugi who brings into it subjects who had been silenced by colonial versions of history. Ania Loomba (2005) also makes this point in her examination of the role of literature in reconstructing history within the resistance tradition of postcolonial literature. Paul Hamilton (2003) also theorises this, in his examination of historicism and the aesthetics of representation.[51] Much earlier, Dominic LaCapra (1985) underscores the generic specificities of the novel as important in the idea of historiography, which is a critical methodology at the intersection of literature and history. Fiction deals with history through its own unique usage of memory. Therefore, fiction that deals with childhood engages with the autobiographical dimension of history. The childhood world, with its figures and images are perceived as micro-worlds in relation to adult regimes of authority that define it. Hence childhood worlds in this sense are marginalised ones, presumably diminutive in their contribution to time and history.

Childhood in this study becomes a contested spatio-temporality, from where the process of reminiscence takes on a complex, autobiographical nature. In this way, it questions the chronological narrative of identity as well as the available archives that an adult self, in reminiscing the past, goes back to, to foster an organic sense of identity. Hence these contemporary childhoods have an alternative sense of memory, where childhood takes the centre stage, in consciousness, in chronology or lack of it, as an organising point of view. Childhood becomes therefore not a marginal, miniaturised and diminutive stage

[51] For further debate refer to Paul Hamilton's (2003) "History and Historicism," pp.6-17.

within the normative frameworks of memory and archive, but its own progenitor of time and history. The memory of childhood becomes a process that constructs alternative time(s) and histories and therefore, making the represented childhood an alternative archive, justifying its own existence and chronotopical logic in its perception of the world.

The representation of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction is formed through a process of narrative memory, autobiographical experience, an awareness of the macro-history of the Nigerian nation state, as well as the disconcerting presence of a diasporic consciousness on the part of the authors. The result is an interesting idea of time and history, fostered by the protean form of the novel. Moreover, as Tim Woods and Peter Middleton (2000) argue, there is genre specificity to the way space, time, history and memory are dealt with in the diverse genres in literature. Woods and Middleton use the term "textual memory" to make distinctions between the way memory works in the novel, the poem, in performance and in the dramatic text. Woods and Middleton privilege contemporary literature as a site that engages with history through memory. They posit that the advent of postmodernity has challenged the legitimacy of history as the only discipline that studies the past.[52]

Middleton and Woods privilege literature as a site for the alternative construction of time and history – literature does not simply supplement the "normative" documents of history. These ideas become a foundation for Woods' (2007) later study on how African pasts are explored in the narratives of memory and trauma in African literature. This study privileges colonialism as a foundation for his idea of the "twin matrices of memory and trauma" in African literature. Woods also makes a problematic assumption that "African literatures are continually preoccupied with exploring modes of representation to 'work through' its different traumatic colonial pasts" (2007:1). In this assertion,

[52] The say: "Narrative, memory, performance and the production and circulation of texts are all implicated in the new spacetimes and history, therefore, takes many forms in contemporary literature, some of them far from obvious. We argue that some of the most original investigations of historicity are taking place in literary practices that are especially aware of the changing conditions of life in space and time, and yet do not advertise themselves as historical literatures" (2000:9)

memory, for Woods, is determined by the experience generated by the Western project of colonial occupation, making these African literary excursions into history, more or less supplements of the narrative set by the colonial project. In examining contemporary Nigerian literature, this assumption comes under challenge, because memory – in these works' representation of childhood – shifts the focus from colonialism and collective subjectivities and identities, to micro-histories and how they ultimately affect our perceptions of collective subjectivities and identities. The discourse of memory in the representation of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction is therefore one of the pursuit of the alternative.

The notion of the alternative, in contemporary Nigerian fiction is pursued through a re-contextualisation of these childhoods. This is done in view of the spatio-temporal axes of the novel, with the author in the present time in diaspora. There is a shifting process that allows us an alternative approach to time and history in the contemporary Nigerian novel. Moreover, it points us to not only reconstructed ways of dealing with contemporary migrant and diasporic identities, but also to a renewed responsibility of the novel as an alternative archival site. The idea of an alternative time and history is explored through the memories of the everyday world of childhood seen as providing an alternative view of a world dominated by an adult framework of experience. In other words, childhood can, as Njabulo Ndebele's (1991) seminal essay posits, allow us to "rediscover the ordinary," through experiences of memory-places, laughter, cooking, eating, washing and the daily occurrences in a regimented and oft-monotonous livelihood. Landscape memory, flowers and the minutiae of home furniture, carry symbolic capital in defining the essence of childhood time and history and also reflecting on "material culture" in postcolonial migrant writing (Cooper, 2008b).[53]

Hence memory-places, in this case houses in specific places as Nsukka in Adichie's fiction carry the symbolic importance of not only the place and time of growth, but also as substrates of history in a familial, ethnic and national genealogy. In this sense,

[53] The notion of "material culture" is used here to refer to "Physical manifestations of creative energy as dress, architecture, tools and cuisine" (Manning, 2007:21). Cooper examines this notion of culture as part of what defines the postcolonial diasporic fiction of Adichie and her contemporaries.

childhood engages with the macro-identities of ethnicities and nations through the representation of memory, figures and images. It is interesting, especially when childhood as presented through Adichie's teenage protagonist Ugwu, is a commentary on the trope on the "child of war". Moreover it also allows us an alternative experience of reading the war, through Ugwu's childhood/domestic worker perspective. Through this trope, we can also explore the idea of trauma and the role of memory and narrative in the process of expiation.

The idea of alternative memory and archive is also examined in Chris Abani's *Graceland*, which deals with memory-places and shifts in a spatio-temporally divided childhood. Trajectories of childhood memory alternate between the city and the country, as the idea of cultural memory also shifts between these places and spaces. Cultural memory is explored through the tensions between the city and the country. The protagonist in *Graceland* is caught in a rapidly shifting cityscape, with a fragile yet very creative cultural existence. Memory in *Graceland* is explored through the popular imagination; through the idea of popular culture. In *Graceland*, popular culture defines the everyday life and experiences of the teenage protagonist Elvis Oke. Daily life, depicted in the performance of popular cultural memory, through Elvis's impersonation of the pop icon Elvis Presley, can be argued as reflecting critically on normative ideas of culture that work through the processes of genealogy and teleology, fostered by institutions such as the family. Yet the time and space of childhood, as Elvis seems to demonstrate, not only presents the daily performance of popular culture, but also the importance of the discourse of childhood in reflecting on how everyday life is increasingly affecting macro-identities through its performance of popular culture. This is an argument that Tim Edensor (2002) makes when he posits that popular culture, as it is performed in the daily life of citizens, redistributes, reconstructs and destabilises the boundaries of national culture. Edensor's critique therefore follows a postmodernist logic, in which processes are no longer teleological or chronological, but in fact in a *matrix*, where subjectivities are fragmented, fluid, shifting and constantly extending and

protracting spaces of engagement within national boundaries.[54] Popular cultural memory is performed as part of Elvis's everyday life, through his impersonation of Elvis Presley and through his internalisation of this simulated identity to the extent of this representing a hyper-reality of his sexual identity as well as sustaining an economic livelihood.

The representation of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction is presenting a critical engagement with history and time as represented through narrative memory. In examining *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Graceland*, the specifics of the world of childhood, familial spaces and places are sites of a critical engagement with memory, the everyday and archive. Memory-place and space, cooking, eating, playing, dancing, music and other activities, depicted in the process of growth, are points of connection that reflect on the critical role of memory as it engages history and time and also as it helps to (re)define contemporary forms of identity. In the next section, I discuss important assumptions about narrative memory and identity, in relation to the act of writing, as well as a brief examination of how memory and history in African literature has been studied.

2.3 Narrative Memory and Literary Historiography

The discourse of childhood in the novel is found in the representation of memory, through the author's active engagement with the historically-related process of anamnesis. The novelist who writes about childhood in its manifest forms of images and figures, works through an autobiographical subjectivity by recreating memories from the perspective of his/her "self". This autobiographical element, involves factual experiences, from history, and also imaginative truths, whether in the case of scenic descriptions, or fictitious episodes that have been experienced and are being reproduced from an attitude and perspective that is intimately known to the author. Hence the novelist becomes, as Ronald Suresh Roberts has argued of Nadine Gordimer, a "self-archivist" (2002:301). The novel, through its tactility, becomes the storehouse of the novelist's attitudes, emotions, feelings – hence the novelist's intimate perception of history. The novel

[54] Edensor's idea of the "quotidian" in constructing a national culture is similar to Mike Featherstone's postmodernist examination of the "aestheticization of everyday life," where he argues that the advent of postmodernism came with the "effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life" (1992:267).

becomes an artefact, a document of history of the novelist's attitudes, emotions and feelings about a particular subject.[55] The memory represented by the novelist in his work therefore has a sense of subjectivity that adds to the narrative trajectory and complicates the narrative form of its representation. Memory therefore drives the reconstruction of an authorial self, because, as King (2000) posits, remembering the self involves a narrative pattern that can be found in the example of the way a recovering amnesiac gets a sense of awareness of the past and present at the moment of healing. Hence, memory for King (2000) and Ender (2005) is significant for examining the representation of self. The narrative of memory impacts significantly on conceptions of identity – of the self, within and without a collective cultural framework. For an author representing childhood therefore, their sense of the self is, at the process of writing, explored and affected through the memory of their childhood. This involves going back to a history of their childhood that in most cases, by virtue of adultist frameworks of identity, is seen as mutually exclusive from it. Yet, for the contemporary Nigerian migrant authors, the representation of the world of childhood is no less constitutive of identity than their current representation of themselves as adults.

For these writers, the representation of childhood is informed by these auto-biographies. This is because of the effect of a diasporic consciousness that avails memory as not only an analytical tool in the construction of a fictional world, but also as an archive that can usefully deal with the fragmented subjectivities of a migrant identity. In this way, it can lay claim to heritage but at the same time create an alternative narrative of identity that has come to define contemporary selfhoods. Memory for the contemporary Nigerian writer is a crucial way of dealing with the oppressive historical process, within the macro-perspectives of the nation, ethnicity and family, and most importantly the histories of childhoods lived under the influence of familial, ethnic, national cultural institutions and also global cultural flows through contemporary forms of mass mediation. Tim Woods (2007:1,3) therefore warns that memory in African literatures is not just a trope, it also serves to foreground the "crucial sites where postcolonial national and cultural

[55] In making these assertions, I am essentially underscoring the subjective consciousness of history that the novel as a specific narrative form can throw up to the surface.

identities are being formed and contested." Through a personal and collective diasporic consciousness, memory also takes on the experience of multiple histories of migration and movement that result in fragmented subject positions. Memory becomes an organising principle, not only of the narrative of childhood, but also of the subject's position(s) that shift as the migrant author presents the story of their childhood.

These narratives of childhood, in their reflection through memories, of figures, and images are located in a macro-historical context and literary historiography. As we read them across specific times within the historical landscape of the Nigerian nation-state, the questions will be: how do they construct and also reconstruct these macro-histories? Do these reconstructions collectively provide an alternative to the orthodox narrative of Nigerian History? Tim Woods gives the hypothetical answer here by saying: "Since 'history' can be an aggressively exclusionary narrative […] African writing constructs memory as a form of counter-history that subverts false generalisations about an exclusionary 'History'" (13). In literary historiography, the narrative of childhood, has had a long literary trajectory or critical heritage, starting from the Romantic period, in which it was examined as a "utopia of time" (Heath, 2003:20), as Coveney (1967), Aries (1962), Pattison (1978), Cunningham (1995), Sommerville (1982) have also explained. In African colonial and postcolonial discourse, the narrative of childhood began by serving the purpose of cultural retrieval (Okolie, 1998; King, 1980; Abanime, 1998), another intensely utopian project that could not reverse the already "internally diasporic" nature of postcolonial societies (Hall, 1996).[56] In these normative cases, childhood was dismissed as an object for a cultural archive. In later narratives of childhood, as used specifically by the Nigerian author Benjamin Okri in his *abiku* trilogy, childhood was used as an allegory of the nation, in an era of postcolonial political disillusionment. In the West Indies, Kenneth Ramchand (1982) has also demonstrated how "the novel of childhood" is at the centre of the formation of new national identities away from past colonialist and hegemonic ones. In these historiographies, childhood has been represented and examined within the discourse of memory. Childhood has therefore been at the centre

[56] Hall points out that considering the history of colonization, postcolonial African societies are already removed from their previous states of existence and therefore internally diasporic in cultural terms.

of the project of anamnesis – in a rebuttal of the utopian dimension in Romantic imagination and in attempts at the cultural retrieval of a bucolic, pastoral existence in postcolonial African societies. Childhood has therefore existed as a useful connection with the past in the discourse of memory. The child has also been a symbolic object of macro-identities, be they as large as civilisations as in the Romantic tradition or as small as nation-states and nations as in postcolonial criticism of newly independent African nations.

Contemporary Nigerian fiction's representation of childhood figures, memories and images is complicated by a diasporic consciousness. Childhood is represented through the consciousness of a fragmented subjectivity that is the product of a disjointed migrant lifestyle. This subjectivity is a result of the tension between centrifugal and centripetal cultural forces that cut across continental, nation-state, ethnic, racial and gender assumptions and physical boundaries. One thing is significant; the representation of childhood is an attempt at going back to memories of growth, through an imaginative and emotional continuum that evokes nostalgia, a sense of (re)affirmation of the "self," of loss and recovery, but of an engagement with time(s) and histories, some macro, others micro, some popular, others normative and orthodox. The engagement with time(s) and histories is an eclectic and postmodern approach that fuses together the imaginative memories of the fictional works and the emotional, intangible memories that characterise authorial diasporic subjectivity to time and history. In other words, the examination of the representation of childhood has to be read in the context of the autobiographies of the authors, the actual times of their childhood, and the fictional times represented in their works as well as their present subjectivities as diasporic individuals.

As we turn our attention to the texts, we will foreground memory in various dimensions – traumatic, nostalgic, individual and collective. These dimensions will be seen as working *compositely*, and/or *competitively*, but determined by the everyday world of childhood, which provides a distinct consciousness. In this way then, the notions of times and histories become sites of interrogation in the world of childhood.

2.4 Childhood as a Representation of the Everyday in *Purple Hibiscus*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, was written five years after Adichie's migration to the United States of America. It is therefore a novel informed by nostalgia, and homesickness. With this in mind, it is logical to argue that the process of writing *Purple Hibiscus* is one of obliquely remembering home, from Adichie's point of view. By remembering home, the process of memory is subjected to the emotions that the thought of home evokes. Hence the memory of home is an emotional one because it is a product of nostalgia, which is informed by migration, by diasporic consciousness and by the displacement from a geographical identification of "home." Adichie's representation of Nsukka brings it to the centre of her experience, idea and imagination of home. Nsukka becomes a memoryscape, where imagination and emotive memories, spurred by nostalgia are constructed. Most importantly, the question of memory is directly influenced by the desire for identification with that diasporic identity and an acknowledgement of its effects on Adichie as a migrant subject. There is the constant feeling of non-belonging that makes the migrant hanker after a place to call "home". The diasporic subject deals with this anxiety through both recollection and amnesia – both of which are processes of memory. Yet the diasporic subject's extent of engaging this process of memory is also influenced by a feeling of alienation. I use the term "alienation" here to refer to the diasporic subject's awareness of the limits of identification with the diasporic world, of a sense of loss of a perceived "authentic" self as reflected in childhood narrative. This feeling of alienation informs diasporic identity.

While this chapter does not in any wish to make autobiographical consciousness overdetermine analysis in *Purple Hibiscus*, it seeks to explain the circumstances, attitudes and moods that produced the text as significant contexts that inform the narrative of childhood in *Purple Hibiscus*. The idea of a diasporic consciousness enables us to contextualise authorial sentiment, while allowing us to see how the discourse of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction is partially the product of a return to the author's childhood memory – a process that defines these works' engagement with ideas of time and history. Therefore, in light of a diasporic consciousness, childhood is

remembered and recollected in a specific way – it is reconstructed, through imaginative and emotional memory, as well as through voluntary (conscious) and involuntary (unconscious) ways.

The case of *Purple Hibiscus* arises from nostalgia and therefore the idea and materiality of "home". This nostalgia is implicitly depicted in the mood of the teenage narrator in *Purple Hibiscus*. In accessing her past, therefore, the world of childhood is brought alive to Adichie, while giving her its distinct experience of the everyday, as grounds for nostalgic reconstructions of home, which the nature of her presently adult world would have restricted. The content of this childhood memory, which is the subject of this chapter, is the everyday nature of its life – eating, cooking, washing, reading, going to school and observing adult regimes of authority at work. I use the word everyday here in light of what Mike Featherstone (1995:55) describes as what is "usually associated with the mundane, taken-for-granted, commonsense routines which sustain and maintain the fabric of our daily lives."

Featherstone's postmodern examination of the everyday is significant in view of its awareness of the "heterogenous knowledge, the disorderly babble of many tongues; speech and the magic world of voices".[57] The idea of how the everyday connects with postmodern experience goes back to Henri Lefebvre's seminal text *Critique of Everyday Life.* For Lefebvre, the consciousness of this condition of alienation, for the masses, leads to transcendence, through a return to a critique of everyday life.[58] Michel De Certeau (1984) picks up from the Marxist (re)positioning of Lefebvre to extend the idea of the everyday further, through his examination of the "ways of consumption," which he argues define the critique of everyday life. Michel De Certeau's theory of the everyday, according to Ben Highmore (2002:23), presents a pragmatic examination of the "practice" of everyday life. For Highmore, De Certeau, like George Simmel, Walter Benjamin and Lefebvre before him, presents an examination of the everyday that:

[57] See Mike Featherstone "The Heroic Life and Everyday Life," pp.54-71.
[58] Lefebvre's critical examination of everyday life was a meta-critique of Marxism as a theory. Lefebvre connects Marxist critique of commodity fetishism to how these commodities relate to social relations that reproduce the worker in their performance of daily activities.

> [C]an be seen to begin to fabricate an '*alternative*' aesthetic for attending to the experience of modern everyday life. It is an *alternative* to a range of options in regard to the everyday: [Emphasis mine]

Hence, Ben Highmore, like Mike Featherstone, examines the theories of everyday life in light of a postmodern experience and consciousness. The everyday, as Highmore and Featherstone posit, is undetected in relation to the normative and spectacular narratives. However in the everyday there is the heterogeneity of voices and actions that are crucial aspects of identity and existence. De Certeau defines this as a form of "tactical" resistance as opposed to the "strategies" that characterise the structures of living and feeling that usually define subjective relations. Adichie resorts to the mirror of the everyday to represent, through memory, a composite past. This is aided by the child protagonists whose lives are not only defined by the notion of the everyday but also by their marginal status as child characters. As I proceed into examining the primary texts, it is important to point here that in no way am I positing that Adichie's texts are entirely autobiographical, other than that autobiographical aspects are a dominant consciousness. The idea of nostalgia, which is influenced by Adichie's diasporic identity does inform (if a close reading is done) a lot of Kambili's perceptions to Nsukka as a place of liberty freedom and happy memories.

The representation of childhood in *Purple Hibiscus* depicts mundane, daily existence, from the point of view of a teenage narrator. Adichie presents a tale that pays close attention to the everyday world of the protagonist. The narrative foregrounds the minutiae of routine in the house of this middle class family: cooking, going to church, going to school, rituals at breakfast, lunch, dinner and doing homework. The narrative also describes in detail, from the teenage narrator's perspective, the sounds of people moving in the house, the textures and smells of furniture, flowers, food, the moods of people in the house, tones and accents of speech, complexions of people, as well as the silences at table and in the rooms. This keen, vivid and detailed attention as narrated by Kambili, makes these events often taken for granted, become unfamiliar, through the manner in which they critique the senses of individual, familial and national identities that are

always assumed to be stable and univocal. The world of childhood is constructed through a detailed processing of memory as the narrator looks back to depict with, sometimes nostalgia and other times with a quiet anger, how what seems to be routine existence can become the most unfamiliar experience. Memory works here through making the past a vivid and detailed present, while making unfamiliar what seemed like routine and mundane during the time of childhood.

Memory structures the narrative of *Purple Hibiscus* through the way a ritualised religious calendar time is incorporated in the events that affect the narrator as a child. The "Palm Sunday" incident is the cue of a significant memory for the narrator. Events are organised around the "Palm Sunday," which represents a specific memory that spurs reminiscence and therefore propels the narrator into a myriad of recollections that then take us back to a causal pathway preceding, culminating and eventually transcending the "Palm Sunday" where the novel starts, to the narrative time of "the present" at the end of the novel. The narrative in *Purple Hibiscus* introduces the central conflict right at the beginning (*PH*, 3). As we will see later, the incident at the beginning is also an accurate representation of the irony that undercuts the narrative. To have a violent gesture in the context of contemplative communion is something that perhaps does not sit well with normative structures of religion. Violence and religion are in fact the strange bedfellows that account for the biggest irony in *Purple Hibiscus*. This introduction into the novel also reflects the position of the narrator, while at the same time underlines the rigour of the enforcement of routine through church ritual. The memory of this incident proceeds into a descriptive and detailed reflection of a history of the pious observance of religious ritual in the narrator's house, and the oppressive silence symptomatic of the fundamental observance of religious ritual. The superfluous conduct of routine, allows the narrator to pay attention to how unfamiliar such things as prayer, eating, cooking among others can eventually become. In the context of an overly routine livelihood, the objects and people around the narrator begin to take on unfamiliar perceptions.

Memory becomes vivid through the description of objects and their tactility: flowers, furniture, and the architecture of the house, food, as well as the faces of family members.

The memory of "Palm Sunday" generates a de-familiarisation of the people and things that exist around the time that the incident happens. The representation of memory here takes on a positivist dimension – colours, smells and textures of objects come alive as the narrator describes in detail the rituals at church masses, as well as at home and the regular domestic routine that revolves around eating, praying, going to school and doing homework. This attention to the miniscule details of daily routine allows the narrator to isolate the importance of what happens at "Palm Sunday" – her father's violent reaction, while juxtaposing it to the disturbing silences at meal times and around the house. The mood of silence, allows what is perceived as routinely to take on a subtext with unfamiliar undertones. These undertones, probing under the surface, pave way for an excursion into memory, on the part of the narrator:

> I lay in bed after Mama left and let my mind rake through the past, through the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than with our lips. Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all; Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom […] A freedom to be, to do. But my memories did not start at Nsukka. They started before, when all the hibiscuses in our front yard were a startling red. (15-16)

The narrator isolates the "Palm Sunday" incident, as a trigger into a landscape of memory. The hibiscus flower is a metaphor for memory, a tactile representation and cue for the memories that precede, and transcend the incident on "Palm Sunday" – that leads the narrator to conclude that her home is disintegrating. Hence, the delicate hibiscus flowers, their color, the time they bloom and their smell represent the sensory dimensions of the narrator's memory. They carry a material and symbolic significance of a specific experience and are therefore a treasure of memory. The purple and red hibiscus flowers represent a trajectory of not only time and place (Nsukka and Enugu respectively, as well

as the time before and after Palm Sunday) but also of the memory, as it is to unfold in the novel. Indeed, Kambili says her memories, stretch back to "when all the hibiscuses in our front yard were a startling red" (16). While representing trajectories of place and time, the hibiscus flowers invoke nostalgic emotions attached to the places and times that they symbolise. Hence the hibiscus flowers are at the centre of the memory-place of Nsukka; as the narrator says, "Nsukka started it all." The reader gets the feeling that Nsukka is of significant influence in the process of recollection.

Therefore the memories actually start, as the narrator says before Nsukka, when the hibiscus flowers were "a startling red" – the place is Enugu, Kambili's home. The brightness of the hibiscus flowers is foregrounded, for its vivacity and the memories, as they are to unfold are similarly vivid and detailed, as the colour of the hibiscus flowers the narrator describes. The chromatic description of the flowers is keen, making it a metaphor for the memories that follow, as well as even synecdochic of the material cultures that are informed by an authorial diasporic consciousness and its condition of nostalgia. The narrator goes back to a time before the memory of "Palm Sunday," where she describes the minutiae of household chores. She defamiliarises herself and the reader in these chores, through the atmosphere of silence and a dramatisation of religious rituals. The silence is pervasive, muffling, choking and violating the narrator, her sibling and her mother's senses of the self. Yet the rhythm of life here is, on the surface, quite ordinary, with an illusion of genuine religious piety and family union. The figure of the father is pervasive in these memories. The father, Papa Eugene, sanctions daily chores and programmes, through the rationale of Catholicism and religious ideology. The daily life in this household is overshadowed by Catholic dogma and the narrator painstakingly depicts it with the similitude of the religiosity that pervades her consciousness and those of the people living in this household. Washing, cooking, doing homework, going to school, among other daily chores are pervaded by the ritual of prayer that has become synonymous to the authority and legitimacy of the figure of the father. Indeed, the figure of the father here has the twin inscriptions of a supreme being and an earthly one who is the head of this nuclear family. In this sense, the everyday as it is depicted here loses its

unspectacular status and is defamiliarised because of its claustrophobic, alienating and violating nature to the sense of the narrator's self.

Hence, the memories represented here seem to be of a narrator's distanced persona, in an unfamiliar familial ritual. Moreover, even within the illusion of a spiritual enactment of ritual, the narrator, despite being a child and therefore a marginal figure in the hierarchy of authority in this household, stands above the silence and ritual through what she calls "speaking with our spirits" (17). The ubiquity of religious ritual, cooking, eating, doing school homework, dressing and even thinking, creates a telepathic form of conversation between Kambili and her brother Jaja which is the only way that filial warmth can be actually expressed. It is perhaps the only *tactic* available for Kambili within the everyday *strategies* laid out by her father, which Kambili describes here:

> I pushed my textbook aside, looked up and stared at my daily schedule, pasted on the wall above me. *Kambili* was written in bold letters on top of the white sheet of paper, just as *Jaja* was written on the schedule above Jaja's desk in his room. I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until the baby was a toddler. (23.) [Emphasis retained]

The narrator is a dominated, marginalised figure in this household. She therefore "operates" as de Certeau says of the ordinary man, under the structures and strictures of the familial space, in "force-relationships" (xix) with "subjects of will and power" – in this case Kambili's father. Kambili and her marginalised brother Jaja, have to find "ways of operating," and speaking, as "tactics" that do not, as de Certeau says, rely on space, but on "propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogenous elements" (xix). Hence "speaking with our spirits," as the narrator calls it, defines her position of "otherness" and yet of creativity and resistance. Telepathy becomes an art that defamiliarises what is practico-sensory, as depicted in this narrative statement: "*I wish we still had lunch together*, Jaja said with his eyes." (22) [Emphasis retained]

It is within the everyday that events, seen as spectacular, as the incident on "Palm Sunday" help to illuminate the fact that what is spectacular has its basis in the routine. *Purple Hibiscus'* detailed attention to the everyday is referenced from time to time by the memory of spectacular events like the coups that were regular events during the historical time in which this narrative is set.[59] Yet spectacular as the coups may appear to be, and as Kambili references them, they are imbricated in the ordinariness of "family time":

> It was during family time the next day, a Saturday, that the coup happened. Papa had just checkmated Jaja when we heard the martial music on the radio, the solemn strains making us stop to listen.
> A general with a strong Hausa accent came on and announced that
> We had a new government. (24)

Events such as the one above seem to break the monotony of daily life in the narrator's life. They also reference normative political history in the milieu of everyday life, allowing the contextualisation of specific historical events by the narrator. What is interesting is the way allusions of ethnic politics are drawn from the consciousness of childhood. The naivety inherent in the recognition of "Hausa accent" speaking in the radio, references the politics of military governance in Nigeria, reflecting, for any astute historian, the "tripartitioning" of political consciousness into ethno-religious blocks during the colonial occupation and at the advent of flag independence in Nigeria. It also draws into sharp focus the consciousness of ethnic identity, as the reader is already familiar, at this point in time, that the narrator is a member of a middle class Igbo household in Enugu.

There is a dimension of history that the memories represented in this narrative introduce: the clichéd idea of a dovetailing of a familial experience and that of the nation. While it is worth pointing this out, it is not worth reducing *Purple Hibiscus* to an allegory of the

[59] The narrative is historically set in the period between 1985 and 1998, reflected in Kambili's memory project, which shifts back and forth, to the present, which at the last section of the novel, hints at the popular rumor at the time of Abacha's death "they say he died atop a prostitute, foaming at the mouth and jerking" (296-297).

Nigerian nation. It would definitely benefit this argument though, by pointing out the complex way the narrative references the macro-history of the Nigerian nation state in everyday life as narrated by the fifteen year old Kambili. Firstly, the events of the socio-political world are mediated, for Kambili, by her father, who owns a newspaper called *The Standard* that provides a voice of resistance against the military regimes, through the editor, a man called Ade Cocker. Ade Cocker is portrayed as a fearless editor who as the story unfolds, regularly gets detained and tortured. He is later killed by a parcelled bomb.[60] Secondly, and most interestingly, the decay of the state, the corruption, as well as the cycles of coups which should normally take on a spectacular dimension, in contrast to what we consider to be everyday events, have instead taken on the ordinary life of the nation-state. Hence as Kambili does insightfully reflect at the beginning of the text:

> Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. (16)

In the reflection above we see two apparently spectacular events within the rhythm of the narrator's everyday life. However, her brother's defiance presents an unfamiliar spectacle, in comparison with the coup event and its riotous aftermath. By contrasting the colours green and purple, Kambili highlights the monotony of the riots that seem to be a routine activity after coups. The colour purple, of the hibiscus flowers here represents something exotic and unfamiliar, as she says "a different kind of freedom…A freedom to be, to do" (16). In a sense then, Kambili outlines for the reader an inverted perception of what in her experience is a daily occurrence. Later, during the coup that happens at "family time," Papa Eugene gives a history of the "vicious cycle" of coups, in a manner that explains the ordinariness of the "spectacle" of these coups as well as a placid internalisation of these events within the national psychic consciousness:

[60] Ade Cocker's character in *Purple Hibiscus*, is modeled after an actual editor of Nigeria's *Newswatch* Magazine, Dele Giwa, who was allegedly killed by the Babangida regime, through a parcel bomb that was delivered to his house, allegedly bearing a State House seal.

> Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups
> of the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria
> to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle.
> Military men would always overthrow one another, because
> they could, because they were all power drunk. (24)

Hence what we have is an inversion of the spectacular as the everyday, in the macro-space of the nation-state. The cyclical nature of political turbulence presents a routine government-in-crisis, an "abiku nation," as Ben Okri's protagonist Azaro calls it (1991:478). Ben Okri's *Famished Road* uses the spectacular and the surrealist style in defamiliarising the everyday, by rendering the spiritual in the physical and vice versa. The everyday, in Ben Okri's work is told through the twin matrices of a spirit world and a physical one, by Azaro, the child protagonist who straddles the two worlds. Ben Okri therefore defamiliarises the everyday, creating a spectacle of vision as the reader is transported into a world of jinn and all sorts of spirits that inhabit the physical world, unseen by ordinary humans. Okri's narrative technique basically domesticates the spectacular. In a sense, the spectacular becomes pervasive in the daily life of the narrator Azaro. Moreover, the everyday in Okri's work is depicted as grotesque.

The idea of the grotesque, relates to the project of defamiliarisation that we see in *Purple Hibiscus*. From a fundamentalist practice of religious ritual, the silence that pervades the narrator's home allows for her imagination to wander. Through the violence meted out to her and other family members by her father, Kambili's consciousness of the silence here allows for the portrayal of a gothic topography (Mabura, 2008). This is shown when the narrator and her brother speak with their "spirits," as well as in expressions such as "The off-white walls with the framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me. Even the glass dining table was moving toward me" (7). There is also the constant image of the "dancing figurines" throughout the narrative. The grotesque is achieved by the defamiliarisation of objects and pieces of furniture. The act of defamiliarisation of the objects is related to Brenda Cooper's (2008b) notion of the material culture of postcolonial migrant writing. While it is not a material fetishism, it is the effect of a

diasporic consciousness that allows authors to migrate objects and memories, through their narratives across the continent to their presently diasporic places. Again this is the effect of nostalgia and a constant feeling of loss. These objects become synecdochs of homeliness and belonging because they represent a version or slice of home, in the "reality" of imaginative memory.

The narrator juxtaposes the macro and micro-spaces of the state and the outside world to that of the family in an interesting way. As a middle-class family, they are cloistered from the spectacle of the street, and at all times Kambili's contact with the world outside her home is fleeting – she always sees the world from inside her father's car. She however, in the little moments she peeks outside, can sense the change; the green leaves and the chanting, as well as the spectacle of guns and soldiers:

> In later weeks, when Kevin drove past Ogui Road, there
> were soldiers at the road block near the market, walking around,
> caressing long guns. They stopped some cars and searched them.
> Once I saw a man kneeling on the road beside his Peugeot 504,
> with his hands raised high in the air. (28)

Immediately, she draws our attention to the irreconcilable situation at home, as if to signal stability, while at the same time to leave a subtext that tells an ironically different narrative: "But nothing changed at home. Jaja and I still followed our schedules, still asked each other questions whose answers we already knew" (29). However, Kambili goes on to mention that the only change here is her mother's pregnancy, and then typical of her precocious observation, she describes her mother's slowly distending belly covered by a "red and gold embroidered church wrapper" (28). This attention to the chromatic is a repeat of the metaphor that as we saw earlier, describes the "startling red hibiscus flowers," that began this trajectory of her memories. This metaphor is extended to describe the church altar which was "decorated in the same shade of red as Mama's wrapper," with red as "the colour of Pentecost" and the priest wearing a "red robe that seemed too short for him" (28). This metaphor is vividly portrayed, as colouring the

trajectory of the memories invoked by the startling red hibiscus flowers growing outside her home in Enugu. In this particular church incidence, the redness of the colours the narrator describes eventually builds up to the reality of a violently induced miscarriage, therefore summing up the extension of this metaphor and depicting the trauma of daily existence for the narrator.

2.4.1 the trauma memory of everyday life

Papa Eugene, in one of his reactions to violated routine, in which his wife is reluctant to visit the priest after mass because of her pregnant status, beats her up, oblivious of her pregnant status. Once again, through Kambili's attention to the tactile sensations evoked through sounds and smells, she describes for us this particular instance:

> I was in my room after lunch, reading James chapter five […] when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true. I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty. I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open. Papa's gait on the stairs sounded heavier, more awkward than usual […] Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme border. (32-33)

And later, we see the extension of the metaphor: "We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolour all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped" (33). Kambili is quite adept at speaking with a precocious naivety and this particular incident, if read closely, allows us to see that her daily life entails a constant witnessing and experience of psycho-physical violence: "Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty" (33). Hence, one can read the ironies that Kambili suggests

of "stability" at home, in the face of gun-carrying soldiers outside. Most importantly, the everyday consists of a domesticated spectacle of violence and a curious and connotative subtext of silence on the narrator's part. She cannot, in light of a pervasive fear and awe of "The Father," speak out. She chokes several times in unsuccessful attempts to speak, as her body becomes part of a spectacle of violence and silence and therefore itself a narrative of trauma. Heather Hewett (2005) has argued that Kambili's body is a site of critical silence made visible by the constant choking and inadvertent inability to speak at crucial moments. Her ordinary life is illuminated through the subtexts of violence, silence and wounded bodies that depict a long-suffering and traumatised existence. Scars, left behind by inflictions of torturous punishments, like Jaja's crooked finger and Mama's awkward limp, remain taboo subjects and residual marks to be read as texts of a pervasive threat of violence in this household.

The unspoken issues are relegated into a complacent silence that defines the ironies of the existence of fundamental Catholicism and violence. Silence, as it is depicted here, is ontological of the bodies and voices suppressed, while at the same time defining the conduct of daily life, in which it takes on a psycho-physically problematic presence:

> Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of the evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterward. (31)

Yet again, this representation of a pervasive, oppressive and suppressive silence can be read against the irony of the narrator's father's attempt at breaking the silencing of democracy by the military regimes through protests in his progressive newspaper, *The Standard*. *Purple Hibiscus* foregrounds trauma on the familial level, through its depiction of the child narrator's psychosomatic distress – her witnessing and experience of physical and psychological violence within the assumed comfort and security of daily family life.

Hence the memories that precede the blooming of the purple hibiscus flowers, which are portrayed by their "startling" redness, have an overhanging consciousness of the experience of psycho-physical trauma, an experience that defamiliarises daily routine. These trauma memories are presented as embodied in the red hibiscus flowers. The homely space Kambili inhabits acquires a searing tactility through a gothic like description, what (Edensor, 2002) calls the "smellscape and soundscape." These are sensory topographies where the everyday is mapped in narrative forms that then provide a critique of the everyday life and how it deconstructs macro-senses of identity. In this way macro-identities are localised into the micro-activities of everyday life.

The narrator succeeds in creating sensations out of attention to colour, sound, smell, sight and touch, aspects that help her to apprehend the daily experiences around her. These become touch points to the content of these memories she is laying out before the reader. She plots her metaphors around the smellscapes and soundscapes she inhabits. As in the above depiction of chromatic metaphor of "redness," the extent of her trauma at the sight and sound of the battering of her mother and eventually the "trickle of blood," is extended further to the letters in her textbook, "swimming into one another, and then changed to a bright red, the red of fresh blood. The blood was watery, flowing from Mama, flowing from my eyes" (35). This watery image of blood is further extended to the narrator's critical observation of the "stale saltiness" (36), on her lips, of the holy water needed to cleanse the family from the mother's sinful act of refusing to visit the priest after mass, despite the miscarriage caused by the beatings. The extension of this metaphor does in fact reflect the temporally fragmented experience of a traumatic event, in its Freudian "belatedness". Kambili's memories here take on complex depiction of temporality as these images of redness and blood that testify to the event she witnessed begin to blind her vision. Scholarship on trauma memory explores the confounding belatedness and recurrence of trauma memory, something that as we see with Kambili recurs against the rules of a Freudian unconscious because they are not repressed, yet neither can they be controlled by the unconscious. Cathy Caruth (1995:4-5) says in fact, that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the

lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished." Hence trauma memory, as with Kambili's case is confounded by her reliving the pain of an inner journey through the traumatic event, and by her inability to "witness," as she listens to the pounding in her parents' bedroom which she "safely" ascribes to the idea that her father was finding it difficult to open the door.

Later, in one of the few crucial and critical moments of self-reflection, Kambili concludes, "I did not think, I did not even think to think, what Mama needed to be forgiven for" (36). In these moments, we get to see the spectacular in the everyday. We especially see how the practice of religious ritual, a part of this particular family's daily ritual is fraught with anomalies whenever it is appropriated, as can be implied in a patriarchal locus of power and control that Papa Eugene represents here. Similar anomalies and slippages of laws and principles are the subject, for instance, of Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy – *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street* – which in their depiction of the everyday lives of an Egyptian middle class family, reflect on the ambiguities of the practice of everyday life and the ideals of Islamic religious practice that overdetermine the consciousness of the characters in the text.

The material and sensorial aspects that trigger memory are the way that the everyday is constructed. In *Purple Hibiscus* Kambili's memories are made real through moments of family congregation, and the dinner table is one such activity that represents Kambili's experience and critique of everyday life. Tensions and fears are enacted within this smellscape, as detailed attention is paid to Nigerian cuisine by the author. Physical and psychological violence is experienced here as well as Jaja's acts of resistance that we find at the beginning of the novel. The dinner table is where the order of ritual, including the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm, 1983) is enacted through Papa Eugene symbolically presiding over prayers and novenas, some lasting for up to twenty minutes. A religious etiquette illustrated in an obsessive compulsion to pray before and after meals, as well as making necessary compliments at specific times during the meal, epitomises the pervasion of ritual activity in this household. These activities also depict the functioning of patriarchal power. Moreover, these moments present the banality of the ritual

practices. For instance when Papa Eugene, having been interrupted and has to leave the table barely after the eating has began, prays the end of the meal prayer in advance before going off to deal with the interruption (198).

For Kambili, the dinner table portrays at most times the trauma memories, especially when some ritual or order has been violated. For instance, in an incident where Kambili's brother Jaja shows defiance, "I turned to stare at him. At least he was saying thanks the right way, the way we always did after a meal. But he was also doing what we never did: he was leaving the table before Papa had said the prayer after meals" (14). These moments offer horrific flights of imagination for Kambili, as she defines the consequences in a hyperbolic, grotesque fashion – where she suffers vicariously:

> I reached for my glass and stared at the juice, watery yellow, like urine. I poured all of it down my throat, in one gulp. I didn't know what else to do. This had never happened before in my entire life, never. The compound walls would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani trees. The sky would cave in. The Persian rugs on the stretches of the gleaming marble floor would shrink. Something would happen. But the only thing that happened was my choking. My body shook from the coughing. (14)

The rituals of order at table offer for us the spectacle of violence, from Kambili's perspective. The dinner table becomes an occasion in which fear is produced and reproduced. It is a moment in anticipation of violence, and trauma, as with another instance in which Kambili, in anticipation of punishment for coming second in her class (which happens after hearing and seeing the effects of her mother's physical abuse and eventual miscarriage), chokes and suffers:

> I did not, could not, look at Papa's face when he spoke. The boiled yam and peppery greens refused to go down my throat; they clung to my mouth like children clinging to their mothers' hand at a nursery

> school entrance. I downed glass after glass of water to push them down, and by the time Papa started the grace, my stomach was swollen with water. (41)

The rituals at table therefore depict traumatic memories that stand out in Kambili's narrative. Kambili's body is itself a text to be read, as a spectacle of violence in everyday life. Traumatic memories here are therefore located within the frontiers of Kambili's psychic and somatic consciousness. Kambili's body becomes a text that depicts a violated body and therefore the locus and visibility of traumatic memory, reflected best in her silence and stuttering speech. On the other hand, these traumatic memories can also be seen to be depictions of material culture mediated by the postcolonial migrant novel. While food here is a synecdoche of the traumatic memories, the attention to descriptions of the varieties of food and their forms of preparation in *Purple Hibiscus* reflects a nostalgic diasporic consciousness reflected in the author's autobiographical memory. In this sense we find similarities with Chris Abani's *Graceland* which has serialised recipes derived from Nigerian cuisine as part of an intertextual process that seem to point to Abani migrating cultural relics through the medium of the text. Hence food, a material object that reflects the tensions in the social relations in Kambili's household is also part of the smellscape of an authorial diasporic consciousness.

Around the representation of activities that centre on food is enacted the rituals that define familial relations and therefore the everyday life in the narrator's household. These activities involve cooking and its ingredients and recipes, arrangement of cutlery and crockery for dinner, as well as the rituals of prayer before and after meals. These activities are accompanied by a schedule of operation, a "strategy" defined by the rituals that are acted around the food. Their purported significance to religious ideals and the subtexts of an identity crisis are made conspicuous by a tangible silence as well as Kambili's traumatic experiences. The seemingly consistent ordering of activities and appliances that accompany the act of eating, which include a uniform arrangement of cutlery and crockery, a rhythmic pattern of speech at table and an insistence on specific etiquette at table, are but an appurtenance to a subversive narrative of (psychological)

disorder and violence – the violence of disorder, that is constantly alluded to by Kambili's choking, bloated stomach and speaking with her "spirit." In a sense, her Enugu home becomes a gothic topography that represents an order of violence and a violence of order. The everyday takes on a disturbingly unfamiliar pattern of violence that for a lack of physical escape necessitates "speaking [...] our spirits," flights of imagination and landscapes of desires that find an alternative experience of the everyday in Nsukka. Nsukka is that memory-place that as Kambili says at the beginning of the text "started it all". Nsukka as she says, and with much nostalgia, defamiliarises her own experience of the everyday in Enugu: "And perhaps then we would never have gone to Nsukka and everything would have remained the same" (104).

2.4.2 nostalgia and a liberating memoryscape.

Nsukka, as a memory-place is, for Kambili, represented by the colour purple, with the purple hibiscus flowers becoming a synecdoche of Nsukka. These flowers are not only a trigger, but a repository of the memories of Nsukka, representing not only here, as it turns out later, a place of freedom and dialogue, but also an authorial consciousness that extends the symbolic capital of Nsukka to her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Nsukka in Adichie's fiction can therefore be said to be a repository of autobiographical and imaginary memory, as portrayed in not only the nostalgic mood it engenders for Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus,* but also for the chivalric tone that accompanies the representation of the Biafran war in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In this sense then Nsukka triggers nostalgic memory that derives from a positive hankering of the memories of its experience from the various protagonists' points of view as well as from a sense of loss. This loss is of an imaginatively pristine time of laughter, music and freedom for Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* and a sense of identity for Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Nsukka is therefore a narrative memoryscape, a palimpsest, in which layers of memories and meanings are plotted from the autobiographical consciousnesses and the history of the Biafran war. Nsukka's importance in Adichie's fiction can be attributed to the repository in which a self-archive is being built and refigured. Moreover, in its own inimitability, narrative memory engages with historical forms of reminiscence in potentially subversive ways.

For example, Adichie's depiction of the Biafran war engages fictional and non-fictional accounts of the war, but it also goes back to the ordinary, as we will see in the next section. Adichie also, because of poetic license, restructures cartographical facts. For instance, she reconstructs the geographical history of the violence, like the order in which the Biafran towns fell. In this sense, one can see how narrative memory can engage in a symbolic re-figuration of the archive in ways that are unique to the genre of the novel in its engagement with memory and history.

Nsukka in *Purple Hibiscus* is a terrain of liberating memories that give the narrator a "freedom to be, to do" (16). And indeed Nsukka, as a place that triggers happy memories, is reminisced in nostalgic tones that are a counterpoint to the traumatic memories and the palpable and repressive silence of Enugu. Hence, this phase of narrative memory is devoid of the monologic grammar of Catholicism and is invested with a different and liberating soundscape and smellscape that heralds a new sense of the everyday. Nsukka for Kambili is therefore the place of healing, of a contrastive memory. Moreover, the freshness of new events at Nsukka comes across with a new sense of coherence, as compared to the disjointed tone describing events at her home in Enugu. As with Kambili's propensity for the infinitesimal, Nsukka is presented in intense detail, an effort that an astute reader would recognise as the author's source of narrative inspiration, as with many other essays and short stories that Adichie has written, whose predominant focus is this University town.[61] For Kambili, Nsukka's memories begin with a symbolic gesture of freedom, with her Aunt Ifeoma's vigorous dance: "Then Aunty Ifeoma did a little dance, moving her arms in rowing motions, throwing each leg in front of her and stamping down hard" (113). This is followed by an interesting sense of familiarity and a different smellscape:

> I noticed the ceiling first, how low it was. I felt I could reach out and touch it; it was so unlike home, where the high ceilings gave our room an airy stillness. The pungent fumes of kerosene smoke mixed with the aroma of curry and nutmeg from the kitchen.

[61] Am referring to essays and stories such as "The Writing life," "Heart is Where Home Was" and "Diary."

(113)

The different smellscape here is complicated by cramped space and a sense of disorder but an interesting feeling of familiarity for Kambili. In De Certeau's terminology, the "ways of using" here present a cultural shock for her. Again there is a different "poetic geography" and its first glimpse, Aunty Ifeoma's dance, is followed by the images of cramped space, with books, medicine bottles scattered on tables and suitcases "piled on top of one another" (114). Furthermore, the soundscape here is polyvocal, as Kambili is to find out: as her aunt "chattered" and "her stream of sentences punctuated by cackling laughter," she "seemed to be laughing and crying at the same time" (117). Laughter becomes an aural metaphor for the narrator's experience of Nsukka, as it pervades daily existence. Laughter as Kambili says "floated over my head" (120) and "always rang out in Aunty Ifeoma's house, and no matter where the laughter came from, it bounced around all the walls, all rooms" (140). The everyday here in Kambili's experience stands out through the reverberation of laughter and its echoes around the house, depicting liberties, freedoms and a different order of ritual that as Kambili comes to shockingly learn, also involves a prayer for laughter. The ritual of prayer in Nsukka is juxtaposed to that in Enugu, and it is bewildering to Kambili, for its staccato nature:

> When we finished, we said morning prayers in the living room,
> a string of short prayers punctuated by songs. Aunty Ifeoma prayed
> for the university, for the lecturers and administration, for Nigeria,
> and finally, she prayed that we might find peace and laughter today.
> As we made the sign of the cross, I looked up to seek Jaja's face,
> to see if he, too, was bewildered that Aunty Ifeoma and her family
> prayed for, of all things, *laughter*. (127. Emphasis retained)

Laughter, therefore, defines the soundscape of memories of Nsukka in a positive way. It becomes the vehicle of the nostalgic emotions associated with Nsukka, which is a contrast to her home Enugu where silence reigned supreme. The idea of dialogue, in very

literal and metaphorical senses is found in Kambili's experience of laughter. Laughter, is a "tactic," that is most familiar to Aunty Ifeoma's household. In Kambili's initial experience, the laughter that reverberates here seems in fact to mock her own internalised experience of silence. In fact, her cousin Amaka initially chides her for lowering her voice when she speaks (117). Laughter, in Bakhtinian (1968) postulations, is also a way of breaking monotony and as he historicises it to the carnivalesque form, it is a way of defying the monologue of church discourse. Indeed, we notice Kambili's perception of laughter as something too secular to be used in prayer, as seen in the quote above.

The memories of Nsukka therefore begin a process of re-membering, in which Kambili has to reconstruct the initial perceptions of her "self" in radical ways, driven by the metaphorical idea of finding speech through laughter. Symbolically, laughter becomes a speech-act that allows her freedom to act and exist. Nsukka therefore becomes the memory-place for freedom of being and action, thereby distinguishing a different persona from the one in Enugu. Nsukka, the home, the house, becomes an architext of memory, even Kambili's conscious (re)construction of her personal history. Clearly, her experience of Nsukka, allows her to lift the veil of a religiously sanitised silence and oppressive home life, thereby reducing it to a manifestation of ordinariness, as she realises in retrospect.

Nsukka and Enugu are therefore counterpoints, mirroring each other as distinctly different concepts of home and house for Kambili. In these two places and spaces, her history follows a traumatic then liberating trajectory of memory. Therefore, while Enugu and Nsukka are places of memory for the narrative in *Purple Hibiscus*, Nsukka, to borrow the words of Seamus Heaney (1989) is "the place of writing," where authorial muse is found. Hence Nsukka, becomes, as the next chapter argues, a "country of the mind" (Tindall, 1991) in Adichie's oeuvre. The idea of home is, in Kambili's memory, found in that continuum between the loss and traumatic experience of Enugu and the nostalgia for an enriching experience in Nsukka. These sensibilities are expounded by the materiality of these memories, found in the houses or dwelling places where the memories find triggers and markers through smellscapes and soundscapes, of food,

flowers, people, laughter, the corridors, passageways and stairs. In a sense, the memory of Enugu and of Nsukka reflects the discursive influence of houses and homes on the discourse of memory and history, something that Burton (2003) examines and which is worth exploring shortly here. Burton examines three 20th century diaporic Indian women's writing of autobiographies, memoirs and novels, as ways in which narrative forms of memory become alternative sites of engaging history. This is relevant to my argument on childhood as a site for alternative history and memory. She makes a significant statement here:

> The frequency with which women writers of different nations have made use of home to stage their dramas of remembrance is a sign of how influential the cult of domesticity and its material exigencies has been for inhabitants of structurally gendered locations like the patriarchal household. (2003:6)

Burton, arguing from a feminist historian perspective, of the relevance of domestic histories within the larger nationalist and colonialist histories in pre-independence India, demonstrates the critical role that domestic stories play in problematising the processes of historicising and providing "a variety of historically contingent narrative strategies and […] an opportunity for a variety of intellectually responsible interpretive possibilities" (27). Nsukka provides for Adichie an entry point into a self-archive but at the same time an alternative perspective of history, through childhood figures, images and memories depicted with attention and detail to everyday existence in homes and within houses. The trajectories of these memories and the movement of the images of child figures is also implicated within a larger historical matrix, derived from Nigerian socio-political and economic history of the 80s and 90s. Yet, memory of the ordinary problematises the archive, which is considered as constructed and informed by specific power relations of official record keepers/government and the citizenry. Childhood memories, its accompanying images and the protagonists are specific sources of not only the history of childhood, but also the archive of childhood. Therefore, due to the fact that the world of childhood is defined by adult structures of living and feeling, it befalls on the author to

use the childhood figures, memories and images to engage with the process of of memory, which for Burton (2003) is marginalised in the discipline of history. The discourse of childhood in its engagement with history presents an innately competing discourse with the process of historicising, because it goes back to everyday life through its engagement with micro-memories. The architectural trope of the house and home provides familiar experience in the narrative of childhood as well as reflects on the diasporic experiences of the author. What I consider to be an instructive statement about the unassailability of the architext(ure) of memory in diasporic fictions is posited by Burton: "diasporic experiences go some way toward explaining their attachment to home as both an architectural trope and a material witness to history" (2003:7). She adds:

> The mobility that characterised each of their lives, thus accounts at least in part, for why house and home became touchstones for their apprehensions of historical time and space - revealing in the process, the gendered politics of the diasporic historical imagination. (2003:7)

Burton's work shares with this study the concern for diasporic consciousness and experiences as reflected in fictional works. The idea of mobility, which Burton examines as an analytical factor, in how it influences micro-histories, is something that Coe's (1984) study attributes, to contemporary childhoods. Coe underscores the importance of mobility, by drawing parallels between geographically static childhoods and mobile ones and concluding that autobiographical works of diasporic authors distinguish childhood selves from adult selves because of the experience of mobility. Hence the intense focus on the everyday, which for children and women revolves around the house and home, depicts them (women and children) as "memory's chief representatives, as well as its primary preservers" (Burton, 2003:23). Burton therefore points out that:

> if women's [and children's] structural locations have meant that the domestic looms large in these accounts-if house and home, in all their symbolic and material complexity, are prime

> among the resources that women have used to imagine the past-
> then we must take them seriously precisely as archival forms in
> order to bring women's [and children's] 'private' experiences
> more fully into the purview of history. Otherwise the historicity
> of women's [and children's] words will continue to be imperiled,
> and memory, like fiction, will continue to be viewed merely
> as the 'counter-archive for the ephemeral and the wayward' rather
> than as fully-fledged (if not self-standing) archive-one that displays
> a variety of historically contingent narrative strategies and provides
> an opportunity for a variety of intellectually interpretive responsibilities.
> (2003:27. Emphasis mine)

Burton's statement here sheds light on the idea of an alternative time and history through the engagement of memory to create an alternative archive. Therefore, the narrative form of fiction as examined by Burton is a form that engages with the masculine text of history and in the case of this study, an adultist text of history from within the framework of adult structures of living and feeling. Therefore childhood memory, as it unfolds through the structures of daily living, engages with the processes of archive and historical formation. As with Kambili's case, the central focus on her reminiscence of daily life gives a much more profound micro-memory, micro-history of ordinary life in Nigeria in the 80s and 90s. While Adichie's focus on the politics of micro-histories is informed by a self-archivist and diasporic impulse, how does the narrative of *Purple Hibiscus* reflect on the ideas of historicism, historicity and historiography?

While Kambili's position as a first person narrator limits the possibilities of her vision, in comparison to that of an omniscient narator, Adichie's choice of Kambili's personal memories is not oblivious of the spectacular – of soldiers and guns outside the streets and even more profoundly, her own father's involvement in the democratic discourse of that time. Allusions of Nigerian history are creatively presented through the modelling, for instance, of Ade Cocker, the editor of Papa Eugene's newspaper, after Dele Giwa. Through this modelling, Kambili's memories can be plotted along a normative historical

time in Nigeria. The loci of Kambili's memories are however at the crossroads of trauma and nostalgia, defined by a patriarchal stranglehold and another matriarchal alternative in Nsukka that is liberating. The conspicuous notion of religiosity that contributes a lot to the religious grammar we find in the beginning of the text is reflective of a historical landscape of ethno-religiosity in the Nigerian body politic since receipt of independence, as well as more generally of specific events such as Babangida's unilateral decision to enroll Nigeria in the Organization of the Islamic Council during his term. In a sense, Kambili's traumatic memories are intertwined with the collective, ongoing national trauma engendered by the totalitarian military regimes' reign of terror, enforced silence and brutality.

Therefore, Kambili's experience of trauma, in the space of the family, is symptomatic of the collective trauma of this "*abiku* nation," in its perpetuity of military governance and what Soyinka (1996) calls a "hemorrhage". The metaphor of blood, "the trickle," and Soyinka's idea of a "hemorrhage" share symbolic meaning with the idea of an *abiku* child, one who, in Yoruba mythology torments the mother by dying and coming back again, much like the miscarriage of socio-economic and political functions of the Nigerian polity. Hence Kambili's familial experience of trauma, which finds a space of healing and expiation in Nsukka, can be located at the macro-level of trauma, of the nation-state. Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, explores a theme that has its discourse entrenched in the politics of nation and nation-state formation – the Biafran war. There are however certain talking points that I alluded to earlier, in trying to establish continuities between *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The privileging of Nsukka as a "country" in Adichie's mind, and as a toponym of meaning and therefore as a place of memory, from where an archive of memories are stored and read along and against a historiography of discourses surrounding the event of the Biafran war. Nsukka's importance in Adichie's second novel can be read in its historical role in the Biafran war, which begs the fundamental question posed by Soyinka – "when is the nation?" The metaphor of a "sore," as Soyinka uses it reflects on the trauma, the hemorrhage of nationality, while also highlighting the collective trauma endemic in the Nigerian body politic. Biafra stands out as a critique of the Nigerian nation-state, in terms of asking the

question "when" in reference to temporality and in exposing the artifice within the historical landscape of the nation-state. Biafra stands out as a cicatrix within the nation-state body politic, in a gradual process of healing. Biafra therefore is not only an event, but a part of traumatic history for the Igbo community specifically**.**

2.5 Memory of War: Trauma, Textual Archive and Cultural Memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

As an event in a specific time and history, the exploration of the Nigerian civil war as a theme in fiction returns us to the focus on memory and its connection to narrative forms. The war happened in 1967-1970 when the South Eastern states, led by Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu decided to secede from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, following a period of social, cultural, political and economic tensions. These tensions culminated in a spate of coups and the Pogrom in Northern Nigeria in 1966, where allegedly, Igbo soldiers and civilians were targeted and killed. The secession led to the self-proclamation of the Republic of Biafra. The Nigerian military regime led by General Yakubu Gowon declared a blockade on Biafra and embarked on "police action," leading to a full scale civil war that went on for four years. This war is the subject of Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

It is important to delineate the different shades of memory and their theoretical dimensions that we are dealing with here. Firstly, the memory of Biafra is influenced by the ethno-geographic politics that preceded and succeeded the independence of Nigeria, found in the notion of the tri-partitioning of Nigeria into ethno-religious polities during colonial occupation. In this sense then there emerges the politics of cultural cartographies and here I am referring to language and religion as distinguishing semiotic clusters. The memory of Biafra can therefore be seen as primarily cultural, especially from the perspective of the Igbo as the dominant nation affected by the war. Secondly, the events preceding the Biafran war, including the coup and Pogrom of 1966, precipitated a series of massacres, and by 1970 when the war ended, an estimated 3 million lives had been lost. In this way, the memory of Biafra takes on a traumatic dimension and the discourses

of "victims and victors" begin to take on the dimensions of communal trauma, and therefore the idea of shared or collective trauma, through collective memory. Biafran literature therefore shares with Holocaust literature the characteristic of literatures of trauma or literatures of memory.

Judging from the vast amount of literature on the Biafran war (Amuta, 1982; McLuckie, 1987)[62], one cannot but as McLuckie observes "reflect upon and emphasize the residual effect of the war on the consciousness of Nigerians" (1987:510). As an "open sore" in the history of state formation, its traumatic nature problematises the temporal axis from which the Nigerian state wants to project itself in relation to the present. The vast body of works about this war complicates the normative idea of a socio-economic and political history of Nigeria, therefore acting as an alternative archive. Hence, this political/military trauma takes on a historical dimension that refigures normative perceptions of history. As Cathy Caruth (1995:8) points out:

> The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time.

Therefore, in light of Caruth's observation, a traumatic event like Biafra is the bane of the presumed organic unity and spatio-temporal existence of the Nigerian nation-state. The vast amount of work about the war, presented in the bibliographies of Chidi Amuta and Craig McLuckie, present an archive of an alternative spatio-temporal existence that can be ascribed to the socio-economic and political livelihood of the Nigerian nation-state. This vast amount of work on Biafra is an array of memory that provides the textual

[62] Chidi Amuta (1982) and Craig McLuckie (1987) provide bibliographies of the vast amount of work in all literary genres and criticism on the Biafran or Nigerian civil war.

background for a collective memory of the Biafran war. Hence, the literatures of the Biafran war become themselves *sites* of memory in its cultural and traumatic dimensions. In their bibliographic form these function as a monument in fixing the events of the Biafran war within the pages of the texts they inhabit. In this material existence of the books, articles, journals and magazines on the Biafran war there is an ongoing tension with history, making the printed work on the Biafran war problematise historical assumptions by its ontological latency and peculiar atemporal structure. In other words, one is reminded of Susan Stewart's (1984:22) astute observations on the general "simultaneity" of the printed word, and its problematic material existence in relation to the acts of reading and writing and how these acts disturb chronologies of time and history. She avers that:

> The simultaneity of the printed word lends the book its material aura; as an object, it has a life of its own, a life outside human time, the time of its body and its voice […] the book stands in tension with history, a tension reproduced in the microcosm of the book itself, where reading takes place in time across marks which have been made in space. Moreover, because of this tension, all events recounted in the text have an effect which serves to make the text both transcendent and trivial and to collapse the distinction between the real and the imagined.

Susan Stewart's idea of simultaneity reflects on the writer-reader dimensions of the book, going back to the idea of an imagined audience or a "*community* of readers" (1984:19 Emphasis mine) and their "abstract existence". In Stewart's reflections, one finds undertones of Benedict Anderson's notion of "Imagined communities" (1983), or audiences in the history of print media. The idea of *community* is fascinating here because it underscores the importance of the *collective*, of a *shared* sense of values, artifacts (books and cultural things) and memories (as with the trauma of Biafra). More interesting, at the heart of the discourse on Biafra is an actual nation –predominantly Igbo

– and its foreclosed attempt at imagining itself as a nation-state, with a communal sense of victimhood. Hence the literatures of the Biafran war are themselves repositories of a collective trauma that reflects on a collective memory of either the macro-community of the Nigerian nation-state at this point in time, or the specifically micro-community of the Igbo. While not globally monumentalised like the Holocaust, Biafra was and still is a tragic and traumatic time of Nigerian history, monumentalised in the material products of its discourse – in the novels, the journal articles, poetry, drama and fiction that have collected over the years into a significant textual archive. Due to its traumatic effects on the nation-state's consciousness, it remains a wound that refuses to heal and, in borrowing the words of Houston Baker Jr. a "critical memory" that "judges severely, censures righteously, renders hard ethical evaluations of the past that it never defines as well passed" (1999:264). Therefore, if we read Biafra as a "critical memory" we can make the assertion, like Baker that it is "the cumulative, collective maintenance of a record that draws into relationship significant instants of time past and the always uprooted homelessness of now" (264).[63]

As a critical memory therefore, Biafra's representation in literature depicts trauma, loss, and nostalgia because of its invocation of a troubling relationship with the notion of belonging. In light of this highly charged landscape of memory, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* plunges into a thematic concern that is replete with memorial subjectivities, directly implicated in Adichie's own familial genealogy, her place of childhood (Nsukka) and her sense of diasporic identity. While *Purple Hibiscus* privileges the familial space as a poignant site of memory and leaves for the reader subtexts that can be related to macro-memories and experiences, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is constructed out of an experience of memory that breaks familial, ethnic, national and nation-state zones of memory and experience. As we will soon realise, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a palimpsest of memories. There are levels of autobiographical memories influencing the individual memories of the

[63] For a further analysis of the notion of "critical memory," refer to Houston Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," pp.264-296. Baker's references to the idea of home imply a critical restructuring of memories of time and space and in a sense signals a re-visionary impact that such memory has on ideas of history, time and senses of belonging.

protagonists in the text, which also form part of the collective memories of the extinguished Biafran nationalism.

It is instructive to underscore the idea of authorial subjectivities here. Adichie's experience of the Biafran war is genealogical. It is a "heritage" as Hawley (2008) calls it, from a familial line that was directly involved in the war. Adichie lost both her grandfathers in the war and writing *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be seen as a symbolic act of retrieval, of a genealogical heritage. For Adichie, Biafra is therefore partly a memory carried down from the oral archive of her surviving grandparents. While it is directly embodied in these figures that experienced it, there are specific sites of memory like the place Nsukka that are residual and of monumental value to the memory of Biafra. The place Nsukka becomes a site where the memory of individuals and of a community is negotiated, because it is a place of shared history. Hence, in view of Liliane Weissberg's (1999) ideas about sites of cultural memory, Nsukka's significance is reflected in its negotiation of individual and collective memories of the war. Ultimately, its material existence as a place of these memories endows it the relevance of a site of cultural memory. Moreover, its importance as a place of memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun* gives it the quality of a "texture of memory" in the words of James E. Young (1993). Young implies here the activity of textualising cultural memory – finding space within the material culture of the book. The book itself is therefore also read across a vast bibliographical account of the war collected over the years – an archive that remains foundational as the loom from which the warp and weft of the narratives on the war are processed. In this way, the fictional work becomes part of this archive of imagination and narrative.

Half of a Yellow Sun is therefore preceded by other texts, which claim a shared historical concern with the Biafran war. On Adichie's part there is an awareness of shared stories, especially across her familial genealogy, from people who experienced the war in her nuclear and extended family. The precocious tone of the "Author's Note" at the end of the text reflects shared memories and an awareness of an event that is defined by a variety of disparate experiences and different people. We notice not only its

acknowledgement of individual memories, but also collective memories, providing the book with a material platform to launch a familial monument around this traumatic yet nostalgic event of the Biafran war. I quote this in detail:

> However, I could not have written this book without my parents. My wise and wonderful father, Professor Nwoye James Adichie, *Odelu Ora Abba*, ended his many stories with the words *agha ajoka*, which in my literal translation is 'war is very ugly.' He and my defending and devoted mother, Mrs Ifeoma Grace Adichie, have always wanted me to know, I think, that what matters is not what they went through but that they survived. I am grateful to them for their stories and for so much more.
> I salute my Uncle Mai, Michael E.N. Adichie, who was wounded while fighting with the 21st Battalion of the Biafran Army, and who spoke to me of his experience with much grace and humour. I salute, also, the sparkling memories of my Uncle CY (Cyprian Odigwe, 1949-98), who fought with the Biafran Commandos, my cousin Pauly (Paulinus Ofili, 1955-2005), who shared his memories of life in Biafra as a thirteen-year-old, and my friend Okla (Okoloma Maduewesi, 1972-2005), who will now not clutch this under his arm as he did last.

The note above provides a reflection of the theoretical construction that began this section of the chapter. It does this by foregrounding the notion of memory in writing, as a process, in both its individual and collective dimensions, with the trauma memories embodied in "surviving" family members, who then become sources of narrative memory by the act of testimony to the author. Reading like a family monument, this note eulogises the departed in a chivalric tone and in a cross-generational and extended family network, dispersing the trauma memory of the war across familial lines while allowing the author, through the vantage point of the present, to assemble those memories and accord them a monumental space within the confines of literary history. When the author was born, seven years after the end of the war, she is born with the scars, visible within

her own familial line in the form of memories and persons who have been scarred psychologically and physically by the war. Nsukka, the place of her childhood, is abound with the markers of these memories and in *Half of a Yellow Sun,* it forms the terrain where individual and collective memories are triggered and narrated.

The title *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a textual translation of the symbol of the Biafran flag which had the image of a half of a yellow sun engraved on it. The symbolic capital of the title is found in its explicit invocation of historical markers of an extinguished Biafran nation(-state). As a text that invokes symbols of that nation, it also represents material cultures of textuality that characterise postcolonial migrant writing. These material cultures are textualised through words or texts that invoke specific material things that then become synecdochic of larger cultures, or experiences. Indeed, the half of a yellow sun engraved in the flag was metonymic of Biafran nation(hood). The symbolic capital of the text and phrase "half of a yellow sun" is found at the convergence of individual and collective memories preserved in a textual form as metaphoric of the hopes of a community – a nation – that were nipped in the bud, but which continues to haunt the psyche of the contemporary Nigerian state. The novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is therefore, from the outset, an excursion into the controversies of national history through memory, with a vast background of narrative forms that the author is conscious about. As a caveat, to call it a historical novel is to put a limit on the multiple meanings that we can derive from its engagement with history through narrative forms of memory. While, as Dominic LaCapra (1987) argues, the historical novel has stirred a methodological debate about disciplinary processes in history and literature, Richard Terdiman (1993) extends the argument further by underscoring the centrality of memory in the crisis of remembering, and the importance of the novel in unpacking the post-enlightenment crisis of history and archive. The idea of memory that narrative forms such as the novel engage in would therefore seem to problematise perceptions of history. *Half of a Yellow Sun* therefore transcends the generic classification of a historical novel as it can be read through the vast archive of not only the Biafran war, but also orthodox history of the Nigerian nation-state.

It is instructive, as we try to unpack the multi-faceted idea of memory in Adichie's works to always put in mind autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is influential in organising narrative memory, as a cue and repository of an archive of childhood. Adichie's return again to Nsukka as the geographical setting of *Half of a Yellow Sun* underlies the relevance of an autobiographical consciousness. This means that one has to be careful of authorial subjectivities informing this highly controversial topic of the Biafran war. Hence, one is conscious of the multi-layered process of remembrance and of engagement with the project of memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The ways in which Adichie's childhood affects her concept of memory as well as the impulses of a diasporic consciousness that always underscore the return to the narrative of childhood cannot be belabored further. Once again, it is important to emphasise an important continuity in the project of memory between *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*: the consciousness of childhood is also foregrounded and the theme of Biafra is constructed from the memory of everyday life of childhood.

2.5.1 a return to the everyday memory of war: composite consciousnesses

In light of the vast store of literature on trauma memory, specifically Holocaust memory, Dan Ben-Amos (1999:297) advocates for "a shift in the perception of collective memory from the monumental to the mundane, from the archives to everyday life." *Half of a Yellow Sun* reverts to the everyday, to the shrinking realities that come when the war starts. Set primarily at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, the narrative of *Half of a Yellow Sun* alternates between the early 1960s during Nigeria's independence and the Biafran war in the late 1960s. Adichie plots the narrative plot in a manner that allows the turbulence of war to intrude, from time to time the engagement with life before the war. Adichie therefore succeeds in showing the disruptions that war causes in the routines of daily life. The story plots the lives of an academic community at the University, with the female protagonist Olanna and fiancé Odenigbo. An interesting narrative voice is provided by the white man Richard, who comes to Nigeria to research on ancient "*Igbo-Ukwu"* art but gets embroiled in a romantic relationship with Olanna's sister, Kainene.

Most significantly is the narrative voice of the houseboy Ugwu who works for Olanna and Odenigbo. Ugwu provides a composite dimension of memory in this story. As a child figure, he provides us with an alternative perspective unlike many other narratives on the Biafran war. Adichie uses Ugwu to construct shifting subjectivities of the war. Ugwu is first of all modeled after an actual houseboy of the Adichie household called Mellitus, who Adichie acknowledges. Secondly, Ugwu, the teenage combatant, provides Adichie entry into the prescient theme of the "child of war". Ugwu's status provides *Half of a Yellow Sun* with a composite account of a war that does not just portray (as feminist critics like Marion Pape have posited about Biafran war works by women), the "Home Front," leaving, for the male writers the "War Front" (2005:237). Ugwu connects *Half of a Yellow Sun* to a wider textual topography on the theme of children of war. Here, I have in mind similar protagonists in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Chris Abani's *Song for Night*, amongst the abundance of similar tales in contemporary Francophone African literature, the products of the escalation of civil wars in postcolonial Africa.[64]

Adichie disperses voices in the novel across gender, race and class and the experience of shifting realities of daily life. Ugwu is significant as a consciousness of childhood. Of more importance is his central role of the child of war who survives and eventually takes on an authorial role, represented as an act of expiation and healing at the end of the novel. As a houseboy, Ugwu provides an account of daily life in his performance of household chores, in much the same way as Kambili does in *Purple Hibiscus*, even though their levels of consciousness differ. While both are marginal figures, Kambili is female while Ugwu's role as a houseboy highlights his menial status within the postcolonial class structure. Adichie has referred to Ugwu as the "soul of the novel,"[65] presenting for us her predilection for marginal but precocious voices as organising consciousnesses in her works. Ugwu comes into the employ of Odenigbo and Olanna at around the age of thirteen, with naïve countryside comportment. The tale that ensues can also be related to

[64] For a further exploration on this notion of children of war in Francophone literature, see Odile Cazenave (2005)
[65] See Interview with Molara Wood – http://www.bbc.co.uk/africabeyond/africanarts/18942.shtml [accessed August, 26 2010]

an epistemological journey, even of a *bildungsroman* that sees him engage with modernity, at the advent of flag independence and eventually become a "vernacular intellectual,"[66] through a process of gradual assimilation into the academic sodality at Nsukka. His consciousness is defined at first by Nsukka and more specifically within the confines of his Master Odenigbo's house.

Like Kambili, Nsukka becomes a place that allows Ugwu to develop a critical awareness as he encounters postcolonial modernity through the English language. This is counterbalanced by the competing historical voice of the tensions of an emerging post-independent Nigerian nation-state for his attention. Nsukka becomes a place for composing memories in Adichie's fiction and in *Half of a Yellow Sun* it is at the centre of the significance of Biafra – as a memory-place in the nation-building front at the start of this war. However, Adichie's return to the everyday, through the narrative voice of Ugwu provides an interesting perspective of history and memory in relation to the Biafran war. Much of the work by feminist critiques of Amadiume (2000), Akachi (1991; 2000; 2005) and Bryce (1991) reflects on not only the dearth of women authors on the war, but also the way women authors such as Flora Nwapa, Rose Njoku, Buchi Emecheta among others, provide an alternative perspective on the war, through their insistence on the importance of what Marion Pape (2005) refers to as the "Home Front," by which is implied the maternal domestic front. This critique places premium on the role of women authors in providing a feminist historical consciousness within the archive and memory of this war, while at the same time underscoring Burton's (2003) argument about the importance of the micro-narratives of the domestic front in re-imagining history and time. However, most of this critique, as Jane Bryce (1991) anticipates, does not reflect, for instance, on the historical militancy of Igbo women in such events as the "women's war" in 1927 and the continued problematisation of exclusive gender roles and categories in the discourse of the Biafran war. Hence, Bryce in this sense begins to problematise such concepts as "heroism" and "patriotism" in the gendered discourse on war while

[66] The phrase "vernacular intellectualism" can be regarded as an off-shoot of Fareed Grant's (2003) idea of Black vernacular intellectuals (an extension of Gramsci's arguments) about intellectuals who in their critique of social justice stand both inside and outside of academic and conventional spheres.

underscoring the idea that the dearth of women's voices in this discourse is because the Biafran war and its patriotic and heroic consciousness was constructed in a traditional patriarchal framework.

The domestic front therefore opens an alternative site to critique the masculinised ideas of patriotism, heroism and at the same time refigure the archives of the Biafran war in the form of a literary text. It draws us back to the everyday routines and from the micro-memories of houseboys and children like Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Ugwu's class position and his status as a teenage boy works as a critique of the memories and histories of protagonists and classes who have hitherto been synonymous with this particular war memory. Indeed, Chidi Amuta (1984) has made the argument that the Biafran war and its histories have been read alongside the anxieties of a bourgeois business and military elite. Thus, Ugwu's voice provides a critique of not only literary historiography about the war, but also past representations of protagonists involved in it. His status as a houseboy can be argued as *sui generis*, in the vast representation of the Biafran war in Nigerian literature. He not only brings in the open and naïve consciousness of childhood, but also a re-constructed perspective of the everyday that is not polemically feminist or masculinist. It is however perceptive to foresee, from a reader's point of view, how the author sets us up to eventually see Ugwu as a somewhat problematic hero, who emerges, on the other side of the war morally tainted by the rape incident (365). However, Ugwu is also reborn through the act of writing as a process of expiation and healing. While he is a hero, he is also an anti-hero, who signals an already contested vision of a future Nigerian nation-state as an organic body politic.

Half of a Yellow Sun begins in the "Early sixties," in the newly independent Nigeria at University of Nigeria Nsukka, in the home of burgeoning intellectuals – Odenigbo and Olanna, master and mistress of Ugwu. As a historically conscious novel, Adichie provides, through the dialogues of this intellectual class at Nsukka, the discourse of a postcolonial society in the making. Through the narrative perspective of Ugwu, we are allowed into the daily practices of this intellectual class, through their conversations, that Ugwu, in his position in the kitchen is privy to, as he cooks, serves food and drinks and

goes about the daily culinary chores assigned to him. Indeed, taking the idea of an academic sodality as representative of the consciousness of this new nation-state-in-the-making at Nsukka, at face value is problematic. One could even argue, in light of Amuta (1984) that Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* depicts the bourgeoisie anxieties that were behind the war, because academics form part of this particular class as intellectual stakeholders. J.P O'Flinn's article also traces the "sociology of the Nigerian novel" through the elitist alliances of the military, businessmen and politicians that resulted in what Olalare Oladitan called "The Nigerian Crisis in the Nigerian Novel" – the strings of coups and the civil war[67] - and collapse in post-independence Nigeria. However, the idea of Ugwu the houseboy represents a self-critique to the one-sided colonial/patriarchal consciousness of the Biafran war. Ugwu's role in the kitchen as a servant, allows for his construction as a reliable voice who takes part in the war from a different point of view. He is scarred by the war, and through the epistemological evolution he goes through as a servant, then as pupil/student, a teacher during the war and eventually an authorial voice, he embodies a composite ideological vision of Adichie – as the previously marginal subject who eventually finds a voice and becomes central to the history being constructed in the novel.

Ugwu starts as a naïve subject facing a new and rapidly advancing post-independent modernity. He is confronted by an anti-colonial consciousness, through his master's conversations with his visitors. He has come into an academic sodality as an observer from the margins of society. Yet he is confronted by historical discourses and epistemological debates, in a manner that has him listen and watch in naïve bewilderment:

> 'There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books.' Master stopped to sip his tea. 'They

[67] Refer to J.P. O'Flint "Towards a Sociology of the Nigerian Novel" in *African Literature Today* no. 7 and Olalare Oladitan "The Nigerian Crisis in the Nigerian Novel" in Kolawole Ogungbesan (ed) *New West African Literature*.

> will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo Park.'
>
> 'Yes, sah.' Ugwu wished that this person called Mungo Park had not offended master so much. (11)

Thus begins Ugwu's epistemological journey, through a baptism of fire by an employer who is an academic and a revolutionary at University of Nigeria Nsukka. While these discourses are meta-critical in relation to Ugwu's mental position as a semi-literate village boy, they begin a build up to the controversial counter-discourse of the Biafran war in the wake of a history of nationalism within the intellectual class at Nsukka. Ugwu begins to witness the dialogues between Odenigbo, his master, and a host of other academics of different races, cultures and ethnicities. The everyday life for Ugwu, apart from preparing the food, is listening to the clink of glasses and laughter, as well as the highly charged topics of nation-state and national identities between Odenigbo, Miss Adebayo the Yoruba Academic, Dr. Patel the Indian, Mr. Johnson the Caribbean, Professor Lehman the American, Okeoma the poet (modeled after Christopher Okigbo) and Professor Ezeka (18-20). Adichie takes this opportunity to construct, through the daily conversations of this academic sodality a discourse around ethnic and national identities and subjectivities around the ideas of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Igboism (18-21). The everyday is therefore fraught, already, with verbal-ideological fractures of differing ideas of identity. Ugwu's role is to listen, from his marginal position and status to the different accents of English or Igbo, ethnicities, like Miss Adebayo's Yoruba accent and to slowly witness how fragile the national identity texture is. Nsukka becomes a microcosm of the already existing tensions that are part of uneasy coexistence of colonial occupation.

Anderson's (1991) idea of an imagined community is interrogated by the intellectuals here. Odenigbo, Ugwu's Master, is already being constructed as a revolutionary, even a vernacular intellectual, championing Igbo nationalism:

> ‘Of course, of course, but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe,’ Master said. ‘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.*’ (20. Emphasis retained.)

Ugwu listens to these polemical debates that foreground the underlying tensions within the nationalist history of Nigeria that the novel is reconstructing. Within the discourse of daily life for these academic society at Nsukka, is encrusted identity tensions. As a university town, it has a cosmopolitan demographic, indicated by the diversity of ethnicities and races that form Odenigbo’s regular interlocutors. The collective experience of colonialism provides a locus on shared history for the intellectuals here, but they soon realise that the practice of everyday life – language and culture, as well as shared communal origins are different and that the post-independent political unit – the nation-state – seems not to provide enough platform for dialogue among these disparate “nationalities”. Nation-state tensions are brought to the level of the everyday in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The “Home Front” as Ugwu witnesses becomes a “War Front” of verbal-ideological warfare. The “early sixties,” the period depicted in the novel as tranquil at the University is ideologically simmering with identity tensions. Adichie’s structuring of the novel as periods of juxtaposed history with “early sixties” alternating with “late sixties” is aesthetically similar to her engagement with the memory of “Palm Sunday” in *Purple Hibiscus*, in which events that happen “before Palm Sunday” are also alternated, with Nsukka and Enugu becoming trajectories of memory-places embodied in red and purple hibiscus flowers. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, history is engaged with through the migration of memories across time, essentially between these two periods of years, early and late sixties. These two periods are alternate trajectories of history that leave an indelible collective memory of an Igbo nation and which are times when heritages and legacies are created and destroyed. The domestic front remains a veritable battleground in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, where the memory of the everyday is reconstructed by Adichie, as a significant part of the archive of the memory of war.

As a novel dealing with historical events, domestic histories and memories provide a critique to many assumptions of heroism and patriotism. Moreover, Adichie is aware of the need to provide a composite yet microcosmic account of the war, with an array of protagonists and voices, even though there is always the underlying subjectivity of her own genealogical heritage of the war. Hence Ugwu, the houseboy modeled after an actual houseboy called Mellitus is admitted into the genealogy of the Adichie family, through his voice in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as part of the narrative's construction of the genealogy of the Biafran war. Ugwu's position in relation to other houseboys in Nsukka, as he realises, is different: his Master Odenigbo insists he should refer to him as Odenigbo and not "sah" as Ugwu has been instructed by his aunt. Odenigbo also enrolls him at the staff primary school, and allocates him a room in the main house rather than the "Boys' Quarters". These, Ugwu realises, are privileges that other houseboys in Nsukka do not enjoy.

2.5.2 collective memory and trauma: composite memories of war

When the military coups start in the late 1960s, Ugwu remains a witness, who is critically conscious and also now literate. He is therefore a part of a political consciousness critical of the civilian regime. Ugwu's daily tasks of cooking, keeping the house in order, availing the newspapers to his master and mistress at specific times have since ceased to be robotic tasks. His literacy has allowed him access to the content of the newspapers, making him part of a community of readers who share attitudes critical of corruption and state mismanagement (126). Ugwu's daily tasks therefore, as his master's and his academic interlocutors, takes on a political dimension, building up to the events that precipitated the Pogrom in 1966, when thousands of Igbos were murdered in the Northern region of Nigeria. The allusions to collective victimhood begin at this point in Nigerian postcolonial history, as thousands of Igbos travel back to their ancestral homes in the south-east. Witnesses, survivors as well as the dead journey back as visibly embodied scars and markers of an internecine war that has just began. The beginning of a collective Biafran voice, as well as accounts from witnesses and survivors of horrific killings start to shape up:

> They repeated the news of the killings in Maiduguri until Ugwu wanted to throw the radio out of the window, and the next afternoon, after the men had left, a solemn voice on ENBC Radio Enugu recounted eyewitness accounts from the North: teachers hacked down in Zaria, a full Catholic church in Sokoto set on fire, a pregnant woman split open in Kano. The newscaster paused. 'Some of our people are coming back now. The lucky ones are coming back. The railway stations are full of our people. If you have tea and bread to spare, please take it to the stations. Help a brother in need.(144)

The collective voice, fostered by a sense of collective trauma is mapped across what in borrowing the words of Shapiro (1997), can be called "cartographies of violence" – the North (northern part of the Federal republic of Nigeria) is presented as a landscape of the Pogrom against the Igbo people. The undertones of ethno-religious warfare are implicit in the statement "a full Catholic church in Sokoto set on fire." It is instructive to remember that before the explosion of violent events, we are presented with a history of Igbo merchant classes in the North, in the form of Olanna's relatives, as well as the other dimension of her relationship with Mohammed from "the North." It is important as well to see within the narrative, the covert hostilities that had already been depicted, like the refusal of the "Northerners" to enroll Igbos into their schools and the protests by the "Igbo Union" and formation of the "Igbo Union Grammar School" (38). We also see, within the micro-relationships in the novel, Olanna's sensing of Mohammed's mother's relief at the end of their relationship as well as of ethno-religious animosity on the part of Mohammed's mother (46). The early and late nineteen- sixties are therefore threaded together by these covert animosities across the landscapes that eventually become cartographies of violence. Adichie also employs an independent narrative representation in the form of a "book" being written within *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Richard the British writer who has come to do research on "Igbo-ukwu" art.[68] Whether Adichie uses this as a

[68] Igbo-Ukwu art is the product of archaeological history in the South Eastern Nigerian state of Anambra, which reveals a complex bronze metal-working culture. Adichie is borrowing from this archaeological

postmodern sleight of hand or a dispersal of subjectivities within the novel is something left for another debate. The pieces of this book that are scattered around the narrative, act as refrains of war and connect the thematic framework across the illusion of tranquility in the "early sixties" and the explosion into war in the "late sixties".

While the cartographies of violence present a (re)territorialisation of identity-scapes, these also form terrains of collective trauma as moving bodies, carrying visible signs of physical violence, move back to Eastern Nigeria to form a unified victimhood, a collective memory of the Pogrom and therefore a collective voice, as the speaker in the radio says: "some of our people are coming back now." And so when Ugwu comes face to face with "tired, dusty, bloody people" coming out of the "rickety train" (145), his reaction is to run back home in an initial state of trauma, as a secondary witness to the traumatic events that started a few days back in the "North". Ugwu's mistress Olanna, who at this juncture is still in the North, visiting her aunt and extended family, witnesses the killings of Igbos. This was a time when even her uncle's neighbour Abdulmalik, who on previous occasions when Olanna visited had been portrayed as a close family friend of Olanna's uncle, in Olanna's shock leads people in the massacre. He shouts "We finished the whole family. It was Allah's will!" while "He nudged a body on the ground with his foot" (148). Olanna's return to Nsukka culminates into "Dark Swoops" as she lies in a state of psychosomatic trauma, a clear effect of the massacres. She is traumatised by the act of witnessing this brutality.

When police action is finally declared by the regime of General Gowon, a full scale war begins to take shape and the Biafran nation-state is declared. Nsukka, as depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, soon comes under attack and Ugwu and his employers flee towards Igbo heartland. Adichie finds liberty in providing a sequential collapse of towns as the war progresses – Nsukka, Abba, Enugu, Umuahia and Port Harcourt. There is at a cartographical level a (re)mapping of not only landscapes of violence, but also the

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history to construct Richard's (one of the narrative voices) story. Interestingly one of the sites discovered and excavated by the archaeologist Thurstan Shaw was actually named "Igbo Richard". For historical details on these discoveries, see Thurstan Shaw (1970)

boundaries of the newly declared Biafran nation-state. Alongside this gradual progression is the movement of bodies, people and families towards an uncomfortably marginalised and narrow territorial allegiance as the dreams of a nascent nation are geographically diminished. Meanwhile, Ugwu and his employers' domestic situation degenerates from the comforts of a middle class intellectual life in Nsukka and Abba to the radical discomfort of a one roomed mud house in Umuahia. While there has been a semblance of the life in Nsukka in terms of the regular meetings of the remaining academics forcibly moved when the towns collapse, the daily life has drastically changed from the abstracts of nation-state and identity theory to the realities of material discomfort. What has remained for Ugwu and his employers is the memory of the life in Nsukka. There is however an increasing solidifying of the collective and cultural memory of the people here. The erstwhile differentiation in accents, even some beliefs and cultural practices, portrayed for instance in Odenigbo's mother's discrimination of Olanna as an Igbo from Ummunachi (97), have vanished, and the collective trauma has created a sense of collective cultural memory. A collective chivalry is depicted in the war songs,[69] mediated by the propaganda machines like the Radio Biafra – a public sphere for the airing of wishes, hopes and dreams for the new nation. The section "late sixties" is therefore pervaded by nationalist rhetoric and military discourse. In this light, the section's chapters follow an ephemeral and staccato nature devoid of the detail of the "early sixties" in which long everyday dialogue was central to the content.

At the climax of the war there is a blurring of battle lines, as the "Home Front" becomes a "War Front" with frequent air raids, depicted in the disruption of Odenigbo and Olanna's wedding (202-203). When the war begins to affect the provision of basic needs like food, the realities of war and those of daily life collapse into each other, as the "win the war" effort gains a collective and concerted effort. It is here that such rhetoric as "afia attack," as Mrs Muokelu calls it (293), brings to prominence a gendered dimension of the war. "Afia attack" involves, as Muokelu says, women who trade "behind enemy lines" for basic food provisions to sustain civilian and military life in the Biafran sector. Critics

[69] See pages 198, 275, 277, 337. These songs work as part of a communal spirit, as part of a platform also of (re)enacting a collective sense of trauma, victimhood and therefore a collective heroism at the hopes of a triumph against the federal forces, referred to now as "vandals."

like Ezeigbo (2005), among others, have used this phenomenon to foreground the role played by women in the Biafran war. Female authors like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta have also depicted the role of women in "afia attack," providing a critique of not only the important role women played in this war but also of the masculine perceptions of heroism that have been presented as historically synonymous with the battle or "war front."

Hence it is through Adichie's dispersal of subjectivities, through her involvement of female, male and multiple voices in the novel, that the idea of masculine heroism attributed to the war is critiqued. The way the war front is brought into the everyday lives of these people as they move from the comforts of a middle class and intellectual environment to the penurious livelihood of the Igbo heartland reflects shifting perceptions of war fronts and home fronts, as well as the division of labour through gender and age. These gradual perceptions and conditions of war are what Cooper et al., (1989) point out as the changing dimensions of war and its discourse. The dimension of Ugwu is particularly interesting, as he eventually gets scripted into the war and thus becomes a strategy for Adichie to represent the trope of the "child of war". This is a strategy for diversification of subjectivities as well as topical currency in socio-economic and political discourse in the states of war in postcolonial Africa.

Ugwu's epistemological journey, reaches advanced stages when the war comes for he is, by virtue of his now literate status, an informed participant in the discourse of nation-making. He has developed mental maturity to partake in the abstractions of the academic sodality at Nsukka. After a brief stint as a teacher, alongside his mistress Olanna, in their "win-the-war"efforts, Ugwu embarks on a final, near fateful journey, when he is forcefully conscripted (357), thus becoming a Biafran soldier in his late teenage years. In the conscription van, "Ugwu was startled to see a boy sitting there, humming a song and drinking from an old beer bottle […] perhaps he was a stunted man and not a boy" (357). Hi-Tech, the boy soldier, in this case is already battle-hardened, with a "dry cynicism in his eyes" that made him "seem much older" (358). Hi-Tech turns out to be a boy soldier who pretends to be an orphan for the purpose of infiltrating enemy camps: "they call me

High-Tech because my first commander said I am better than any high-technology spying gadget" (358). High-Tech and Ugwu become acquaintances, as Ugwu is exposed to the army's bare food and military resources. Ugwu's authorial self, begins to emerge as he experiences the war – he feels the urge to "write down what he did from day to day" (360). The need to preserve the memory of his traumatic experiences through the act of writing gives him a new self-reflexive position and authenticity within the narrative. The complexity of the stream of his consciousness can be gleaned from his much evolved thought process (361). Slowly, he builds his reputation as "target destroyer" by virtue of his skill at detonating the *Ogbunigwe* and causing as many casualties as possible in the federal government's army (362-364). It is sometimes clichéd, the way that at the intense moments when tension is high in the battle field, Ugwu's memories drift to imaginations of virility: "Ugwu thought of Eberechi's fingers pulling the skin of his neck, the wetness of her tongue in his mouth" (362). In these sensibilities, we glean the discourse of reproduction and destruction, in which virilities are intertwined with the bloodshed and violence of war. The militarised masculinities are presented in a graphic scene in which Ugwu and his fellow soldiers gang rape a girl in a bar. The rape incident shatters the identification of the reader with Ugwu, presenting him as a cog in the wheel of an already structured patriarchal war sexual economy and tainting his erstwhile authentic dimension as an evolving authoritative and moral voice within the novel. The vulgarised and militarised speech patterns, during this incident are also particularly striking, especially when Hi-Tech is ordered to "Discharge and retire!" before he "groaned and collapsed on top of her" (365). The speech patterns of war are fairly similar to Achebe's character Gladys who in using war metaphors to allude to sex in the short story "Girls at War" asks Nwankwo, " 'You want to shell?' she asked. And without waiting for an answer said, 'Go ahead but don't pour in troops!' " (113).

A few "operations" later, Ugwu meets his fate. He gets all but mortally wounded, albeit goes into a coma, as the war slowly ends. When he finally emerges out of hospital, he is an embodiment of memory and trauma, and his status within his immediate society is elevated because he is now a war hero. The scars of his body become markers of memory and residual archives of pain and trauma. The process of healing involves a constant

engagement with memory of the war. On his part, expiation and healing come through his act of writing. Having evolved as a composite embodiment of memory – autobiographical, as well as part of the cultural memory of the Biafran nation, Ugwu embodies the convergence of collective and individual trauma and memory: individual on the part of an autobiographical consciousness of genealogical antecedents and collective on the part of a Biafran nation whose emergence has been choked by the federal military government. Hence Ugwu suffers trauma through the recurrent dreams. The sounds of shelling, the fallen Biafran soldiers, the crying of the wounded in battle, become constant images in his dreams, assaulting his mental schema and defying his attempts at dealing with them:

> His mind wondered often. He did not need the echo of pain on his side and in his buttocks and on his back to remember his *ogbunigwe* exploding, or High-Tech's laughter, or the dead hate in the eyes of the girl. He could not remember her features, but the look in her eyes stayed with him, as did the tense, dryness between her legs, the way he had done what he had not wanted to do. In that grey space between dreaming and daydreaming, where he controlled most of what he imagined, he saw the bar, smelt the alcohol, and heard the soldiers saying 'Target Destroyer', but it was not the bar girl that lay with her back on the floor, it was Eberechi. He woke up hating the image and hating himself. (397. Emphasis retained)

Ugwu's state of delirium is located in a continuum of traumatic memories and experiences, exacerbated by the physical pain he is feeling at the moment. His mental schema cannot place his experience within its recognised structures of experience and therefore, as Cathy Caruth (1995:154) says, traumatic memory is an "affront to understanding". Ugwu is an embodiment of a traumatic memory and history and borrowing Caruth's words, he carries "an impossible history" and therefore he is "the symptom of a history' that he cannot "entirely possess." This history, by virtue of eliding

his mental schema, freezes time, becoming itself an indictment of Ugwu's actions, as with the memory of the rape incident tormenting his attempts at finding clarity of mind. These memories become therefore spatio-temporal metaphors of an individual and collective conscience and the need to actually deal with the guilt becomes increasingly intense until Ugwu engages with his mind through the process of writing: "*But he tried, and the more he wrote, the less he dreamed"* (398). The act of writing becomes important as the process of Ugwu's unburdening, healing, expiation and dealing with inassimilable forms of history and memory. Ugwu's authorial activities become part of a supplementary archive of the war, with his experience and body as a repository. The act of writing becomes therefore in the words of Shoshana Felman (1995:14) an act of "bearing witness" on the part of Ugwu. Writing allows him a voice in the traumatic history. In dealing with trauma history, Caruth posits that we are dealing with "a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (1995:153). Therefore the content of Ugwu's writing is reflective of the complexity of the time and space of traumatic experience, in which traumatic memory collides with the present and its daily experience:

> He sat under a flame tree and wrote in small, careful letters on the sides of old newspapers […] he wrote a poem about people getting a buttocks rash after defecating in imported buckets […] he wrote about a young man with a perfect backside […] Finally, he started to write about Aunty Arize's anonymous death in Kano […] He wrote about the children of the refugee camp, how diligently they chased after lizards, how four boys had chased a quick lizard up a mango tree and one of them climbed after it and the lizard leapt off the tree and into the outstretched hand of one of the other three surrounding the tree. (397-398)

Ugwu gains the status, within the narrative schema of the novel, of an authorial voice, as a source of traumatic memory and history as well as custodian of the same history. The

composite memory he carries is the result of his evolution, from houseboy to intellectual, to a Biafran soldier and eventually to an embodied archive of memory – he becomes an authorial voice. He carries the memory of Nsukka by virtue of his houseboy duties, having been part of a trajectory of war-induced collapse of the middle class. When the war ends and they return to Nsukka, nostalgia sets in and the sight of the abandoned house and buildings becomes a residual text of memory (418-419).

The return to Nsukka, as Olanna laments is slower, yet the leaving was hurried (432). The process of return is aided by memory, as the protagonists try to recapture the past. The house, now dilapidated with "Milky cobwebs hung in the living room, with dust motes, spiders and brown walls" (418) stands as a relic, a monument of memory, in which a new sense of habitability has to be created. Much like the "different kind of silence" that liberates Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* after her father's death, there is a new silence at Nsukka in *Half of a Yellow Sun* that is informed by the memories of the past and the scars of the present. Nsukka is now a monument – it is scarred by war, with fragmented memories of a past cracked by the war. And so as the snail-like pace of the return to life picks up, the federal military government embarks on a project of wiping up what is left of the memory of Biafra by searching for what one soldier says "materials that will threaten the unity of Nigeria" (424). While the memory of Biafra is embodied in the protagonists and their experience, relics like Biafran Pounds and flags are part of the material culture of memory – the residual aspects of memory that the protagonists hold on to:

> She lay on the living room floor and prayed that they would not find her Biafran pounds. After they left, she took the folded notes out from the envelop hidden in her shoe and went out and lit a match under the lemon tree. Odenigbo watched her. He disapproved, she knew, because he kept his flag folded inside the pocket of a pair of trousers. 'You are burning memory,' he told her. 'I am not.' She would not place her memory on things that strangers could barge in and take away. 'My memory is inside me.' (432)

Olanna's idea of memory is therefore embodied, stored away in the body and its experience and her emotions become part of the process of dealing with her missing sister Kainene, who has not returned from "afia attack". For Ugwu, his experience as a Biafran soldier means the scars on his body are central to the idea of an embodied memory, but his trauma and sense of guilt at the rape is expiated and healed through writing. When Richard tells him that the war is not his (Richard's) story to tell, Ugwu takes the mantle of the book-within-the-book, titled "The world was Silent When We Died."[70] Thus his authorial journey comes to an end at the end of *Half of a Yellow Sun*: "Ugwu writes his dedication last: *For Master, my good man*" (433. Emphasis retained). Indeed, one senses that Ugwu's dedication is a culmination of an accumulated process of memory and the manifestation of his authorial persona.

Ugwu's book project, drawn from the sketches of Richard's story, from Ugwu's experience in the war, from his sense of guilt and want of expiation and most significantly from individual and collective trauma, is part of a process of creating a composite memory of the Biafran war. The disparateness of traumatic experiences and the fragmented nature of the experience of war can only be portrayed through various processes of archiving that involve personae of different ages, classes, gender and even races. Ugwu stands therefore as an evolution of traumatic memory, individual and collective memory and therefore of cultural memory. His childhood status provides an initially naïve sense to start of a new cultural experience as he encounters modernity, yet his account proffers an alternatively significant archive of war, competing with a normatively adultist, class-conscious sense of history as depicted by the intellectual class at Nsukka. Indeed, the intellectual class' anxiety in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is seemingly synonymous to those of this new nation-state, as portrayed in the regular debates on the constitution of the new nation-state. However, Ugwu's construction as a growing project of epistemological consciousness in the novel provides an internal critique to a bourgeoisie and intellectual class consciousness. That Ugwu eventually becomes a worthy chronicler of this turbulent history is a significant vision of the novel.

[70] This title takes on a collective voice of indictment, a strategy on the part of Adichie, to rope in a collective refrain and a sense of "critical memory" of the Biafran war in global politics.

The history of Biafra, as explored in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, is part of a process of individual, collective and cultural memory that continually problematises the illusion of organic unity that the nation-state of Nigeria proclaims at this point in time. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, while pooling into an already vast existing archive, excavates conversations that unsettle normative historical accounts of Nigerian history. It problematises the temporal map of the Nigerian nation-state. The cultural memory of Biafra is explored through the processes of composite memories that range from the autobiographical, individual and collective to a reflection of genealogical heritages of memory that are arguably part of a diasporic consciousness on the part of the author. The narrative voice of Ugwu allows Adichie to explore the story of war from the composite perspectives of a home front and war front as well as continue the project of domesticating war memories within the consciousness of daily life. Like *Purple Hibiscus*, marginal protagonists are important in exploring how everyday memories are important alternatives to normative histories. They are alternative archives that the world of childhood provides, as options for Adichie. The text of childhood is therefore an "architext of memory" as Ender (2005) posits, as well as a source of alternative memory and history, as Hamilton et al (2002) espouse. As "a shifting set of ideas" (Cunnigham 1995), the text of childhood works through a Bakhtinian (1981) literary chronotope of time and space. For Adichie's fiction therefore, the memory-place of Nsukka is a pivotal toponym whose *topoi* of houses, compounds, flowers, furniture among other material cultures are triggers of childhood memory and objects with intrinsic memories of growth and trauma that represent individual, collective and cultural aspects of memory within the context of postcolonial Nigeria. These material cultures are aspects of memory that influence diasporic senses of identity from an authorial perspective. They are material cultures of memory that allow us to read Adichie's works as "literatures of memory," with the organising consciousness of childhood worlds, figures and images. It is in this light of material cultures of memory in literature that we shift our focus to the urban novel of Chris Abani, *Graceland*. The idea of memory here deals with popular culture, with the process of migration, pitting the metaphoric continuum of the city against the countryside. The notion of memory-place is still instructive in defining the idea of popular cultural memory in the cityscape.

2.6 Popular Cultural Memory in Chris Abani's *Graceland*: Material Cultures of Memory

Abani's *Graceland* provides an interesting account, of Lagosian urban life in the 1970s and1980s. The spatio-temporal narrative structure is similar to Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun'*s alternation of time between the early and late sixties. *Graceland*'s temporal structure shifts between the 70s and 80s – the present time of the protagonist Elvis in the Nigerian city of Lagos. Space-time chronotopes are used in the text as a strategy of migrating memories across rural and city landscapes. This is done in the context of daily activities and the influence of global popular culture on the teenage protagonist. The story constructs dystopian material conditions which are contrasted to a pervasive cultural utopia of an informal settlement called Maroko. The protagonist is an embodiment of the phenomenon of a culture of survival. He impersonates Elvis Presley to earn a living. His life is characterised by flights of imagination. The title of the text *Graceland* can be seen as a localisation of the Elvis Presley image as it flowered across the globe in the 1970s and 1980s. Elvis's impersonation of his idol takes him to beaches to perform for tourists as he tries to eke out a living. In a postcolonial Nigeria that is socio-economically and politically fragmented by a series of military regimes, a rapid decline in standards of living is complicated by the demographics of rising urban conurbations, as the city becomes a magnet for informal settlements. Maroko, where *Graceland* is mainly set, is one such settlement of the postcolonial city of Lagos. Maroko actually existed up to the early 1990s when it made the headlines after the military regime of the day embarked on a process of gentrification. It was destroyed. This aspect of Lagos' history is dramatised in *Graceland* as we see the residents of Maroko attempt to put up organised resistance to the destruction of their homes, leading to losses of lives, including Elvis's father Sunday Oke (263-272; 284-287).

Described as the "Lagos Novel" (Dunton, 2008), *Graceland*'s narrative portrays aspects of the history of Lagos in the 1970s and 1980s. Apart from the history of Maroko and the gentrification process, there are certain material cultures of memory that place *Graceland* within the popular culture of this time. One such is the notion of Onitsha market literature, which Abani uses to portray urban cultural history – particularly the history of

literacy in Lagos. Hence the project of memory in *Graceland* involves material cultures of memory that portray the history of urban literacy. The phenomenon of Onitsha market literature can be examined within the larger framework of Abani's project of presenting popular cultural memory of this time as what informs the consciousness of the novel. Material cultures of memory influence the structure of the narrative. The recipes that precede each chapter form a structuring technique in the novel. They are residues and relics of memory from Elvis's late mother. As recipes of Nigerian cuisine, they can be read as the migration of material aspects of culture, through the text. The attention to certain aspects of Nigerian food culture and pharmacopeia, including the kola nut ritual can be read as a strategy of authentication, but also the process of archiving indigenous forms of knowledge. Hence the novel becomes definitive of the material culture of the archive – as a storehouse. In this way, the idea of narrative memory is informed by the debates on forms and processes of archiving that Hamilton et al. (2002) define as the alternative to orthodox record-keeping processes.

The other level of memory that we extend from our arguments on Adichie's works is related to the everyday – in this case it is in relation to popular cultural memory. It is instructive to point out here that the state of economic dystopia that defines Maroko in *Graceland* creates appropriate conditions for the porosity of cultural practices. This is a prerequisite for the flight of imagination as a process of dealing with poverty and hardship. Popular culture is pervasive, as a cultural economy that sustains the lives of the people in Maroko. There is a class consciousness aspect to the idea of the everyday in relation to popular culture in Africa. This is a point that Karin Barber (1997) seeks to delineate in relation, especially to the definitions of "high and low," "popular and elite" binaries that have a history of contrasting mass consciousness against elite ones. The significant point that Barber makes is the idea of fluidity and the in-between-ness of these popular cultural forms, as what determines how Western popular cultural forms are localised and domesticated in Africa. This is done to deal with a range of immediate and pressing daily concerns.

Popular cultural memory in *Graceland* influences the life of the protagonist, whose sense of identity is tenaciously connected with his impersonation of Elvis Presley, and with his vision for a better life, in the "Graceland" of his dreams – America. This is a dream he manages to achieve at the end of the text. Popular cultural memory is therefore presented as pervading the day-to-day hopes, dreams, activities and visions of the protagonist in the text.

Another level of analysis can be found in the idea that popular cultural memory presents an alternative plane of existence and experiencing of time in *Graceland*. As the trajectory of memory in *Graceland* migrates, back and forth, from country to city, the concerns of daily life, experienced through popular cultural aspects like music and fashion, takes us away from the encumbering presence of the military regime of this time. Hence temporal disjunctures are created out of the consumption of popular cultural forms, as the protagonist's imaginations fly in the face of political and economic dystopia. Hence while the text is temporally set in the 1970s to 1980s, the overdetermining condition of military governance, which was at its peak at this time, does not seem to deter the cultural rhythm of this city. Economic survival, immediate day-to-day concerns of survival foreground De Certeauan "tactics," "ways of using" and processes of eking out a living. Hence, the rhythm of Lagos follows a dizzying pattern of survivalist movements and rat races through a landscape of desires, with the organising consciousness being that of the teenager Elvis Oke.

In light of the substrates of memory and everyday life outlined above, and in relation to the organising consciousness of childhood, *Graceland*'s textures of memory carry a sensory dimension of smellscapes and soundscapes, as part of a daily organisation of a myriad of socio-cultural orders that pervade the home and the city. We are therefore drawn, through a "redistribution of the sensible" (Jacques Ranciere, 2004) to the nasal and auditory experiences that allow for a (re)mapping of the cityscape. Maroko, the slum where *Graceland* is set, is a tenement city, visualised through a scatological imagery of its material conditions, as well as a medley of nasal and auditory sensibilities that define the landscape of daily experience. Thus, when Elvis wakes up at the beginning of the

novel, a concoction of auditory sensations, a soundscape, what Edensor calls "a space of tactile sensation" (2002:60) opens up a room for auditory consumption. This is portrayed by Bob Marley's "Natural Mystic," the Highlife music of Celestine Ukwu, the bickering of two women in the street and "the sounds of molue conductors competing for customers" (4). This auditory map redefines the cartography of the cityscape, through the perspective of Maroko, allowing for the beginning of a micro-experience of the cityscape – by the dominated, as De Certeau (1984) calls them – the "consumers". Indeed, such a concoction of popular cultural music speaks to a pastiche of experiences defining dominated corners of experience. The hybridity of soundscapes also mirrors the popular cultural memory of this time. As the ontology of the cityscape, the cacophony of auditory experiences defines and borrows from what Highmore (2005) calls the "rhythmicity" of the city. In fact, the rapid and chaotic movement of people and vehicles defies the logic of the organised architectural plan of the ideal city.

The material culture of consumption is visible in the "half slum, half paradise" image of Lagos as Elvis describes it, with skyscrapers, flyovers, well landscaped yards alongside the seething cauldron of filth and dirt of the slum Maroko. Elvis's perception of this city is binarised: having arrived at the age of fourteen, he was marked out because of his "small-town thinking and accent" and "the Americanisms he knew were old and outdated" (8). The consumption of "Americanisms" becomes definitive of cultural survival in this city. One of the symbolic markers of this kind of chaotic hybridity, consumption and popular cultural acculturation is the "Molue" buses that transport passengers around the city. They are the apotheosis of not only acculturation, but also of a De Certeauan "way of using," on the part of the dominated. This is the kind of consumption that is the product of the creativity that comes out of the desires of the dominated – a "secondary production hidden in the processes of utilization" (xiii) as De Certeau would call it. While this kind of consumption reflects an overarching order of capitalism, "it creates a certain play in that order, a space for manoeuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference" (1984:18). The molue buses are literally vehicles of acculturation. They are described thus:

> The cab of the bus was imported from Britain, one of the Bedford series. The chassis of the body came from surplus Japanese army trucks trashed after the Second World War. The body of the coach was built from scraps of broken cars and discarded roofing sheets – anything that could be beaten into shape or otherwise fashioned. The finished product, with two black stripes running down a canary body, looked like a roughly hammered yellow sardine tin. (8-9)

As navigators of the city landscape, these vehicles portray a materialist culture of consumption and an aestheticization of popular cultural consumption. When *Graceland* starts, they are the first impression the reader gets of the city of Lagos. As carriers of culture, they are also transformed into mobile churches and market places (9-10), where preachers and hawkers ply their trade. These buses portray the fast-paced cultural life of the city, cutting through the monstrous highways across the city, via the slums and into the up market suburbs.

Elvis, the teenage protagonist traverses the city, to tourist beaches to try and, through the impersonation of Elvis Presley, eke out a living. Inspiring his performance is the memory of his mother, who took to Elvis Presley as her hero. The popular memory of Elvis Presley is passed down to the protagonist who takes it as a performance of memory at two levels: firstly, as the popular cultural memory of that time, when the pop icon was a global brand. Sewlall (2010) examines Elvis Presley as part of global cultural semiotics. He postmodernist tools of analysis to examine the pervasion of the Elvis Presley imaginary across the globe, and concludes that it is a system of signs defined and redefined, localised and globalised in all manners, genres and forms of expression. This popular memory's semiotic importance in *Graceland* can be seen as helping to define temporal maps in the 1970s and 1980s as well as in the depiction of landscapes of desires and flights of imagination redolent of the slumscape in the postcolonial city. Secondly, as a performance of memory, the impersonation of Elvis Presley allows the protagonist an alternative identity, through the memory of his mother. The dance act (12), involved in

the impersonation ritual is a symbolic gesture of freedom, invoking the liberating memories of his late mother, while unshackling him from the claustrophobic clutch of a highly masculine cityscape that has rendered him economically baseless, having been uprooted from a middle class countryside childhood. As the structure of the book is organised around the spatio-temporal maps of countryside and city, and the periods of time in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, Abani connects these through a structuring device of memory – part of the larger framework of material cultures of memory in *Graceland*.

2.6.1 material cultures as a source of memory

This extra-textual device of memory is resourced from a pouch that Elvis carries on his neck, which contains a journal of recipes he got from his mother. It represents an inheritance on the part of Elvis, keeping alive, in him, his mother's memory (as reflected in his dance performance):

> It was his mother's journal, a collection of cooking and apothecary recipes and some other unrelated bits, like letters and notes about things that seemed as arbitrary as the handwriting: all that he had inherited from her, all that he had to piece her life together.

These recipes of Nigerian cuisine are used by Abani as a structuring device preceding each of the chapters in the book, complete with sections of "ingredients" and "preparation." These are artifacts for Elvis the protagonist, which trouble his identity because of how critical they are as sources of memory. There is a space-time dimension to the location of these memories, portrayed in the formative years of his childhood, and Afikpo, the countryside place of his formative childhood. In talking about identity and the performance of memory, chapter four will examine a genealogical dilemma, reflective of a troubled masculinity on the part of Elvis. Having been physically and sexually abused, as well as witnessing the sexual abuse of his cousin Efua by his uncle

Joseph (64, 197-8), Elvis's performance of memory can be seen as dealing with trauma memory of his childhood. In this sense then, he shares in the trauma memory of Adichie's teenage protagonist Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*. The recipes of Nigerian cuisine, a material and artifact level of memory, represent sites of engagement, on the part of Elvis, with a maternal memory and lineage that allows him to trouble the idea of his sexual identity within a highly masculine and militarised cityscape of Lagos. It is interesting the way the countryside landscape of memory also involves the initiation of Elvis into "manhood" (17-22). This is pitted against a very troubling present, in the city of Lagos, where Elvis's impersonation act is perceived as feminine. This takes us back to the image of the "mask dancing" – in pitting these dichotomies as complex representations of migrating memories, identities and selves. The image of Elvis dancing, as a masquerade across the city (12), presents a shifting sense of reality, blurring the memory of Afikpo and the ever present and troubling realities in Lagos. Eze Chielozona (2005) uses the metaphor of the "mask dancing" by examining the shifting realities that Abani seeks to represent as extending Achebe's vision in *Arrow of God*, at the advent of dichotomised realities of the traditional and the modern during the formative stages of colonial occupation. Chielozona's critique focuses on transculturation as a process of the formation of cosmopolitan identities, reflecting on the masquerade metaphor of shifting realities of the postcolonial city. It is interesting the way Achebe uses the same metaphor to implicitly problematise gender categories in *Things Fall Apart*, portraying the lack of moderation on the part of Okonkwo on gender issues as informing his tragic demise. Indeed, Elvis Oke in *Graceland* is a modern day masquerade – literally impersonating his American idol as a performance of his troubled masculinity.

The recipes of Nigerian cuisine are therefore structuring devices that open up insights through the idea of a material culture of memory and its relevance in the performance activity of Elvis. They connect the memories of Afikpo and the present Lagos. These recipes are supplemented by pharmaceutical notes on the etymological history of plants with medicinal values, which are given Igbo equivalents. In his acknowledgement section, Abani cites R.C Agoha's book *Medicinal Plants of Nigeria* as a source for this information. Part of Abani's strategy as a novelist, is to be able to have fiction that is

amenable to both scientific and artistic language. The recipes are also significant in influencing the chronotopical aspects of time and space in the novel's plot. One wonders however about the danger of ornamentalism that comes with such meta-fictional interventions, and whether these are, in this context, postmodernist strategies or not. Again we can draw similarities here with Adichie's "book within a book" in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, in which supplementary narratives are a structuring device that seem to fragment the narrative space and time, but at the same time constructing the organic unity that strings together the two counterpoised periods of time – the "early sixties" and "late sixties".[71]

More importantly is that material cultures within postcolonial migrant writing allow for the authors to engage, as Abani's does, with the sensory world of childhood – to foreground the smellscapes and soundscapes that define and influence the world of childhood. The memory of childhood is constructed by these aspects that define the materiality of life. Material aspects of life in Elvis's world are determined by the popular cultural consumption and the memory of Elvis Presley. Triggered by the squalid material conditions of slum life, popular cultural music, fashion, among others are pervasive in everyday life. Television and video, among other forms mediate material conditions, desires and memory. Brian Larkin (2008:2-3) extensively reflects on how these forms "facilitate and direct transnational flows of cultural goods and modes of affect, desire, fantasy, and devotion," while creating "unique aural and perceptual environments, everyday urban arenas through which people move, work, and become bored, violent, amorous, or contemplative." Scattered across the narrative of everyday life in *Graceland* is the regular mentioning of popular television programmes, videos and movies as well as the actors: John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and Hollywood classics like *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* and *Wild ones*, as well as popular Nigerian TV programmes like *Bassey and Company* produced by the late human rights activist Ken Saro Wiwa. These form a daily construction of desires, heroism and popular wisdom in the city's cultures of survival. This repertoire of texts defines the popular culture of this time while mapping out

[71] Adichie, through metafictional narrative structure, constructs a "narrative within a narrative" through the project of one of the protagonists named Richard. This narrative is titled "The world Was Silent when We Died." This stylistic device is part of the subject of chapter three.

cultures of existence of the world of teenage childhood. Childhood worldviews are here defined by the evolution of these popular cultural memories, within the narrative's spatio-temporal shifts from Afikpo to Lagos – from places of "old Americanisms" to new ones as Elvis evolves to fit into the popular cultural rhythm of Lagos.

Alongside the forms that mediate mass cultures and memories are also textual landscapes of memory that allow us to plot literacy histories in the city of Lagos, as well as figure out an alternative terrain of the experiencing of space and time as depicted in the novel. Elvis the protagonist, an avid Elvis Presley impersonator and consumer of American popular video is also presented as reading Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (5), Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* (7), the Koran (46) as well as Onitsha market literature (111-113). There are in *Graceland,* planes of memory that present a hybrid literacy culture. In a sense, Abani blurs popular and elite forms of literacy in his project of presenting a narrative that hails both "canonical" and "popular' works of art. Again it is important to note here that the 1970s-80s was one of increase in literacy levels and therefore literacy cultures in Nigeria because of what Karin Barber has called "Popular Reactions to the Petro-Naira" (1997:91-98).[72] These literacy cultures therefore define the popular memories of this time. In a reflection of these geographies of reading and book circulation, one of the fascinating images presented in *Graceland* is where Elvis visits Tejuosho market, where he comes across a "cart selling second hand books' (111). The imagery here reflects the sociologies of literacy during this time, the textual landscapes of popular and elite memory as well as a redefined idea of the geographies of reading and circulation of books:

> There was a set of dog-eared Penguin Classics. Elvis pulled a Dickens out, *A Tale of Two Cities*, his favourite, and read the first line […] There were also novels by West African authors: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*; Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba*; Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*; Camara

[72] Barber locates the rapid increase in literacy levels to the rise in oil economy and therefore the rise in disposable cash and printing presses that maintained the Onitsha market press culture(s). Richard Priebe (1997:81-90) also makes similar claims in his comparison of popular writing in Ghana and Nigeria.

> Laye's *The Radiance of the King*; Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*; and thrillers like Kalu Okpi's *The Road* and Valentine Alily's *The Cobra*. (111 Emphasis retained)

This representation of a circulation of used books is part of a material culture of memory, informing Abani's project of hailing cultural influences while remapping geographies of reading. We are immediately told that "He [Elvis] had read them and ran his fingers along the spine nostalgically" (111-112) and eventually settling for "a torn copy of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and a near-pristine copy of James Baldwin's *Another Country*" (112). In Abani's hailing of "elite" and "popular" works of fiction is a politically conscious act of collapsing what Jacque Ranciere (2004:20-30) has called the "representative regimes" that "distribute the sensible," through deciding on structures of reading, representation and interpretation in artistic works. Indeed the medley of fictional works that are cited here reflect the hybrid nature of cultures represented in *Graceland*, while also being an echo of the pastiche of metal work and vehicular body parts of the Molue buses described earlier. At the same time, there is the joining of worlds and continents that seem apart and therefore by a literal intertextual hailing, *Graceland* is inserted into a global topography of other texts with Elvis as the organising consciousness and subject of this experience. The "canonical classics" quoted above defy spatio-temporal maps of reading by their circulation, years after their publication. Indeed these texts, as Susan Stewart says, endow the book a "tension with history," (1984:22) and defy the distinctive class notions of "canon/elite" and "serious" readerships that are assumed to come with the pragmatic activities of reading (Stewart, 1984: xi).

Elvis eventually notices another section of the second hand book market, which as is represented in the text reflects competing forms of literacy – indeed, the dichotomic anxieties of the popular and the canon, the elite and the masses, even the exotic and indigenous: "Come and buy de original Onitsha Market Pamphlet! Leave all that imported nonsense and buy de books written by our people for de people. We get plenty. Three for five naira!" shouts the bookseller (112). The portrayal of this market place literacy battles introduces us to a significant moment of literacy history and memory, as

part of the project of material cultures of memory in Abani's *Graceland*. The third person narrative voice takes the opportunity for this historical talking point in Nigeria's literacy history:

> These pamphlets, written between 1910 and 1970, were produced on small presses in the eastern market town of Onitsha, hence their name. They were the Nigerian equivalent of dime drugstore pulp fiction crossed with pulp pop self-help books. They were morality tales with the subject matter and tone translated straight out of the oral culture. (112)

This is a meta-fictional device on the part of Abani, to represent a crucial historical moment of literacy and literary history in Nigeria. In similar fashion, there is a quotation of the corpus of these pamphlets: "There were titles like *Rosemary and the Taxi Driver; Money – Hard to Get but Easy to Spend; Drunkards Believe Bar As Heaven; Saturday Night Disappointment: The Life Story and Death of John Kennedy* and *How to Write Famous Love Letters, Love Stories and Make Friends with Girls*" (112. Emphasis retained). There is, subsequently, a quotation in *Graceland* of contents of one of the pamphlets "Beware of Harlots and Many Friends," in which moral talking points about "harlots" are given (113).

The phenomenon of Onitsha pamphleteering reflects the material cultures of memory in *Graceland*, as they form the experience of Elvis's childhood literacy as well as a meta-fictional structural device. As we see in the subsequent chapters, the contents of one of the most famous of these pamphlets "*Mabel De Sweet Honey Dat Poured Away*" are used by Abani as an introduction to that particular chapter, similar to the structuring role that is given to the recipes as well as texts of pharmacopeia on herbal aspects of Nigerian plants. However the importance of invoking Onitsha market literature, for the purposes of this chapter is to underscore the importance of literature as an alternative archive and memory. In other words, the textual strategy of incorporating Onitsha market literature in *Graceland* is a process of literary archiving of popular literary cultural memory that

decentres the idea of archive, in line with what Hamilton et al. (2002) posit as the role of literature as a different record-keeping process and therefore as part of what refigures archival processing. In another sense, as examined before, the book itself gains significance, in view of Stewart's (1984) idea of the simultaneity of print as well as the crucial aspect of circulation that proffers it a commodity status, as we witness with the representation of the book market in the scenes from *Graceland* above. Hence *Graceland* as a text becomes a repository and an archive of popular cultural memories.

As the narrative progresses, the spatio-temporal pattern continues to alternate between Afikpo and Lagos. Afikpo gradually gains the role of a significant place of memories that are in dialogue with the present in Lagos. The trauma memory of Elvis's sexual abuse and the constant violence meted out on him by his father, the nostalgic memory of his mother found in the journal around his neck influence the present daily life. When we meet Elvis at first, his hatred for his father and the antagonistic relationship they have is gradually put to perspective and historicised through the movement of space and time alternately between Afikpo and Lagos. The image of a dysfunctional family that we are presented with, through the antagonistic micro-relationship of Elvis and his father is unraveled through the regular intrusion of memories from Elvis's early childhood. Hence the temporal map of the present in Lagos is redefined by the memory of Afikpo, a recurrent memory-place that defines relations in the present. Indeed, Elvis's problematic gender disposition can be explained through the trauma memory of physical and sexual abuse during the formative years of his childhood. Elvis becomes an embodiment, like Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* of a composite memory of trauma, nostalgia and popular culture. The dimensions of the abuse and the nostalgia of his mother's influence which provides him the inspiration to embody, through simulation the image of Elvis Presley, are definitive of a composite idea of memory in *Graceland*. These dimensions of memory are embodied and their anxieties performed during the impersonation activities. Yet again for Elvis, trauma is part of the everyday process of living and perhaps the impersonation activities provide a sense of expiation (similar to Ugwu's writing), healing and freedom from the burden of his traumatic and nostalgic memories. It is interesting as well that in *Graceland* Abani, like Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, provides supplementary narratives

through the structural and meta-fictional devices mentioned earlier. Part of the trauma memory invoked in Elvis experiences in Afikpo is that of the embodied memory of Biafra, through the character Innocent, a relation of Elvis, who fought as a child soldier during the Biafran war.

Innocent's account is explored through an entry into his stream of consciousness and the trigger of memories of the war. This particular scene is like a flashback, in which the reader is taken into the war front as a secondary witness to the atrocities committed by "children of war" (209-214). It takes the shape and form of a story within a story, in the narrative of *Graceland* and indeed part of the legacy of traumatic memory in post-independent Nigeria. Within the temporal structure of the novel, this story within a story is a tangential aspect of memory and experience that informs the anxiety of post-military Nigerian dispensation at this point in time. Like Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, it is a statement towards a heritage of traumatic, individual and collective memory. Again it is important to highlight here that this aspect of memory in *Graceland* is intertextually reflected in Chris Abani's novella *Song for Night* (2007) which is the tale of a child soldier called My Luck, who is in the process of trying to locate his lost platoon. Indeed Innocent's account rings with the familiarity of My Luck's plight in *Song for Night*.

Memory in *Graceland* is organised at an aesthetic level, around the literary chronotopes of space and time, with a shift between the city and the countryside. However, the overriding popular cultural aspect of memory which defines the everyday life of the protagonist, allows us to glean through nostalgia, material cultures of memory on the part of Abani as aspects that define the world of a dispersed childhood of the protagonist Elvis Oke. As the idea of popular culture pervades *Graceland*, it defines the structures of memory in the text, connecting cultural aspects of memory and identity as the space-time chronotopes shift from the countryside to the city and back. Teenage identity, as with Elvis Oke, is therefore constructed around this pervasiveness of popular cultural memory as it is used to construct material cultures as textual strategies, deal with trauma memory and enter into a debate on an alternative archive provided by the experimental time of childhood. Indeed, Elvis's sense of identity is constructed around a pastiche of cultural

experiences – the proliferation of a medley of images and soundscapes that pervade the everyday of slum life. The movies, television and radio are aspects that mediate cultural tastes and experience, but also provide landscapes of desire, imagination and flight from penurious material conditions. In this sense then, culture takes on material dimensions, as the symbolic capital that provides dreams and hopes for better existence. Hence, the normative historical accounts of Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s are problematised by a different process of experiencing time and space. The horizons of Elvis's worlds are marked by a culture of survival and desire for flight. Elvis's networks of friends are indicative of a metaphysical plane of experience, with names like Redemption, De King of De Beggars, Comfort and Blessing reflecting on the desires of freedom, flight and hope. These individuals engage in alternative and informal networks of the economy for survival: one of Elvis acquaintances Okon sells blood to get money to buy food (74-76), while Elvis and redemption get involved in drug and human trafficking for the colonel (230-238).

Therefore, Abani portrays the 1970s and 1980s slum life in Maroko, as a representation of popular cultural memory, material cultures of memory (through textual strategies) and trauma memory in the discourse of an everyday world of teenage childhood. Hence like Adichie's *Half of a yellow Sun*, there is a *composite* idea of memory that draws from trauma, nostalgia and popular culture. The world of Elvis's childhood in *Graceland* allows for a complex discourse on experimental and alternative forms of identity fostered by the cultural options provided in music, movies, videos and fashion. While the everyday life is made difficult by destitute material conditions, it is culturally rich because of the multiple options available to experiment, within the cityscape, while incorporating the significant aspects of a memory of the past to hanker for freedom, project utopian desires and allow imagination to fly.

2.7 Conclusion

The idea of memory in contemporary Nigerian fiction is therefore significant in trying to engage with the concept of history and time in childhood. Kambili, Ugwu and Elvis are

variations of childhood figures that allow us to engage with narrative memory in its autobiographical consciousness and diasporic inflections, through the notion of composite memory. The compositeness of this memory is found in the individual, collective and cultural practices through their imaginatively nostalgic, popular and traumatic dimensions. The idea of a history and time of represented childhood is therefore constructed through a matrix of memories. The everyday world of childhood domesticates, refigures and restructures the macro-memories of nations, ethnicities and families. Childhood engages therefore in the micro-politics of history and time, to provide an alternative processing of these aspects, as well as the archive of history and time. That these childhoods are set at a time of military governance is an implicit dimension that has been domesticated through the worldview of the child protagonists, images and memories. Indeed, to speak of Nigeria in the 1960s, 70s and 80s is to imagine narratives that delve into the macro-politics of military governance, something that has determined the literary historiography of those times. Perhaps contemporary Nigerian fiction seeks to engage a post-military dimension of this time? A logical conclusion that can be drawn from these literary excursions into memory is a return to what Njabulo Ndebele (1991) calls "the rediscovery of the ordinary," through a narrative exploration and critique of the everyday life of individual and collective amnesias, nostalgias and traumas. Indeed, Ndebele's own predilection to a childhood consciousness in his seminal short story "Fools," underlines childhood's embodiment of everyday, mundane existence.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE

DIALOGIC STRATEGIES AND (INTER)TEXTUALITIES IN CHILDHOOD.

3.1 Introduction: Childhood, (inter)textuality and the Literary Chronotope

Having explored in chapter two the notion of childhood as a memoryscape, this chapter turns to childhood as a "storyscape."[73] In navigating through the cultural, traumatic and memory landscape of the world of childhood, the novel in this chapter is foregrounded as a landscape of meaning. This chapter examines the (inter)textualisation of childhood as informed by Bakhtin's (1981) idea of the literary chronotope. Bakhtin explains the literary chronotope as a terrain of meaning-making constructed in the intersection of the axes of time and space in the narrative. The notion of the literary chronotope allows this chapter to foreground space, place and time as planes of meaning that define childhood world through the spaces of dialogue they create, while mapping out topographies of meaning in the represented worlds of childhood. This chapter therefore presents the text as a scape where dialogic strategies are laid out through the chronotopes of space, place and time. Implicit in employing Bakhtin's notion of the literary chronotope is his idea of the dialogism in structure of the novel. By dialogism Bakhtin means the interaction of space, place and time as grounds for meaning in the text. Moreover, space, place and time are the sites of identity construction in the narratives of childhood. These would seem to define the childhood world as zones of negotiation in the process of growth and identification. Therefore, that the novel seems the logical choice for contemporary Nigerian writers is not contrived, it is a pragmatic genre that mediates their memorising, imaging and figuring of childhood as a chronotope.

[73] This term, which is used by Viljoen and van der Merwe (2004) in this chapter refers to a story or plotline as a landscape of (inter)texts, a writer's "country of the mind" (Tindall, 1991). I also coin the term "textscape" to refer to text as product of networks of other texts, which seem to construct a structure of dialogue in the novel.

There are several strands of argument connecting in this chapter: the notion of space, place and time (literary chronotope); the idea of a diasporic consciousness on the part of the authors; and the strategies of textualising childhood. The strands of argument converge at that set of ideas that constitutes the discourse of childhood. The discourse of childhood is therefore informed not only by the toponyms of actual spaces, places and times, but also a network of textual spaces, places and times found in the idea of intertextuality. In this way, contemporary Nigerian writers would seem to grapple with spaces, places and times of influence that derive from actual familial and literary genealogical heritages. These heritages are explored, as chapter two has done, by a sense of critical memory, which comes out of the dissatisfaction with orthodox colonial/postcolonial history. This dissatisfaction in turn leads to a quest for alternative times and histories, triggered by dislocations, displacements and migrations of authorial selves, which subsequently privilege going back to the formative stage of identity formation – that of childhood.

Adult selves are textualised as products of a much richer and complex time of childhood in which myriads of worlds interconnect, taking advantage of the open consciousness of the childhood world. Stylistic strategies chosen to textualise childhood are informed by paratexts and epitexts that (re)construct these various childhoods.[74] Therefore, the contemporary Nigerian writer, is as Graham Allen (2001:165) says existing "as a split subject whose utterances are always double-voiced, their own and yet replete with an otherness which can associate with a socially oriented notion of intertextuality." Thus, contemporary Nigerian fiction is characterised by an awareness of the tendency of African literature in general and Nigerian literature in particular to be driven by the idea of generations of writing (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2005; 2008; Cooper, 2008b).

As a postcolonial subject and migrant writer, the contemporary Nigerian writer is preceded by a literary history that constructs a genealogy of African literature within its

[74] I borrow the concepts of Gerard Gennete (1997b) to refer to elements "at the threshold" and "outside" of the text that come from things like interviews, prefaces and text covers. These extra-textual sources provide relational meaning to the text, informing it in a manner that multiplies meanings that might be derived from that given text.

repertoire of genres. But as writers of a contemporary time it is difficult to locate themselves within this literary history they have inherited and also grapple with the socio-political, economic and cultural fragmentation of their time. What is instructive for them is that they are products of adult regimes of authority, in both familial and literary heritages. Their adult selves are also products of a culturally and geographically mobile world, as migrants. How they approach writing, given the increasing complexity of histories and ideas is crucial in reflecting how they are to be informed by an existing tradition, and also how they seek to problematise it in order to deal with their contemporary context. Yet as writers of a contemporary time, they realise that due to their diasporic status, they have to traverse multiple cultural borders. The process of writing for them is not only double-voiced by virtue of their postcolonial subjecthood, but also because of the inherent need to distinguish their adult from their childhood selves.[75]

Childhood is represented as, a *potential*, in the process of becoming an *act* of being. In this way, the novel for these writers is a space of stylistic experimentation, and childhood, which is a process of becoming, is connected in the practice of writing. Indeed Bakhtin's notion of the novel as a genre of becoming allows us to see its experimental potential, which the text of childhood relies on. Writing about childhood brings this world into existence and blurs the boundaries between the textual and the actual childhood world. Contemporary Nigerian writers, in bringing the child into textual existence (his/her world, image and memories), find themselves re-living childhood, constructing its processual nature, portraying it as a distinct category, and in conversation with their contemporary adult lifestyles which are also in socio-cultural flux. The crucible, then of childhood is found at the disjuncture and conjuncture of time and space, which as this chapter will explore constructs sites of differentiation between adulthood and childhood. Moreover, the generic importance of the novel is realised in the

[75] Cooper's (2008b) examination of metonymy and metaphor as defining the postcolonial migrant writer's use of language is important for instance in understanding why the materiality of language, via metonymy, appeals to not only the migrant status of the authorial self but also as a way to reach out to the concrete realities that define "truths" in the perception of childhood.

representation of chronotopes that are fragmented, through transcending its generic specificity because of its flexible planes of discourse.[76]

A theory of textualising childhood in novelistic discourse entails an attempt at blurring the boundaries between the subject and object of childhood. Moreover, the writing process involves a transcendence of the coupling of object and subject, themes and styles, local and global, as well as between multiple genres. Besides, if seen as the combination of a particular time, place and space, represented childhood is a chronotope. Textualising childhood therefore might mean a reconstruction of childhood personae and roles by the authors. The distance between the adult authorial self and the childhood self being brought into textual existence is blurred, here influenced by contemporary conditions of existence by which adult (read authorial) selves have been transposed across cultural and geographical zones. In a sense, childhood becomes, in view of a history of migration, its own "system of signs."

It is imperative to give a word of caution here. To say that migrant adult authorial selves represent childhood experiences as only informed by their personal childhood, is not to propose an overriding autobiographical significance of meaning. The idea that authorial distance to the textual world of childhood is blurred goes a long way to emphasise, as Bakhtin (1981) quite elaborately does, that the novel as a genre has in our case transcended analytical, stylistic and thematic exclusivities. It is to emphasise its multi-generic form, for indeed its discourse is dialogically informed by paratexts, epitexts and multiple social speech types. In this way, the child protagonist inhabits a textual world – the novelistic word – that has a long history of problematising the orthodox, which in the child protagonist's case are the regimes of authority dictated by the adult world. The child protagonist, in whatever state, as a memory or image, then populates the texts that imagine and memorise him or her.

[76] Bakhtin's (1981:83) literary historiography of the novelistic discourse expresses the point above more clearly by placing the "prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" as "not to be contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary genres." Hence Bakhtin begins to posit the idea of the novel as "multi-generic" but also implied in it is the idea of the novel as *trans-generic*.

Hence, childhood as an idea generating a figure, memory or an image of a particular time, place and space populates the text, bringing with it a tension-filled terrain. This terrain of the text or the "storyscape" (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2004) is interesting because of how it initiates a dialogic process within the production of meaning embedded in the multicultural worlds of childhood. As writers of a postcolonial time, and as migrant writers, the concepts of space and place present an important site of meaning in the representation of a child figure, image or memories. Real geographical or imaginary places, mental or psychological spaces either experienced in sustained or contingent times are characteristic of the multiple world of childhood. These are houses, homes, compounds, villages, countries and cities. While the textual landscape that defines these spaces and places works through imagination, the minimum unit of the word, which Bakhtin (1981) and Kristeva (1980) call an "ideologeme," is foregrounded to inhabit, cohere and dialogue, beyond representing the figurative, image and memorial world of childhood. The textscape of childhood in this sense blurs the theory and practice of representation.

This chapter explores the textscape, using Bakhtin's idea of the literary chronotope. It examines Nsukka in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* as topography of meaning, where the childhood identities of Kambili and Ugwu are mapped out and seen to intersect with those of the turbulent postcolonial military Nigerian state in Kambili's case, and the emergent Igbo and Nigerian nation-state in Ugwu's case. In both cases, Nsukka stands out as a "country of the mind" (Tindall, 1991) on the part of Adichie, where nostalgia and trauma inform the landscapes with meanings that can be mapped out. The chapter then moves to the cityscape in Abani's *Graceland*, where the time, space and place of the city is presented as a chronotope which is created out of the intersection of dystopian material realities and a utopian cultural landscape of desires.

3.2 Dialogic Childhoods: Chronotopicity in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*

3.2.1 childhood and the literary chronotope

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.[77]

The epigraph above explains Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope as a formal structure for novelistic discourse on time and space. Referring to it as a "formally constitutive category," he underscores the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships in literature" (1981:84) as informing the concept of the chronotope. The landscape of meaning in the novel is informed by this intersection of axes. The idea of intersection of axes, later reflected in Kristeva's (1980) ideas about paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of the text is important as not only a formal point of entry into the novel but also as informing plot and history. Meaning is therefore constructed at the intersection of the axes of space and time in the novel. Space and time are constituted in the novel by plot, history and actual or imaginary places which become toponyms of meaning for interpretation. In this case the representation of childhood invests in the foregrounding of spaces, places and times of growth, making the discourse of childhood in the novels here a literary chronotope.

In fact, childhood has historically been represented as a "utopia of time" (Heath, 2003)[78] in the romantic age, and as a site of cultural retrieval in postcolonial discourse (King,

[77] Bakhtin M,M (1981) "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," p. 84

1980; Abanime, 1998). In this way, it was seen as a distinct authorial presence. Contemporary representations of childhood in this study present it as influencing the process of negotiating adult authorial identities. The time of childhood is portrayed as entwined with space and place. Childhood becomes a palimpsest from which layers of meaning are inscribed and re-inscribed as we will see in this chapter.

Childhood is represented by figures occupying spaces and places, memories reflecting times of childhood or images inscribed in specific places or spaces and specific times. Hence, childhood is constructed through a sense of "chronotopicity".[79] Chronotopicity is not just a formative structure of the novel as a genre, but a technique that blurs authorial distance with the subject matter of childhood. This is because, the diasporic space and consciousness in which contemporary Nigerian works have been crafted, plays an influential role in amplifying chronotopicity as relevant in the production of meaning. Chronotopicity is therefore reified through the notions of cartography and place-attachment in fiction.

The represented world of the child, images or memories of it, are therefore mostly constructed around houses, which are divided into kitchens, living rooms, gardens, compounds, all of which carry sensibilities and nostalgia (in the case of memories). But at the same time, navigation around these material spaces is mediated by adult regimes of authority. Hence such spaces also find important meaning through their identification with specific people like mothers, fathers, brothers and extended family members. At the same time there is also the concentric structure of place and spatial cognition that stretches into increasingly public spaces like markets, streets or the University of Nsukka in Adichie's works, in which the idea of the self in relation to family and community is constructed. If stretched further, the concentric nature of space, which Achebe observes, in his conversation on identity with Nuruddin Farah (1986), also finds meaning in broad

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[78] Stephen Heath (2003) "Childhood Times" pp.16-27.

[79] Deriving from the term chronotope, chronotopicity is used here to signal to the processing of space and time within the landscape of meaning in the novel.

cartographical terms that begin to refer to locations as places, moving further away from the cognitive purview of the world of childhood.[80]

In examining the idea of place as part of what he calls "post-colonial transformation," Ashcroft (2001) discusses the tensions that abound in postcolonial experience, in re-ordering and remapping place, which he examines as the most resistant concept in the process of transformation and decolonisation. He discusses the history of cartography as overdetermined by the Western idea of the ocular and therefore as a perspective that is Eurocentric and therefore problematic if applied in postcolonial imagination and experience. Postcolonial imagination continues to grapple with decolonisation itself from Western concepts of space and time, which Ashcroft says come with a powerful ideological discourse of control. Hence, to textualise childhood within a diasporic space is not only burdened with a problematic historico-ideological sense of place but also with the complexities of a process of self-identification that should transcend specifics of place and space in a manner that portrays the cumulative experiences of migration.

Representation of childhood here is therefore a highly charged textual activity that is influenced by the intersections of axes – of chronotopicity, of meanings, of worlds and of cultures, it is dialogic. The "discourse of the novel" (Bakhtin, 1981) therefore provides a propitious and useful plane of expression, in which childhood can be examined.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's texts demonstrate a loyalty to place – in particular, Nsukka. Nsukka features prominently in her two novels. The protagonists in both novels who live in Nsukka are different. But Nsukka transcends the formalistic elements of a chronotope in the narrative. It becomes not just a metaphor but also a metonym, reified to embody childhood figures, images and memories. Nsukka is a toponym that signifies Adichie's genealogy, for she actually grew up there, having been brought up by parents working at University of Nigeria Nsukka. Place-attachment in Adichie's fiction reflects what Tindall (1991) refers to as "countries of the mind" which writers occupy. Tindall

[80] In this film recording, Chinua Achebe and Nuruddin Farah were speaking at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London, England)

explains these countries of the mind as more than just settings. The importance of these places is found in metaphoric forms which are crucial to the production of meaning. As Tindall (1991:9) says:

> I am concerned with literary uses to which places are put, the meanings they are made to bear, the roles they play when they are re-created in fiction, *the psychological journeys for which they are destinations*. Actual countries become *countries of the mind*, their topography transformed into psychological maps, private worlds. [Emphasis mine]

Tindall's project is a stylistic foregrounding of places as chronotopes of meaning in fictional works. Moreover, to posit that places are sometimes destinations for psychological journeys is pertinent. Tindall seems to imply not only the tensions found in the individual project of writing in which a particular place is infused with meaning from a subjective perspective, but also the peculiar tension between the timeless and the specific of place and space. For example, for a postcolonial migrant writer like Adichie, Nsukka embodies familial and literary genealogy, as well as ethnic identity found in the controversial history of the Biafran war which is the subject of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Place-attachment therefore portrays the significance of Nsukka as a literary chronotope in her novels.

In Adichie's first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, the child protagonist Kambili presents a first person point of view of the minutiae of the architecture of the house she dwells in. The various rooms are portrayed in her own architectural perspective of the interior and exterior design of the house. Moreover, when we move beyond the compound walls, we come across Nsukka, the University town of Adichie's childhood, which Adichie describes as:

> A quaint university town in eastern Nigeria […]
> it's a description that does nothing to capture

> the potholes, the people I cannot wait to see,
> the market that spreads its zinc sheds across
> the road, the fragrant dust, the fat mosquitoes.
> I am back after five years. I am re-seeing Nsukka
> With my Americanized eyes. And I am remembering[81]

In Adichie's interviews, short stories, essays and opinion pieces, Nsukka features conspicuously, as the place of good memories. The description of Nsukka is tinged with nostalgia, now that it can only be seen through "Americanized eyes." Nsukka occupies a tangible, reified, metonymic and metaphoric existence in the countries of Adichie's mind. The process of remembering Nsukka is portrayed through material cultures of memory, as explored in chapter two, as well as the tangible objects that define places, houses and their interior, compounds and other concrete objects. Cooper (2008) discusses how language mediates the material cultures in these narratives. This mediation is done through the deliberate use of untranslated words, and the attention to the definition and naming of concrete objects like figurines, hibiscus flowers, roped pots, ingredients for food among others – this indeed is metonymic of particular spaces and places in Adichie's fiction.

Adichie's consciousness of space and place in her writing, informed by her reminiscent time of childhood, allows her to represent childhood figures in her works as a "psychological journey," towards grappling with contemporary migrant identities. These childhood figures are constructed in a matrix of concrete memories, spaces, places and times that play a significant role in the production of meaning, and in making sense of Adichie's own migrant self.

In foregrounding the significance of space, place and time as chronotopes of meaning in Adichie's fiction, this section aims to establish how the textual space is a re-enactment of the dialogical world of childhood. The art of writing, for Adichie, is a return to a childhood world, blurring the boundary between an adult authorial self to a childhood

[81] See Adichie's essay "Heart is where the Home was."

memory, figure and image. In this sense, the authorial self is seen as one divided entity, moving back and forth the places and spaces of growth, enriching the senses of identity at the present. Hence, when we meet Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* and Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we examine them alongside paratexts at the threshold of the novels. These protagonists are therefore not located in an intrinsic hermetic textual world but in a matrix of meanings brought in by the dialogic process between adult and childhood authorial selves. Adichie's essays are examples of paratexts which occupy the margins of her long fiction and which dialogise and concretise meanings to be generated. [82]

In "The Writing Life" for instance, Adichie gives us a spatio-temporal autobiography of her formative stages of authorial consciousness. In these are sources and influences of her narratives and in them we come to visualise the symbols she draws of place and space from the view-point of a childhood self:

> In 1982, my father was appointed deputy vice chancellor of the University of Nigeria at Nsukka and assigned a new two-story house, number 305 on Marguerite Cartwright Avenue: graveled, landscaped, bright with red hibiscuses and green whistling pines.

At the age of five, Nsukka holds the fond memories we see here, where a conscious authorial self is hatched – at her father's desk where "I wrote my first 'book' at 10 […] in an exercise notebook, titled 'The Hopscoths.'" When Adichie transposes the same memories twenty years later in the essay "Heart is Where Home Was," we notice memories of an adult authorial self:

> We moved from a bungalow to a duplex on Marguerite Cartwright Avenue when my father was made Deputy Vice Chancellor. Our

[82] We can refer here to particular essays like "The writing Life," "Diary," "Real Food" and "Heart is Where Home was," in which the writing process for Adichie involves not only occupying spaces of memory, but actually going back to the spaces and places she lived as a child. In the essay "Real Food" for instance, we see the attention to Nigerian Cuisine that informs many scenes in *Purple Hibiscus* – like the resistance to food that Kambili enacts to reflect her silenced voice in the household.

> neighbors were colorful, literally. [Sic] There was the childless Ghanaian woman married to the German professor opposite us […] Up our street was the Irish woman married to the Nigerian and their brood of eight.

"The Writing Life" and "Heart is Where Home Was" hold an interesting trajectory that reflects authorial persona respectively between *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The memories of Nsukka take different authorial selves in the two essays with "The Writing Life" paratextually informing a nostalgic childhood perspective of *Purple Hibiscus* while "Heart is Where Home Was" projecting an adultist memory of childhood in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Nsukka acquires a significant meaning, as a toponym that represents a particular place and space within the novel. As Miller (1995:6) therefore says, such a topographical setting "connects literary works to a specific historical and geographical time." Miller examines time as both historical and geographic, pointing the interesting way in which topography functions in a textual terrain. Following Tindall (1991), Miller (1995) seeks to ask whether places and spaces "have a function beyond that of mere setting or metaphorical adornment?"(1995:7). Tindall goes on to point to the subterranean "psychological journeys" meant to be achieved through place-attachment and topographical markers in the novel. Since contemporary Nigerian fiction is informed by the diasporic context, it is clear that topography plays more than its orthodox role of establishing a setting. The *topoi* within topography – the houses, streets, roads, gardens, towns, cities and markets are specifically selected for the achievement of an organic topography of belonging.

Nsukka stands out directly because it is a metaphor of childhood. Authorial psychological journeys are mapped across the topography of Nsukka as well as the figures, images and memories of childhood. The storyscape is the terrain from which is enacted a series of journeys across time and space, reshaping, (re)moulding and (re)inscribing the physical topographies of the places where the protagonists are growing up. Adichie constructs time and space by moving her narrative across, back and forth in both *Purple Hibiscus*

and *Half of a Yellow sun*. She demonstrates how chronotopicity is characterised by intersections of the axes of time and space. At the same time, she makes use of the storyscape as a terrain where there can be multiple competing narratives as this chapter will demonstrate, particularly with *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie marks the events of the novel around the Roman Catholic Advent calendar of the Palm Sunday by using temporal markers such as "before" and "after" Palm Sunday. The narrative, told from the point of view of a teenage girl shifts back and forth and moves towards foregrounding the main event – the disintegration of the narrator's family as an ironical process of her growth. Adichie constructs competing temporalities, by using the Roman Catholic calendar which assumes a superficial yet facile ordering of the narrator's life and a secular one, which is defined by political upheaval which disrupts and redefines the ritualistic and calendrical one of the Roman Catholic Church. There is therefore not only competing temporalities, but also a dialogic ground from which these temporalities engage in, through not only juxtaposing religiosity and secularity but also involving them in a structurally dialectical narrative process.

The protagonist in *Purple Hibiscus* is seventeen years old, as the final section of the novel titled "The Present" reveals. What we have in the earlier sections is a trajectory of memories, of the two years preceding "the present." *Purple Hibiscus'* concept of temporality is a mixture of memories, played out against a back and forth movement of the past, culminating in the present of the teenage protagonist Kambili. The temporalities in *Purple Hibiscus* are entwined with spaces and places. Kambili, the speaking subject in the story, offers a detailed description of the architecture, interior designs of houses, furniture, recipes for cuisines, landscape designs and species of flowers among other *topoi* inside and outside of houses. Most of the time, Kambili describes these in a somber tone, constructing a gothic topography (Mabura, 2008). Mabura argues that the haunted setting in *Purple Hibiscus* has a symbolic precedent in Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The haunted atmosphere is further exemplified by Brenda Cooper (2008b) who foregrounds the interanimation of objects speaking to each other in *Purple Hibiscus*. Through the animism found in the description of the figurines, furniture and ceiling,

Cooper underscores the importance of that strategy in defining contemporary postcolonial migrant writing. This material culture is underscored by the concept of migration, in which boundaries of space and place are broken by the textual transposition of a range of artifacts like traditional paintings, Nigerian recipes and the untranslated Igbo phrases found in the language.

Like *Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun* moves back and forth in its temporal structure. By covering the period just after Nigeria's independence, the narrative shifts to the time of the Biafran war and back to the ordinary lives of a middle class house at University of Nigeria Nsukka. There is not only a shift in places and spaces but also in narrative points of view. The speaking voices in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are multiple and as they speak, they are involved in a meta-fictive textual strategy, through a "book" being written within *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The intersubjectivity found in the narrative and textual voices of those writing the "book within this novel" is highly complex and charged within the very controversial topic of the Biafran war. There is a disjuncture and conjuncture of storyscapes in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Being a highly subjective and charged topic, representation takes on a complex and ambivalent subjectivity. Speaking subjects come with variant socio-ideological positions of class, age and generation. The authorial voice also comes with a language to represent the characters, with its own subjectivity (Bakhtin, 1991).[83] To represent a highly fraught period of history like Biafra in the 21st century means collecting narratives and temporalities that are always in competition with each other not only because of the blurred lines of truth and fiction about the war, but also because they represent distinct discourses owing to agencies, positions and intentions of the different subjects that abound in them.

Half of a Yellow Sun, as a storyscape is therefore constructed from the concurring and competing temporalities of the Nigerian nation-state space/scape and the Igbo

[83] Refer to "The Speaking Person in the Novel," p. 331-366 – Bakhtin points out that the author's voice, one among the many in the novel, remains an organising principle for the other voices, as a kind of centripetal force.

nation/scape.[84] Other concrete cartographical factors, like what Stephanie Newell (2006:53-54) describes as the "Islamic-scape" complicate the orthodox cartographies and scapes that are a legacy of colonialism ("colonial-scape").[85] Fraught with such a complex and already highly charged textual landscape, this raises the following questions: How does *Half of a Yellow Sun* negotiate the tension in meanings, speaking voices, subjectivities, temporalities, spaces, places and scapes? How and why does it confront this highly charged atmosphere with its own multi-authorial subjectivities? What textual strategies does Adichie adopt within the genre of the novel that deal with the controversial nature of the history of the Biafran war?

In these novels, the two child protagonists Kambili and Ugwu, are used as bodies that navigate the textual topography. They are like the subjects and objects (figures, memories, images) of the narratives and producers of meaning who populate space and place with meaning. They are at the centre of the shifts in space, place and time in their various socio-cultural and political contexts. How they navigate these sites within the textual/imaginary topography speaks of the textual strategies employed by Adichie in this discourse(s) of childhood.

3.2.2 "countries of the mind": Spacetime chronotopes in *Purple Hibiscus*

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie's debut novel, Kambili speaks as the first person narrator. Her sphere of influence is her father's house in Enugu. Kambili commands knowledge of the space around her and exercises a precocious and descriptive demeanor by portraying the minutiae of objects. She talks of "figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted positions," the "huge leatherbound missal," "the whir of the ceiling fun," "slippers

[84] In fact, Arjun Appadurai (1995) in his seminal article "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," points to the disjunctural nature of the hyphen that separates nation and state. He says "states and nations are each other's throats, and the hyphen that links them is now less an icon of conjuncture than an index of disjuncture," (1995:39).

[85] The geography of violence that mapped the "pogrom" was informed by the regional ethno- religious cartography, pitting the Hausa-Muslim North against diasporic mostly Christian Igbo from the South East. Here we see how the ethnoscapes – exilic, migrant identities, in fact internal diasporas – that Appadurai talks about are influenced by the ideoscapes of religion.

making slap-slap sounds on the marble flow." Space is populated with objects that do not just serve the function of a normative setting. Indeed, as Brenda Cooper writes, material objects have "spirits dancing within them" (2008b:170). We read for example, "The off-white walls with the framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing down, bearing down on me. Even the glass table was moving toward me" (*PH*, 7).

Kambili is aware of the space she inhabits, conscious of the monochromatic world that signifies the uniformity and as it occurs to her later, the monologic nature of her nuclear family space. Her apprehension of her surrounding has an animated and descriptive vigour that highlights the role of space in her narrative:

> Our yard was wide enough to hold a hundred people dancing atilogu, spacious enough for each dancer to do the usual somersaults and land on the next dancer's shoulders. The compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires, were so high I could not see the cars driving by on our street. It was early rainy season, and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillea, cut smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. *Closer to the, house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals*. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars. (9) [Emphasis added]

Kambili's eco-critical consciousness helps us formulate an ecological context of her title that, in a way, transcends the symbolic, metaphoric and metonymic. For Kambili, nature outside her bedroom seems in a dialogue; "Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus

reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals." This image seems to stand in contrast with her gothic feeling of entrapment – the one she experiences by watching from her enclosed room.

The colour purple and its implied symbolism intertextually connect Kambili to another protagonist, across the Atlantic, fourteen year-old Celie in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*. Heather Hewett makes an interesting argument, connecting the "transnational intertextuality" found in *Purple Hibiscus* to what she refers to as a corpus of "Black woman's literary tradition" (2005:87). The colour purple as a symbol comes with intertextual markers that as Hewett eruditely discusses, allows *Purple Hibiscus* into dialogue with a wide transnational textual terrain – part of Adichie's dialogic strategy, that chapter four will also examine through the notion of "genealogy".

The hibiscus bushes are a focal point of significance that not only provide symbolic, metaphoric and metonymic capital to Kambili's narrative, but also give a heuristic shape to the topography of Kambili's home compound. Through the technique of foregrounding, the bushes are positioned at the seams of the narrative, representing trajectories of emotions, memories and actions as Kambili says:

> It was mostly Mama's prayer group members who plucked flowers; a woman tucked one behind her ear once – I saw her clearly from my window. But even the government agents, two men in black jackets […] yanked at the hibiscus as they left (9).

The hibiscus flower has a deeper metaphorical meaning that not only represents Nsukka, where Kambili found her freedom, but also people and memories. Yet, the flower is also a composite image that provides a metaphysical embodiment of freedom from the oppressive environment of her home Enugu. It becomes, within the storyscape, a topographical determinant of meaning. Moreover, Kambili demonstrates place, space, memory and meaning as creating a semantic palimpsest:

> Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all; in Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the *silence*. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. (16. Emphasis added)

This "silence" is foreshadowed by "vibrant bushes of hibiscus flowers" reaching out "exchanging their petals" which Kambili observes from her window (9). Hence, the first section from which these passages are extracted sets up a quest for dialogue, in which the hibiscus flower sets topography where there is a "greening" of dialogue. This section is titled "Breaking the gods: Palm Sunday." This section is immediately followed by "Speaking with our Spirits: before Palm Sunday," where the temporal axis shifts back in time and where a larger portion is set aside on exploring the conflict developed. In this section we encounter the minutiae of space and place, as childhood is contextualised within diverse topographies. Kambili's world opens up spatially in the section "Speaking with our Spirits: before Palm Sunday."

It is instructive to point out that terms like "speaking," "silence," and "spirits" are contrasting narratives of silence and speech that characterise subjectivity in *Purple Hibiscus*. The child figure and her memories before and after "Palm Sunday" form a complex web of dialogic discourses that characterise their stream of consciousness, and style of remembering. To "speak with our spirits" implies a transcendental subjectivity that portrays a higher more ephemeral self, yet connecting this self with a collective voice of siblinghood. Kambili's diction is informed by religious dogma acquired during her childhood, something she tries to transcend by using its own terms. Kambili's discourse therefore engages with "ideoscapes" (Appadurai, 1996), with an "interpellation" of religious ideology (Althusser, 1976), portrayed in her speech and thinking. Her childhood is caught between the competing discourses of religious and secular-worlds and the

intermediary space of Nsukka, where all the competing narratives, spaces and places find grounds for interaction. Moreover, Ashcroft (2001) talks of the postcolonial subject's ability to interpolate discourse and regain cultural capital from the dominance of colonial or western machinations. He says that postcolonial subjects are not "passive ciphers of discursive practices." For Ashcroft, these subjects are engaged in an ordinary "dialogic engagement with the world," which as a "strategy involves the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse without asserting […] a separate oppositional purity" (2001: 47). Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus,* childhood occupies the transcendental space of engagement ("with our spirits") that interrupts the dominant discourse of fatherhood and of adulthood, which is illustrated in the description below:

> I pushed my textbook aside, looked up, and stared at my daily schedule, pasted on the wall above me. *Kambili* was written in bold letters on top of the white sheet of paper […] I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler.' (*PH*, 23. Emphasis retained)[86]

In a sense, the foregrounding of the place Nsukka is also investing it with notions of resistance and transformation that come with apperception of it as a "habitation" (Ashcroft, 2001). However, Nsukka gains its significance as a liberating place/space/habitation by virtue of the "other" place, Enugu, the narrator's home where a haunted and gothic topography is found. The wide yard and garden that Kambili describes for us (9) belies a self containment. As is typical of an upper middle class family, there is a conspicuous consumption of space. A suburban atmosphere, found in

[86] Such are the structures of living which literally order Kambili's childhood. The idea of a scripted childhood is expressed by Kambili in a further statement, "Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep" (23-24). It is ironic that textuality is used by Papa Eugene also as a tool for resistance – through the editorials of his newspaper "The Standard."

the bushes of bougainvillea, roses and hibiscus flowers, wide yards, spacious corridors, large and airy living rooms is represented. Despite the impression of an abundance of space, Kambili disabuses herself of this facile impression by being conscious of "compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires […] so high I could not see the cars driving by on our street" (9). Indeed we never get to even know whether the Achike family has neighbours. Therefore, the image of the natural dialogue of the hibiscuses flowers, reaching out and touching "one another" is stifled by that of "coiled electric wires". The urge for a dialogue beyond these walls seems like a natural instinct, something that Kambili has to find beyond the precincts of the walls. Indeed, the coiled electric wires speak an illusion of grandeur –for Kambili, they are metonymic of a sense of entrapment. Kambili's window, where she is wont to constantly peep out into the gardens, paints a topography of entrapment, grotesque and oppressive silence found in the "airy stillness" of the ceiling fan and the "measured steps" of a Sunday afternoon after church (31).

The architecture of this mansion is therefore symbolic of the "architexuality" of Kambili's narrative.[87] In this mansion, we are privy to the experiences of Kambili, on the issues of freedom, violence and silence – all these exist within the precincts of these walls. Kambli's space is portrayed with contradictory meanings of freedom, oppressive silence and the undulating endlessness of time. The spacious corridors and rooms ironically become claustrophobic. Kambili describes her father's bedroom thus:

> All that cream blended and made the room seem wider, as if it never ended, as if you could not run even if you wanted to, because there was nowhere to run to […] the softness, the creaminess, the endlessness. (41)

In the wake of claustrophobia, her speech comes out seemingly impaired as we see Kambili is wont to choking, stuttering and mumbling whenever she tries to speak. Speech is translated into telepathy as Kambili talks about "speaking with our spirits" (the title of

[87] Architextuality, as Genette (1997a: 1) writes, is "the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation."

the second section – before Palm Sunday). Kambili and her brother Jaja find dialogue through their transcendence from the physical environment. They ask questions and speak to each other, expressing needs, desires and fears through their eyes (22, 30, 59, 81 and 105). Having experienced the violence of her father, Kambili's childhood is characterised by an acute consciousness of speech and sound, even making her conscious of her own ability to speak. She has to constantly anticipate her stuttering because the act of speaking is arduous, owing to an internalised silence and the use of telepathy.

Kambili's visit to her countryside home, Abba, makes little difference in terms of her quest for freedom and dialogue, but maintains an awareness of space. In this rural home, her family is set apart, by virtue of its class, and indeed during Christmas, the spacious yards surrounding their palatial home are peopled with villagers, for her father is an "*Omelora*" – "one who does for the community." The landscape here is dotted with what Kambili describes as "mud and thatch houses […] to three-storey houses that nestled behind ornate metal gates" (55). Of their multi-storey countryside home, Kambili is in awe: "Our house still took my breath away, the four-story white majesty of it, with the spurting fountain in front and the coconut trees flanking it on both sides and the orange trees dotting the front yard" (55). The feeling of unfamiliarity and non-belonging, of silence and oppression, of a lack of dialogue is still persistent. There is a disconcerting mystique, in the aura of this plush architectural presence:

> The wide passages made our house feel like a hotel,
> as did the impersonal smell of doors kept locked
> most of the year, of unused bathrooms and kitchens
> and toilets, of uninhabited rooms. We used only the
> ground floor and first floor; the other two were last
> used years ago […] no I went up thereonly when I
> wanted to see farther than the road just
> outside our compound walls. (58-59. Emphasis added)

The consumption of the space – the wide corridors, yards and storeys feels as cloistered as in her Enugu home. This mystical citadel is juxtaposed almost immediately with Kambili's grandfather's compound a few yards away:

> The compound was barely a quarter of the size of our backyard in Enugu. Two goats and a few chickens sauntered around, nibbling and pecking at drying stems of grass. The house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and Aunty Ifeoma growing up here. It looked just like the pictures of houses I used to draw in kindergarten: a square house with a square door at the center and two square windows on each side. (63)

This topography paints another perspective of Kambili's family history, what Kambili has been denied access, for she can only visit her grandfather for fifteen minutes, on condition that she doesn't drink or eat anything as her father demands. This place, as Kambili has been indoctrinated by her father to think, has an ideology of godlessness, of heathenism and Kambili consciously looks out for these to no avail (63).

In contrast, Kambili experiences a culturally shocking topography at Nsukka. Nsukka becomes a central chronotope where all meanings diverge and converge. Nsukka's topography contrasts that of Enugu and Abba. Marguerite Cartwright Avenue, the duplexes, driveways, bungalows and flats in Nsukka all speak a different language of freedom, liberty and noise. Kambili envisions again, the "tall gmelima trees" bordering the Marguerite Cartwright Avenue "bending during the rainy season thunderstorm, reaching across to each other and turning the avenue into a dark tunnel" (112). Kambili has a penchant, as we notice here, for dark imagery. Indeed her life is full of silence, even as she yearns to "reach across" like the gmelima trees in Nsukka, and the hibiscus flowers outside their yard in Enugu to find her voice and dialogue.

Aunty Ifeoma's garden in Nsukka has "a circular burst of bright colours – a garden-fenced around with a barbed wire. Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a hand painted wreath" (112). Nsukka is definitely bustling with activity. There is a dialogic air to it that begins with a vigorous dance which Aunty Ifeoma performs, as a welcoming gesture for Kambili and her brother Jaja (113). Typical of her conscious self, Kambili begins to notice the spatial (un)familiarity of Aunty Ifeoma's house:

> I noticed the ceiling first, how low it was. I felt I could reach out and touch it; it was so unlike home, where the high ceilings gave our rooms an airy stillness. The pungent fumes of kerosene smoke mixed with the aroma of curry and nutmeg from the kitchen (113).

There is a marked difference in the consumption of space here. There is, in the words of Michel de Certeau (1984) a "poetic geography" of space unfamiliar to Kambili. The bookshelves, narrow passages, frayed cushions, stacks of rice, suitcases and medicine bottles all in one room speak a polyvocal language unfamiliar to that in Enugu. These minutiae of objects portray a chaotic yet intimately dialogic atmosphere in Nsukka. Dialogue is so mundane in Nsukka while the material culture is variform – it speaks of a different order to the one Kambili is accustomed to.

Plates and cups are multicoloured, as well as the chairs in the living room. Laughter, Kambili says "always rang out […] it bounced around all the walls, all rooms." The Ifeoma family is boisterous, effervescent and carefree in their laughter. If we remember, laughter is a concept that Bakhtin (1968) in *Rabelais and His World* uses to discuss the dialogic strategies that brought about the use of parody and made popular art conspicuous, as well as for later Bakhtin (1981) set the foundations for the "novelistic word." Laughter takes Kambili out of the monochromatic state of mind she has come with from Enugu. The "airy stillness" of the rooms in Enugu is replaced with laughter "bouncing of all the walls of the rooms" in Nsukka. The architecture in Nsukka is not dogmatic, neither is it didactic, like that of Enugu. They even pray for laughter. Indeed,

Bakhtin (1968:123) points out how laughter is anti-dogmatic, works against "fear and intimidation […] didacticism […] naivette and illusion." There is, in the Aunty Ifeoma household, a "polyvocal speech," in the laughter and noise that as Hewett (2005: 86) argues "interrupts and contests the dominance of Eugene's monologue." Moreover, Jo Anna Isaak (1996) posits that laughter gives an "agency for intervention" – it has a subversive potential that pluralises, destabilises and baffles "any centred discourse" (1996:4).[88]

The contrasting topographies of Nsukka and Enugu are subliminally juxtaposed by Kambili to create the effect of one being a parody of the other. The navigation and meaning of the different spaces varies significantly. After having experienced both, the tone of her voice is now fearless when she goes back to Enugu after the visit to Nsukka. The expression of her spatial consciousness is critical:

> Our living room had too much empty space, too much
> wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing
> and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our
> furniture was lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted
> skin in the harmattan, the leather sofas' greeting was a clammy
> coldness, the Persian rugs were too lush to have any feeling. (192)

Kambili's heightened awareness after Nsukka re-defines her idea of home. The feeling of belonging, which defines the place and space called home, has been reconstructed with the experience of the liberating topography of Nsukka. Hence, the movement back and forth Nsukka and Enugu, signified and symbolised by the purple hibiscuses blooming outside their compound, has extended the idea of "home" for Kambili. Nsukka becomes a place of growth, beyond silenced familial spaces in Enugu. It dialogises the topographical artefacts that reify her sense of belonging – the furniture, walls, ceilings, corridors, food

[88] Isaak (1996) examines laughter as a "metaphor for transformation" and for cultural change. Laughter, for Isaak gratifies libidinal desires – in this sense Isaak tries to connect the social and symbolic. As we see with Kambili, the polyvocal environment gives her the ability to laugh and appreciate laughter hence lifting silence off her body and allowing her sexuality to come into focus, as she gets attracted to Father Amadi.

and other aspects of material existence are invested with laughter and noise, giving them a different metaphorical significance within the storyscape. Hence, Nsukka is centrally positioned as chronotopic to Kambili's childhood experience and its textual relevance, as we realised earlier, goes beyond the boundaries of the spaces of *Purple Hibiscus* as a novel. Indeed, the acute nostalgia that Kambili expresses in the final section of the novel titled "A different Kind of Silence: the present," says a lot more about the centrality of Nsukka beyond the fictional discourse here (298-299).

Kambili's account of her final visit to Nsukka is informed, perhaps, by Adichie's nostalgia, of going back to Nsukka almost half a decade after her studies in America. The short story "Tiny Wonders," which is also included in the Harper Perenial edition published in 2005 portrays an autobiographical nostalgia of a visit to Nsukka, similar to what we see of Kambili's return to Nsukka in the last section of *Purple Hibiscus*.

The chronotopical importance of Nsukka is amplified again in Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a time when perhaps the potholes in the tarred roads were not there (as portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus*). This was a time when the university town was indeed a suburban upper middle class, without the silences, tensions and economically better. This is different from the potholed, rusty and dusty town of the Aunty Ifeoma generation in *Purple Hibiscus*. The chronotopicity of Nsukka is explored through the experiences of the teenager Ugwu, a houseboy.

3.2.3 chronotopicity and cartographies of violence in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The Biafran war plunges *Half of a Yellow Sun* into a historically loaded discourse. To fictionalise the Biafran war four decades after it actually happened involves a conscious choice of writing across and along existing works on the subject. The impetus for going back forty years, in a second novel says something significant about an author's choice in stepping into a literary minefield. For Adichie though, this decision is also influenced by her need to retrace her familial history that ties in with her ethnic Igbo roots. In other

words, the Biafra war defined her familial history, as a source of genealogical knowledge and affirmation of a lineage.[89]

Half of a Yellow Sun is written against a background of competing narratives of victims and victors, nation-states and nations and ethnicities entangled in a long history of conflict. In view of this, textual strategies are deliberately chosen because of the expectations and assumptions of "truths" about the war. Adichie is conscious about treading that line of fact and fiction carefully as she points out the "imaginative truths" that attend to poetic justice.[90] The narrative choices she makes become important in light of this politically charged notion of the Biafran war. Textual strategies are particularly important, especially narrative voices and the subjectivities they represent. The textual space here is therefore an extended space for the engagement of history, and provides an alternative archive of this particular subject of the Biafran war.[91] Adichie is conscious of the choices of narrative voices, historical debates about the war and her own subjectivities regarding the subject.

Therefore the generic nature of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is multiply informed. Considering Bakhtin's (1981) ideas about the multi-generic nature of the novel, and the heteroglossic nature of the novelistic word, *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be examined as historical by virtue of its subject of the war. It is also epistemological as it competes with a vast knowledge about the war – historical and literary. The child narrator, Ugwu, is also on an epistemic journey, which turns out with him being included in the textual strategies of this novel, as a co-author of "the book" within this novel. It is also a story about romance, and love during times of war, with protagonists involved in a sub-narrative of love that runs up to the end of the novel.

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[89] While the book is dedicated to her grandfathers who lived during and took part in the war, the "Author's Note" (in the form of an epilogue) explains further, the role of lineage as a source of the story. She credits her extended family for being participants in the research that brought to existence *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

[90] Refer to the "Author's Note" at the end of *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

[91] Here one has in mind Appadurai's (1996) discussion of "Global ethnoscapes". He talks about how "many lives are inextricably linked with representations (*novels, cinema etc*), and thus we need to incorporate the complexities of expressive representation into our ethnographies […] as primary material which is to construct and interrogate our own representations," (p. 63-64. Emphasis mine). Chapter two also examines the text in relation to the notion of an alternative time, history and therefore archive.

In view of the competing histories in times of war, Adichie's strategies in crafting her work are based on a conversational approach. The actual research that Adichie undertook which involved a metaphorical act of reclaiming her familial lineage is also complemented by a literary historiography of the Biafran war. After her epilogue, she acknowledges "the(se) books that helped in my research," giving a list of fictional and non-fictional works she consulted while writing *Half of a Yellow Sun*. She highlights specific influences as follows:

> I owe much thanks to their authors. In particular, Chukwumeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* and Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* were indispensable in creating the mood of middle-class Biafra: Christopher Okigbo's own life and *Labyrinths* inspired the character of Okeoma; while Alexander Madiebo's *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran war* was central to the character of colonel Madu. (Author's Note-emphasis retained.)

In light of the author's note, it is important to see how (inter)textuality is a strategic choice for the author in *Half of a Yellow Sun* – Adichie is aware of the vast amount of work on the war. She is therefore aware of the numerous voices at the background of the topic. *Half of a Yellow Sun* becomes an engagement with multiple textual, lineage and genealogical narratives in view of multiple authorial sources. Ugwu, who is one of the three narrators in the text, provides an interesting perspective into the narrative strategies, competing voices, worlds and cultures. Ugwu's role as a narrator takes on a more complex (inter)textual role as he co-author's another book within *Half of a Yellow Sun* titled "The World Was Silent When We Died." The book within the novel is a portrayal of a competitive narrative, a meta-fictive strategy intrinsic to the dialogic structure of *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

When we first meet Ugwu, he has just taken up the duties of the houseboy of a university lecturer. Fresh from the village he is confronting a new urban and academic environment at University of Nigeria Nsukka. Having spent the formative years of his childhood in a

rural, countryside home, Ugwu's new world is confounding because of its modernity, the English language and the written word. Language becomes the central organising principle as he flounders to appropriate a new world and extend the horizons of his experience. Translations, Igbo dialects, inflections of Igbo dialects and of English become linguistic tools that Ugwu uses to make sense of this new world, form opinions about it and create a sense of self appropriate to finding his voice and place in this multicultural and modern world. Hence language finds a central place in his new experience. The reader can see authorial consciousness from the instances of translation,

Language in *Half of a Yellow Sun* comes with an explicit sense of Igbo nationhood, because of its representation of the Biafran war. It reflects the multiple dialects of the Igbo community as the nation that hitherto fought for a pan-Igbo consciousness. A critic, like Obi Nakwama (2008), refers to this novel as the "Igbo novel," by bringing to mind the subject of the story as well as its linguistic consciousness. Adichie deliberately uses Igbo words, as part of the material culture project of her novel. She leaves untranslated words as an authentication process but at the same time allows for a transformative process in her use of English as a second language speaker.[92]

Nsukka is a world partly textualised as Ugwu realises, "They went past a sign, ODIM STREET, and Ugwu mouthed *street*, as he did whenever he saw an English word that was not too long" (3). There is a conscious attempt at the use of English language on the part of Ugwu. As a boy from the countryside, the linguistic terrain of Nsukka is heteroglossic and as Ugwu notices, his master Odenigbo code switches relative to the occasion. He speaks in a mix of Igbo and English sometimes in complete Igbo to Ugwu. Ugwu has to constantly translate and appropriate the language addressed to him in Igbo. Through Ugwu, we get to experience the contradictory standards not only of English but also of Igbo, symbolised by numerous dialects that portray difference and linguistic cartographies, which also signify regional variances immanent in the Igbo world.

[92] Bill Ashcroft (2001:75) points out that the use of untranslated words signifies a "metonymic gap," when "appropriations of a colonial language insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions, or references which may be unknown to the reader." According to Ashcroft these become "synecdochic of the writers culture and hence a marker of 'difference' brought about by 'experience.'"

Ugwu enters into a world where his consciousness is aroused by signposts. They trouble his cognitive ability, stretching his imagination in his struggle to comprehend new spatial orders that he is forced to deal with:

> Ugwu had never seen a room so wide. Despite the brown sofas arranged in a semi-circle, the side tables between them, the shelves crammed with books, and the centre table with a vase of red and white plastic flowers, the room still seemed to have too much space. (5)

Like Kambili, spatial practice heightens Ugwu's consciousness. If we for a moment highlight the importance of the words "spatial practice" here, we will come to see Henri Lefebvre's (1991) understanding of "spatial practice" as that which is "perceived" and relates to a particular rhythm and organic existence. The "representation of space," is therefore the architecture in Ugwu's mind, related to his processes of cognition. Ugwu, we are told, in a manner foreshadowing his epistemic journey to come, edges "closer and closer to the bookshelf" (5). The house is filled with books, in every room "piled on tables" and even in the bathroom. Ugwu begins by navigating this new architecture, marvelling at the "cold barn" and the "metal box studded with dangerous looking knobs." He brings with him the innocence of the countryside with the mindset of a bucolic and pastoral existence, signalling for the reader that his narrative will entail an epistemic journey across this highly textual landscape.[93] It will *actually* be a textual journey, for Ugwu, in the midst of a multitude of books has to decode the written word, for him to be able engage in speech with his master Odenigbo.

Hence, the construction of the character and voice of Ugwu is found in the instances of translation between Igbo and English, in code-switching, in the fluid use of the different dialects in existence in his new world and in the practice of writing. The university town's cultural landscape is different from the one in his native Opi. As an academic, his new master relates to knowledge textually and the way the word is consumed is different

[93] A textual landscape here also refers to the material existence of books in circulation within the house, making the "text" take on a material cultural role beyond its "representative" function.

from how Ugwu has experienced it. Mental spaces are extensions of social spaces in this environment. The book is a product of this space, and therefore the idea of social space here is one in which the representations of space that exist in the mind have become a part of. The book here is also a representational space, in which a part of social life and practice finds extended space. Indeed, in multicultural worlds, Appadurai (1995) warns, the social space goes beyond what Lefebvre (1991) calls the "practico-sensory" existence – representations, found in the mental landscapes are constitutive of the reality of the social space. Moreover, Lefebvre (1991:30-31) warns of the disappearance of "physical/natural space" due to *thought*, while Appadurai (1995) posits that the work of imagination is diacritical to modern subjectivity, something Gerald Gaylard (2005) attributes also to African (Post)modernity.[94] Imagination, for Appadurai, becomes the mediator of subjectivity, to cope with the modern world. Ugwu's imaginative subjectivity is the key to allowing him to relate to his contemporary realities.

Nsukka has an intellectual cosmopolitan vibe. It is a melting pot of knowledge(s) about global history, a lot of which is consumed in the daily meetings of Odenigbo and his multi-racial and multi-ethnic colleagues. The globe is brought to Ugwu's doorstep and apprehended through the conversations and soliloquies of his master Odenigbo. Nsukka becomes the toponym for an epistemic re-evaluation but also for Ugwu, it is, in the words of Ngugi (1986), a place to "(de)colonise the mind" and re-engage his mental appropriation of reality. Ugwu navigates his new cultural space at the margins; from his position in the kitchen he eavesdrops on the conversations of his master and visitors. His relationship with his master is a portrayal of the Fanonesque Manichean world in which the colonised live in marginal existence with definitive roles as house and plantation servants. In these colonial economies, this "division of labour" was synonymous with racialised identities. Ugwu's world is therefore divided two-ways: that of childhood whose structures of living and feeling are determined by the adult world and that of a houseboy where his position is of servanthood in relation to that of his "master." In this way, one can see the architecture of knowledge and distribution of functions and voices that runs along a public/private and adult/childhood split, where Ugwu's domesticity and

[94] Gaylard underscores the role of imagination in postcolonial and postmodern constructions of identity.

age is meant to confine his knowledge to the "apolitical" concerns of private space and childhood times – something implied in the term "houseboy." However, his presence as a voice in the text, points to a destabilisation of the hierarchy of rules, functions and voices in this narrative of war.

There exists, if not, (using Homi Bhabha words) a "vernacular cosmopolitanism" in Nsukka, a "vernacular intellectualism."[95] Despite the multi-racial and multi-ethnic composition of the academic community here, there is the strong influence of an Igbo ethnoscape, found in the stereotypes, portrayed in Ugwu's perception of the Yoruba academic Miss Adebayo's "rapid, incomprehensible Yoruba" and the often raucous arguments on the group identities of the nation, tribe and ethnicity (20). In this atmosphere of a newly independent nation, Adichie begins to paint the fractious ideological terrain that is the Republic of Nigeria, in laying a background to the internecine Biafran war that later occurs.

Ugwu attempts at entering into the textual world around him (17), at first as a performance, whose impetus comes from a Toundi-like realisation of his different status as a houseboy.[96] Moreover, his thirst for understanding the new world (of his master) was obvious in the conversation Odenigbo has with his colleagues:

> Ugwu did not understand most of the sentences in his books, but he made a show of reading them. Nor did he entirely understand the conversations of Master and his friends but listened anyway and heard that the world had to do more about the black people killed in Sharperville, that the spy plane shot down in Russia serves Americans right […] and Ugwu would enjoy the clink of beer bottles against glasses, glasses against glasses, bottles against glasses. (17-18)

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[95] See footnote 66

[96] Here I am drawing attention to the figure of the houseboy Toundi in Ferdinand Oyono's book *Houseboy.*

As hinted at earlier, there is a humorous reflection of Fanon's master-servant relations. Ugwu's desire to be like his master, speak, command and be knowledgeable as him, indeed even occupy his position, presents a comic moment in his attempt at imitation:

> Late at night, after Master was in bed, Ugwu would sit on the same chair and imagine himself speaking swift English, talking to rapt imaginary guests, using words like *decolonize* and *pan-African,* moulding his voice after Master's, and he would shift and shift until he too was on the edge of the chair. (20. Emphasis retained.)

Language is at the front of Ugwu's reckoning with this new world. His Master occupies the prototype English subjectivity, with the "melody" of his "English-inflected Igbo, the glint of the thick eyeglasses' (21). For Ugwu, the English language is an indicator of personalities and their hierarchies, with the inflection of the English words, the cadence, pronunciation and tonal variation defining a particular speaker's superiority. Ugwu enters a world of hybrid subjectivities performed through not only the building of an academically informed cosmopolitan mindset, but also by the (un)conscious code-switching from one Igbo dialect to another and from English to Igbo. When he meets Olanna, Odenigbo's fiancée, "He wished that she would stumble in her Igbo; he had not expected English that perfect to sit beside equally perfect Igbo" (23).

Ugwu has entered into the world of postcolonial subjectivity, in which imagination occupies worlds beyond concrete physical experience and is a significant part of experience. In this world is the transpositional capacity of language, performed through the bilingualism and multilingualism that Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (1989) argue defines the immanent transformational capacity of postcolonial subjectivity. Through this performance of language and speech, these subjects are ontologically cosmopolites because they inhabit the multiple worlds that come with these languages, as Ugwu witnesses. Yet what is interesting is that they live in a relatively homogenous Igbo community. In this largely Igbo ethnoscape, Nsukka becomes a place where the global

and the local experiences conglomerate. We see Odenigbo in many arguments using the knowledge of global struggles to understand the fractious, newly independent Nigerian state. There is a vernacular cosmopolitanism that not only expresses the possibilities of the co-existence of the dominant nationalisms of Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani but also the chasms arising out of the "tripartitioning" (Ekwe-Ekwe, 2007) of Nigeria in which ethnicities are defined as synonymous with regionalism and religionism.

In Ugwu is the narrative's development of a budding consciousness that should signify the future of the project of nation-state building after the ruins of war. Through Ugwu is a traceable trajectory of the naivety, bucolic, unconscious of an emergent nation-state struggling with the collective angst of a modernisation process and lost in the struggle for a unitary language to express the diverse nations that predate the colonial occupation project. In Ugwu's emergent childhood is the embodiment of a vernacular logic and a cosmopolitan, multinational one that is in the throes of a painful birth. While Ugwu does not in any way represent the entire Igbo nation, he is metonymic, even synecdochic of the past, the struggles of the present and an envisaged future. All of these make him an embodiment of this emergent nation-state.

By placing Ugwu in the space of a middle class family at Nsukka, his position as a houseboy gives a detached narrative, crafted in the marginal spaces of this household. His narrative is to be constructed, in most cases, with his ears on his Master's bedroom door, or at the living room door adjacent to the kitchen. He is fiercely protective of his kitchen and loyal to his designated duties, sometimes with a humorous enthusiasm that surpasses his capacity to cook. His narrative competes with the dominant one provided by Olanna and Richard, as the plot shifts alternately from "the early sixties" to "the late sixties". Adichie, like she does in *Purple Hibiscus*, shifts time back and forth, taking the reader back to the relatively tranquil early sixties and then to the chaotic period of the Biafran war in the late sixties. The construction of the temporal space is not just as an undivided entity but a divided and dialogic positioning in which two separate periods are alternated and contrasted to each other. In this strategy we can plot shifting subjectivities as the idea

of the nation-state is (de)territorialised and the idea of an "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson, 1991) changes demographically and geographically.

By the power of a print economy (the book) mediated by their imagination, Odenigbo and his colleagues relate the political situation of Nigeria to other global situations within the continent and beyond its shores. Nsukka's academic cosmopolitan space allows the work of imagination which defines the social space here, to carve out a postnational order which ironically engages in an act of territorialisation and deterritorialisation of ethnic, tribal, regional, national and nation-state spaces. [97]

Ugwu's stream of consciousness, essentially the work of his now transforming rustic imagination tries to process the protracted spaces of experience in this modern house, in this modern university town. The protraction of spatial experience, through imagination and thought, occurs to him as essential to mediating this new world. Ugwu therefore has to exploit his imaginative potential and his engagement with poetry and the text becomes important. In this sense, an authorial self is in the offing for Ugwu. The poetic text unfortunately does not offer an organic unity of images as he expects of it (84). As we witness later however, Ugwu's authorial capabilities mature with his authoring of the supplementary narrative, the book within this novel "The World Was Silent When We Died."

The temporal patterns where the narrative(s) are set have an interesting pattern. They alternate between the period early sixties and late sixties, moving back and forth these two temporal planes. This gives a sense of narrative unity through juxtaposing different times. It is interesting that the pattern of narrative voices is another level at which structural unity is achieved, in tandem with both a tranquil "early sixties" and a turbulent "late sixties". The three narrative voices of Ugwu, Olanna and Richard take up an interesting position along the two temporal planes. There is a uniform, almost teleological

[97] I use the term "postnational order" after Appadurai's (1995) idea of an "order" created by "mass mediation" within the diasporic public spheres. Appadurai argues that imagination defines this postnational order in the sense that it has become itself social practice and the imaginative space, as Lefevbre (1991) before him argues, becomes an extension of concrete spatial practice.

positioning of the voices in the temporal plane of the tranquil "early sixties," in which the narrative of Ugwu is followed by Olanna then by Richard. This structural consistency is broken when turbulence comes and narrative voices do not take on the uniform pre-set hierarchy. Narrative structure and voice in the "The late sixties" becomes fragmented as we even lose clarity of the authorship of "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died."

The para-narrative book, "The World Was Silent When We Died," is a deliberate intertextual attempt by Adichie at representing the testimonies of victims of war. It is scattered intermittently in the text of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, acting as an independent narrative device and voice, trying to order the inchoate nature of a polyglot narrative landscape. As a narrative device, it is a literal attempt at intertextuality, often breaking the pattern of mainstream narrative voices. Occasionally occurring at the end of some chapters, it acts as a vignette, standing out to constantly bring the reader back to memories of war. It is in this way a mnemonic device, functioning as an archive, which is being constructed at first by Richard, the English man who has come to do research on Igbo-ukwu art. Yet for its intermittent positioning within the narrative of the novel, between the tranquil early 1960s and turbulent late 1960s, the narrative is a point of intersection, collapsing the temporal difference between the two tranquil and turbulent periods by destroying the illusion created by positioning these two periods as almost mutually exclusive to each other. There is also within this vignette a historical dimension as portrayed on page 115. Because war is the subject, the vignette presents an illustrative supplement, as an independent historical voice, giving the reader a background of the ethno-religious scapes that predate colonialism (115).[98]

The onset of the war translates to Ugwu's literary consciousness developing significantly and the world of imagination becoming familiar, through his engagement with texts.

[98] This particular piece on page 115 is like a racialised historical voice, delineating the ethno-cultural landscape, ascribing bio-cultural differences to ethnicities while at the same time hierarchising them. This particular historico-anthropological piece however seems to sketch the colonial cartographic history of the independent republic of Nigeria in a sardonic distant tone. It is one of the many narratives from history that compete with others in this context of war. It can be interpreted as a strategy for authenticity on the part of the author, in view of this very controversial narrative landscape of the war.

Forms of mass media (the radio) and the print media become extensions for the imaginative and informative landscape for Ugwu. His position in the household is not just as voyeuristic as it was initially. His increasing command of the English language has created a conscious coordination of languages characteristic of bilingual subjectivity. In Ugwu is the development of the Bakhtinian "novelistic word." There is now a dialogic coordination in which there is an interanimation of languages aided by forms of mass media accessible to him – in particular, his access to the print media of newspapers and novels:

> but politicians were not like normal people, they were
> politicians. He read about them in the *Renaissance* and
> *Daily Times* […] Whenever he drained a pot of boiled beans,
> he thought of the slimy sink as *politician*. (127. Emphasis retained)

Hence, the textual world of printed newspapers mediates and extends Ugwu's cognitive capacities. He is beginning to occupy not only lived but perceived space beyond the kitchen which is his primary sphere of influence. The worlds beyond the kitchen, those inhabited in the speech and texts he encounters, as well as in the forms of mass media, now interanimate and become dialogically coordinated. The world of metaphor, metonymy and symbolism builds up in his consciousness as he takes an increasingly participatory role in the narrative of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Ugwu finds a new set of imaginative experiences and slowly enters into Master Odenigbo's sodality of intellectuals – this "imagined community". The sodality is held together not only by the print economy, but also by the radio, an influential form of mass mediation. In Ugwu's case, he is increasingly able to think about what he eavesdrops from his position in the kitchen:

> Ugwu moved closer to the door to listen; he was fascinated
> by Rhodesia, by what was happening in the south of Africa. He
> could not comprehend people that looked like Richard
> taking away the things that belonged to people like him,

Ugwu, for no reason at all. (213)

The above are diasporic public spheres, in which forms of mass mediation create a globalised diaspora, one that is racialised in Ugwu's case. This not only demonstrates Ugwu's growing participatory consciousness in this academic community at Nsukka, but also to the globalised sense of nationhood that was in vogue in the early sixties.

Meanwhile, degrees of subjective consciousness heighten as Ugwu enters into the time of war. He shares the angst of Master Odenigbo upon the news of the Pogrom in the Northern parts of Nigeria, one of the most controversial moments in the country's history. This reflects what Richard, the narrator and the creator of "para-narrative book says in the third piece of "The Book": "he 'writes about independence,' reflecting actual historical discourses about the paranoia of the 'North', allegedly a colonial preference to the radical 'South' and reaching the conclusion that 'At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp'" (155).

Adichie represents actual historical accounts through Richard's book project "The World Was Silent When We Died." This piece is multi-generic with testimonial accounts, historical and anthropological information as well as structurally fragmented. Through this competing narrative, a complementary, supplementary and organic narrative structure is (re)constructed. This narrative structure not only testifies to the complexity of the immanently heteroglossic nature of the topic of the Biafran war but also to the erudition of research conducted by the author.[99] If we remember, she says that this project's goal is "to provoke a conversation."[100] *Half of a Yellow Sun* demonstrates deliberate textual strategies of dialogue beyond just the creation of narrative voices in the characterisation process. The authorial voice takes a clear organising principle, coordinating the represented voices which are informed with a long tradition of

[99] It is worth noting here that the writing of this novel coincides with Adichie's completion of a Masters in Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University and the beginning of a Masters in African Studies at Yale University.

[100] Refer to Adichie's interview "My Book should provoke a Conversation" - http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/bookshelf/book-reviews/my-book-should-provoke-a-conversation-chimamanda-ngozi.html

discoursing on this particular subject of the Biafran war. There is a direct referencing of actual speeches, such as that of Ojukwu (1969:193-194) upon the "Declaration" of the "Sovereign Republic of Biafra" as represented in his radio speech (*HOYS*, pp. 161-162). In this narrative there are representations and representations of representations, creating a concentric pattern of representations and voices cutting across different forms of media that inform the textual landscape of the novel. Moreover, there is a dialogue of representations organised around an authorial subjectivity towards the topic of the Biafran war. When we talk about representations, we are relying on the "rhetoric" as Ashcroft (2001) says of history, in which case as he discusses, the notions of truth, fact and fiction become increasingly vague and meaningless as absolutes, and hence what we have are narrative truths, even fictive truths. Adichie calls them "imaginative truths."

The textual process in *Half of a Yellow Sun* involves conscious choices of representations. This is constructed through making the narrative voices involved in the *actual* textuality. Moreover, Adichie weaves a literary historiography of previous fictive and research works on Biafra, as portrayed by the para-texts in her postscript. At the threshold of this text, is the literary figure of Okigbo, through the character of the poet Okeoma. Whether for purposes of verisimilitude or literary archiving, the reprisal of the Okigboan imaginary within this textual landscape is more than just an intertextual process – it foregrounds the role of literary imagination within this imagined community of the Igbo nation.[101] Okeoma's performances became templates of action, even speech-acts, from where the soul of an emergent Biafran nation-state was envisioned. At the apex of Ugwu's literacy, coinciding with the advent of this emergent nation, the kernel of the spirit of secession is captured in his knowledge of Okeoma (read Okigbo's) poetry:

> For a moment Ugwu heard nothing – perhaps Olanna too had walked out – and then he heard Okeoma reading. Ugwu knew the poem: *If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise.* The

[101] Elsewhere, Dan Ojwang' (2009) refers to Christopher Okigbo, an eminent Nigerian poet who was killed in the Biafran battle front, having dropped the pen for the gun, as part of intellectual intervention in the advent of the Biafran war. See "Kenyan Intellectuals and the Political Realm: Responsibilities and Complicities" in *Africa Insight* Vol. 39 (1):22-38.

> first time Okeoma read it, the same day the *Renaissance* newspaper was renamed the *Biafran Sun*, Ugwu had listened and felt buoyed by it, by his favourite line, *Clay pots fired in zeal, they will cool our feet as we climb*. Now though, it made him teary. (174-175 Emphasis retained)

Ugwu, as we see, apprehends the spirit within this imagined community, one that as he understands, is built through the print media. This is all within the process of creating not just a narrative voice out of him but also an authorial one. As we shift between the two temporal planes, Ugwu's consciousness rises, and as a speaking voice, he begins to claim an authorial stake in the narrative. Upon forceful conscription to the Biafra military, he begins to claim a stake in the Biafran war, making use of his literacy skills from the moment of conscription:

> 'I do rayconzar meechon,' High-Tech announced, speaking English for the first time. Ugwu wanted to correct his pronunciation of *reconnaissance mission*; the boy certainly would benefit from Olanna's class.' (358 Emphasis retained)

Upon conscription, construction of Ugwu's authorial self begins. As a boy soldier, the only way he can make sense of the conditions of the ragged military camp, the emaciated soldiers, lack of ammunition, food and less than basic training facilities is to write, as he has learned at Nsukka. Ugwu's position as a narrator has strategically changed to give the narrative of *Half of a Yellow Sun* a fresh subjectivity, of being in an actual battle field. It is at this camp that he comes across the book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself*. Ugwu reads this book time and again, to maintain his sanity and nurture an authorial subjectivity. His excitement about the book leads to an angry outburst with High-Tech, the thirteen-year-old fellow soldier when he discovers High-Tech using a page of his book for wrapping some drugs into a roll for smoking. Later, Ugwu earns himself the title "Target Destroyer," for his precision at

detonating the *Ogbunigwe*, a Biafran hand-made grenade.[102] Despite Ugwu's forthrightness, humility and self-discipline, the conditions of war, as we find later, numb his senses. He is surrounded by blood, shelling and death. When some of his battalion stumble into a bar, Ugwu becomes an accomplice to rape, in what the narrator describes as a "self-loathing" feeling (365).

For Ugwu, writing brings a sense of expiation and healing. For instance, after a near-fatal mission, he is taken to the hospital and Richard visits him. Ugwu explains his empathy for Frederick Douglass' anger in his book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself.* Upon hearing the title of Richard's book "The World Was Silent When We Died":

> Later, Ugwu murmured the title to himself: *The World Was Silent When We Died.* It haunted him, filled him with shame. 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. (397. Emphasis retained)

Ugwu's healing, emotionally and physically, is aided by his continuous writing after he leaves the hospital (397-399). He writes, from the power of memory, referencing the poet Okeoma, recording the conversations he overhears between Odenigbo, Olanna and friends who come to visit them. After the travails of war, Ugwu has achieved an authentic subject position, in which he has respect for his combatant status in the Biafran war and his survival. Later, when the war is over and they move back to Nsukka, Richard says to him that the war isn't his (Richard) story to tell and it is at this point at the end of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, that Ugwu takes on the mantle of telling this story: Ugwu writes his dedication last: For Master, my good man (433).

[102] The Ogbunigwe was perhaps a symbol of Biafra's scientific ingenuity and invention. As a Biafran made weapon, it was metonymic of the scientific prowess of Biafran soldiery. It took on a mythic, even motific importance in Biafran tales (see Emecheta,1994) and was synecdochic of the biological warfare that marked the historical capture of the Mid-west region by Biafran soldiers which coincided with the recognition of Biafra by Tanzania (Raph Uwechue, 1969). During this capture of the Mid-west, some hundreds of Nigerian soldiers were said to have died because of the Ogbunigwe – a weapon that was said to kill without "firing a single shot".

It is through the narrative voice of the teenager Ugwu that *Half of a Yellow Sun* demonstrates strategic positioning in this highly-charged topic of the Biafran war. Narrative voices have been constructed through (Inter)textuality in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and have involved multi-generic, multi-voiced consciousness. Ugwu's narrative voice is the product of a dialogic process of writing. Through his voice, the text is foregrounded as a coordination of the ethno and verbal-ideological components that define his immediate environment. The text has produced its own space (Lefebvre, 1991) from within which Ugwu's subjectivity is held, examined and transformed sufficiently for him to occupy a central narrative role, perhaps more authentic than the rest.

Once again Nsukka emerges as an ideological toponym that provides a resource for meaning within and without the text. Nsukka also becomes a metonym of authorial childhood, from where the nostalgia of a diasporic consciousness is played out. Yet Nsukka is also a chronotope which signifies an intersection of the axes of time and space. The impact of a diasporic consciousness allows for Nsukka, through the print media to cross boundaries, mediated by the power of imagination and thought. *Half of a Yellow Sun* comes to occupy, what (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2008:ix) refer to as "a borderless, global textual topography."

3.3 Dystopian and Utopian Childhoods: Navigating the Lagos Cityscape in Chris Abani's *Graceland*

Chronotopicity in Adichie's works has been examined through the toponym Nsukka, the University town. Nsukka has taken on a metaphoric and metonymic dimension, where the narrative of childhood has been plotted as defining to the idea of dialogue. The idea of dialogue has been mapped out in the textual landscape – through narrativity, memory, symbols, metaphors and metonyms, drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) idea of mental, social and physical space as connected elements. Hence the idea of dialogue is constructed through a textual world that the child figures in these texts not only inhabit but also define by their role as narrators or as part of an authorial strategy, as is the case with Ugwu.

The focus here shifts to that of the city. In Abani's *Graceland*, the city is a spatio-temporal terrain connecting diverse worlds. It is a place of dialogue and conflict, a "city of attractions" (Highmore, 2005:45-69) and distractions, dystopia and utopia. As an urban space, Abani's Lagos is seen through a rookery, a tenement city called Maroko and through the life story of presently sixteen-year-old protagonist Elvis Oke. There is a historical development that alternates between Lagos the city and Afikpo, Elvis's countryside home, which builds up to the present. The movement of time and space also plots the migration of memory between Afikpo and Lagos, while constructing the polarities of a simultaneously dystopian and utopian existence that eventually converges in the Lagos cityscape. The dystopian existence is portrayed in the representation of the scatological imagery of poverty, deprivation and filth which intermingles with utopian dreams, wishes, hopes as well as the imagination of worlds that are polemically apart. In spite of these conditions, a feverish imagination thrives, stirring and speeding up human activity. Maroko is driven by the hope of flight and by the power of imagination found in forms of mass media. This text portrays Lagos through the practico-sensory experience and the imagination of Elvis's late childhood.

Childhood is a fecund time for experimenting with time and space, portrayed in reality and imagination. Moreover, fantasy allows childhood to rupture boundaries of reality and create what Ashcroft (2001:204) calls a "horizonal" reality, which according to him is transformative in the postcolonial world's attempt at rising above the physical and metaphysical boundaries inherited by the nation-state at the juncture of independence.[103] The time of childhood is also particularly impressionable because of imagination, which is infromed by mobility. In Elvis's case we see the narrative move back and forth, between countryside and city in a stylistic positioning of Elvis's trajectory of identity formation. Eventually, space and time converge on the city of Lagos and on Maroko. The city of Lagos serves as the background of the narrative, moving in time and space through the rookery of Maroko.

[103] Gerald Gaylard (2005:4) also underscores the centrality of "imagination," through the genre of the novel as diacritical to the "transhistorical and transnational" ontology of postcolonialism which in this sense becomes not just a period, but an idea.

Maroko is an actual informal settlement in Nigeria, the result of a gradual process of gentrification, as the aboriginal fishermen community of Lagos were edged out of Ikoyi – later to become one of the most expensive suburbs in Lagos – through increasing costs of housing (Olu, 1990:83). Elvis describes Maroko as a "swamp city" which is also "suspended." Its precariousness is symbolic of the fragile material, cultural and moral socio-economic fibre of this society. The fragility underlies what Marcus and van Kempen (2000:18-19) describe as the "ghettos of exclusion," where an endemic attitude of abandonment is rife; they call this the "abandoned city." It is part of the city destined, as Highmore (2005:6-8) explains, to be "illegible". An overwhelming atmosphere of abandonment is made manifest by the unsightly sludge, dirt, mud puddles and mangrove swamps and the people of Maroko, in the wake of this "abandonment" have to literally, as Elvis does every morning, slog their way through:

> While he waited, Elvis stared into the muddy puddles, imagining what life if any, was trying to crawl its way out. His face reflected back at him, seemed to belong to a stranger, floating there like a ghostly head out of a comic book […] As he sloshed to the bus stop, one thought repeated in his mind: What do I have to do with all this? (6)

The foul material conditions of Maroko remind us of Fanon's (1961) idea of the "wretched of the earth." In postcolonial Nigeria, Maroko stands out as an "internal colony," signifying the continuities of the Manichean colonial world, through the dual economies that characterise most postcolonial urban landscapes. By representing Maroko, Abani makes it become what Highmore (2005:1-6) defines as a "metaphor city" or an "imaginary city" (Prakash, 2008) from where cultural readings can be made of the "material and symbolic." Maroko, as part of Lagos can be related to the whole of Lagos, making it in this sense synecdochic to Lagos as metaphor and symbol of meanings that can be drawn from cultural readings. *Graceland* becomes part of what Chris Dunton

(2008) refers to as the "Lagos Novel," following the popular work of Cyprian Ekwensi in the late 60s and 70s as examined by Emenyomu (1974).[104]

Maroko is located at economic and socio-political margins within the architecture of Lagos. Materially, it is a place of despondence and abandonment, fuelled by informal economies. Culturally, it is a cornucopia of positive energy (Dunton 2008)[105], creativity, imagination and utopia. Elvis, the protagonist, thrives in this diversity of cultural existence. His hobby, turned economic activity of impersonating Elvis Presley allows him to draw on the creative energy that comes out of these impoverished material conditions. The activity of impersonation, borne out of his early childhood maternal influences is ontological of the state of childhood as it thrives through imagination in *Graceland*. The claustrophobic environment that Elvis feels (3), allows for imagination as the only available space of freedom. There is, in this condition, a thin line between what is material and metaphysical. Indeed, the narrator describes the infrastructural wastage in Elvis's neighbourhood: "Between the pillars, a woman had erected a buka, no more than a rickety lean-to made of sheets of corrugated iron roofing and plastic held together by hope" (3). A further atmosphere and image of discordance and dissonance is described thus:

> Water, thick with sediment, ran down the rust-coloured iron roofs, overflowing basins and drums set out to collect it. Taps stood in yards, forlorn and lonely, their curved spouts, like metal beaks, dripping rainwater. Naked children exploded out of grey, wet houses, slipping and splaying in the mud, chased by shouts of parents trying to get them ready for school. (3-4)

Maroko is represented as an image of abandonment, yet there is on the part of the authorial voice a tactical selection of adjectives, through the personification of objects and animism in a world in which children seem to "explode" out of houses. Nature and

[104] For other work on Lagos the city see Obiechina (1973) and Echeruo (1977).

[105] Chris Dunton's article "Energy and Entropy: City of words," traces the historiography of the "Lagos novel" from the 1960s and examines the idea of positive energy in contemporary novels set in Lagos.

nurture collide in a chaotic way, and as the rain washed down in a cleansing fashion there is still an overhanging "smell of garbage from refuse dumps, unflushed toilets and stale bodies" (4). Despite this fetid material world in the margins, there exists multiple cultural worlds in a rich and hybrid musical symphony. For the despondency that is provided by the ocular sense, there is richness and diversity in the auditory sense as Elvis gets up to listen to the city waking up. Besides the "tin buckets scraping, the sound of babies crying, infants yelling for food and people hurrying but getting nowhere," there is the tune of Bob Marley's "Natural Mystic" playing and the "highlife music," a "faster-tempoed" one by Celestine Ukwu also playing next door. These cacophony of aural signals begin to paint a picture of the culturally diverse landscape that is Maroko and hence of the multiple worlds in existence within the cultural imagination of this society. Using Highmore's postulations, such acoustic cacophony reveals a different idea of movement and rhythm of the city that policy makers and urban planners of cities can never make intelligible. According to him, the advent of modernity meant the illusion of order created within cities (2005:8-16). In this sense, and as Watson seems to advocate, there exists in such marginal and illegitimate sections of the city, "sites of magical urban encounters, hidden in the interstices of planned and monumental, divided and segregated, or privatised and thematised, spaces that more usually capture public attention" (2006:5). For Watson, the enchantments found in the politics of difference find a nuanced encounter in the marginal "micro-publics" that are normatively illegible in the mainstream planning of the city.

Maroko is culturally cosmopolitan, consuming global cultural products in an inventive and creative way – a manner best described by Bhabha (1990) as "vernacular cosmopolitanism," by Ashcroft's (2005) concept of "transformation"[106], by Roland Robertson's (1995) idea of "glocalization,"[107] or by Arjun Appadurai's idea of "grassroots globalization"[108]. The Lagos cityscape is therefore a terrain of worlds

[106] Ashcroft Bill (2005) "Global Culture, Local Identity and Transformation," pp. 215-218.
[107] Robertson, Rolland (1995) "Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity," pp. 25-44, in *Global Modernities*
[108] Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," in *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000)

simultaneously in dialogue and conflict. Elvis's growth as a teenager is located in this transformative, creative yet materially deprived environment. His earlier childhood in Afikpo comprised a fairly homogenous and stable sense of the world: he lived in a neat nuclear household, regularly visited the bioscope and had mastered the popular modes of expression. Now sixteen, Elvis confronts at the end of his childhood, a frenzied cultural space that plunges him into unstable material life and accelerated expectations of growth and responsibility. Creativity becomes the substance of existence and Elvis embraces the pastiche and hybrid practice and form of existence found in the multicultural worlds created by the power of utopian imagination:

> Elvis looked around his room. *Jesus Can Save* and *Nigerian Eagles* almanacs hung from stained walls that had not seen a coat of paint in years. A magazine cutting of a BMW was coming off the far wall, its end flapping mockingly. A piece of wood, supported at both ends by cinder blocks, served as a bookshelf. (4-5. Emphasis retained)

Elvis's reading tastes, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, reflect the significance of not only imagination as a way to navigate the deprived socio-economic landscape but also "the therapeutic or corrective power of published knowledge" (Dunton, 2008:74).[109] Dunton discusses the importance of the text in the "Lagos Novel" of this century as central to the positive and creative energy that is a counterpoint to the entropy often associated with the "African city" (Enwezor, et.al 2002; Freund, 2007). In *Graceland,* Elvis's avid reading practices are part of an authorial strategy of not only constructing an epistemological self out of his childhood but also of intertextuality, reflecting the multiple texts that inform this novel. Elvis's existential crisis is therefore textually constructed and related to that of the "invisible man" in Ralph Ellison's work, allowing the astute reader to make their own assumptions from Elvis

[109] Dunton's idea of the text and published knowledge as a definitive feature of the contemporary Lagos novel is illustrated in Abani's referencing of a variety of texts, which include the pharmacopeia and recipes that are relevant within the structural organisation of the central narrative (as material culture of memory sourced from the protagonist Elvis Oke's late mother) as well as the strategic referencing of Onitsha market literature as an authentic textual product of the popular urban Lagos space.

reading texts about his marginal material existence, but his imaginative and creative power as (re)inscribing a sense of agency.

3.3.1 navigating the city: landscapes of desires, poetic geographies entropic realities.

The architectural brittleness of Maroko – the suspended poise, the pastiche of building materials reflected in the interior design of Elvis's own room is also a reproduction of an imaginary world – these inhabitants imagine a life into *actual* existence. In Elvis's case, his sense of claustrophobia is obviated by an imagination that has free reign and convinces him to try and make a living out of the impersonation of Elvis Presley. Elvis's early childhood, defined by an abusive father, sexual molestation and the loss of a culturally influential mother has created a crisis of subjectivity, and especially sexual identity that is at the present, in Lagos, fueled by a highly deprived material condition but culturally porous environment. Elvis occupies, in this kind of cultural landscape and economy, what can be called a "landscape of desires" (Prakash, 2008:14) created by the consumption of images, sounds, memories and cultural artefacts. His later childhood culminates into a mixture of desire, despondency, and blitheness and therefore a dystopian and utopian plane of existence that reflects the urbanscape of Lagos – world (s) of dialogues which are also in conflict.

This landscape of desires is culturally contiguous to and concretely manifested in the discordant architecture of the built environment. The narrator has a particularly demonstrative and sensational way of mixing images of the built environment with ocular and aural senses while building up a discordant yet artistic satellite image of Maroko:

> The plank walkways, which crisscrossed three-quarters of the slum, rang out like xylophones as a variety of shoes hurrying over them struck diverse notes. In the mud underneath this suspended city, dogs, pigs, goats and fowl rooted for food. Somewhere in the vicinity, the congregation of a Spiritual

> Church belted out a heady, fecund music that was a rhythmic, percussive background to their religious ecstasy. (24)

The image of a "suspended city" invokes a metaphysical phenomenon of material isolation, desolation and alienation. But the "rhythmic, percussive" acoustic images invoke a wealth of metaphysical economies that characterise and therefore "support" this suspended city. Moreover, in actual sense the alienation of Maroko from the mainstream economy of Lagos has created the metaphysical economies such as Elvis's impersonation activities, Benji's "hooking up services," and Okon's blood selling for survival. Within the perceived chaos, there exists an intricate internal order such as Koolhas (2002) ascribes to Lagos.[110] As Elvis navigates the city we witness how his wanderlust is the source of networks he builds with people like "de King of de Beggars" and Okon. Mainstream economy is beyond the reach of the inhabitants of this bridge city. The propinquity to decent built environment is found in the high-rise buildings that source for inexpensive labour from Maroko. Elvis's experience in a construction job illustrates the sheer alienation and irony that exists in the contiguous images of development and decay within the Lagos cityscape (27-29).

It is through the eyes of Elvis that we get to navigate Lagos. The reader experiences the satellite cartographical imaging of the city – the "sweeping flyovers" with a "shantytown" growing "underneath them peopled by petty traders, roadside mechanics, barbers, street urchins, madmen and other mendicants" (29). There is a symbolic hierarchy of habitation within the cityscape, as modernity, represented by the "sweeping flyovers," seems to tear across the skies of the tenement cities beneath them. What we have is also a worm's eye view scenario of the position of marginal persons through Elvis's actual point of navigation on the ground. It is interesting as the power of the image registers in Elvis mind, buoying him into leaps of cinematic imagination, and, true to the landscapes of desires created by the forms of mass mediation that strongly inform his sense of utopia, Elvis imagines himself a film director:

[110] Rem Koolhass (2002) "Fragments of a Lecture in Lagos," pp. 173-184.

> What shots would he line up? Which wouldn't make the final edit? ending up on the cutting-room floor? It frustrated him to think this way. Before he read the book on film theory he found in the second-hand store, movies were as much magic to him as the strange wizards who used to appear in the markets of his childhood. Now when he watched a movie, he made internal comparison about what angle would have been better, and whether the watermelon shattering in the street of a small western town was a metaphor for death or a commentary about the lack of water. (29)

Elvis takes up the position of a *voyeur*, using the ocular sense to paint the disparate images of the city within the same street – he describes a customer "reading a book on quantum physics," who Elvis thinks is probably a "professor down on his luck," and a "thief stalking a potential victim with all the stealth of a tiger." However, Elvis is equally vulnerable to the vagaries of the city's underbelly as a one-eyed beggar with a "long scar, keloidal and thick" accosts him. The beggar's "hair was a mess of matted brown dreadlocks, yet he was clean, and his old clothes appeared freshly washed" (30-31). This beggar turns out to be "de King of de Beggars," one of Elvis's seminal networks of friends and contacts who has a strong sense of moral probity, is a revolutionary and an intellectual of sorts, who expresses himself in pithy aphorisms.

There is a hyperconscious sensibility for the optical as Elvis leaves Maroko every morning. There is something defamiliarising and alienating yet fulfilling about the landscape and the city which he calls "half-slum, half-paradise," a place "so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time" (7). There is, as Elvis reckons, a constant revelation about Maroko, which he says "nothing prepares you for." The ragged built environment, suspended above the filth of the mangrove swamp seems to be in a perpetual sense of *becoming*:

> Half of the town was built of a confused mix of clapboard, wood, cement and zinc sheets, raised above a swamp by means of stilts

> and wooded walkways. The other half, built on solid ground reclaimed from the sea, seemed to be clawing its way out of the *primordial swamp, attempting to become something else*. (48. Emphasis mine)

Hence the swamp becomes "primordial," – a constant and essential background of the haphazard built material here that is symbolic of a slog, plod and existential crisis of habitation. Further, in the scatological imagery constantly portraying Maroko in the novel, there is, much to Elvis's consternation, "a little boy, sank into the black filth under one of the houses" and "a man squatted on a plank walkway outside his house, defecating in the swamp below, where a dog lapped up the feces before they hit the ground." Much to Elvis's further disgust, he "saw another young boy sitting on an outcrop of planking, dangling a rod in the water" (48). Such disgusting eco-systemic images of filth and food represent the cyclical conditions of a "miasmal city" which are interestingly contiguous to the "garden cities" in an interesting juxtaposition of images as the narrative voice informs us:

> Looking up, Elvis saw a white bungalow. Its walls were pristine, as though a supernatural power kept the mud off it. The small patch of earth in front of it held a profusion of red hibiscus, pink crocuses, mauve bachelor's buttons and sunflowers. The sight cheered him greatly. (48)

Lagos becomes a collage of images of poverty and affluence, a "dual city" of conflicting material realities that give a complex image because of how they are contiguous to each other. The idea of duality exists not only in the images of poverty and wealth as Elvis witnesses or in the cacophony and polyphony of the aural images of this city, but also in the cultural energy that this city is able to generate. This cultural energy is found not only in the imaginative landscapes that are, as in the case of Elvis leaping out of the material boundaries, but also in the cultural production and circulation of artefacts around the cityscape. Music, food, clothing, books, magazines and paintings are the concrete products within Lagos' cultural landscape that tell a different narrative of movement and

circulation, different from the static, sluggish, almost immobile nature of the built environment of Maroko. It is these cultural products mediated through communication networks like radio, television and video that speed up the idea of Lagosian rhythm and movement. The pervasive nature of these particular forms of mass media has allowed for the cultural energy of Maroko to be realised. One of the sites for the mobility of cultures and artifacts is the market, and Elvis's navigation of the built environment takes him to the market scenario within the Lagosian cityscape.

Like in the fiction of Achebe and early Nigerian writers, the market place is a significant network of the movement of people, goods, ideas and general cultural artefacts. The representation of the market place reveals the apex of cultural tastes, mobility and creativity within the overlapping nature of this cultural landscape upon the Lagos cityscape. The market constructs networks for the informal economies that make such miasmal cities as Maroko thrive. Their situation within the dual economy of the city of Lagos erases the compartmentalised movement of ideas, people and goods that urban planners envisioned for the city. While its location within the physical precincts of the city implies a conscious act of planning, the circulation of the cultural products, artefacts and ideas continuously inscribe and re-inscribe cultural boundaries. The products in circulation, which include people, food, music, books, magazines and snacks are also classified as indigenous and imported in origin, signifying the market place as a site for competing cultures and knowledge(s), found also in the second-hand section of books and magazines. Abani finds the opportunity to reference literary variety as well as reflect the essential nature of mobility and circulation of knowledge in the most unlikely of places. Describing the second hand books as being sold via a cart, he goes on to describe the "dog-eared Penguin Classics," giving the example of *A Tale of Two Cities* by referencing the first line, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (1). This referencing is fortuitous in capturing Elvis's perception and experience of the city which he described earlier as "half-slum, half-paradise" (7).

Through this market scene, we are made aware of Elvis's reading tastes as well as how the idea of the text and the narrative as cultural product in a circulation network, reflects

the co-existence of "high" and "low," canon and popular culture within the space of the market. As Elvis navigates the second-hand book mobile market – the book carts – he comes across not only the "Penguin Classic" *A Tale of Two Cities*, but also works by Chinua Achebe, Mongo Beti, Elechi Amadi, Camara Laye, Mariama Ba, "thrillers" by Kalu Okpi, Valentine Alily as well as works by Dostoesvsky and James Baldwin. Through the text's tactility, it gains a central role as not just a representation or a reflection, but actually a product being represented and referenced by Abani, alongside food, music and clothing – an actual cultural product – a good like any other within this multicultural and transcultural network of the city. Abani also takes this chance to reference Onitsha market literature, giving a vignette of its historical importance in the epistemological history of Eastern Nigeria. Its palpable nature is used here to reflect its creative origins as well as allow for an authentic referencing (112)

The sub-cultural relevance of these works (Onitsha market literature) is underscored through the politics of everyday, within the city – love, hate, good, evil and general issues of morality. However, the notion of "landscapes of desires" is portrayed in the escapist ideals of beauty, money and the construction of American popular imagery:

> The covers mirrored American pulp fiction with luscious, full-breasted Sophia Loren look-alike white women. Elvis had read a lot of them, though he wouldn't admit it publicly. These books were considered to be low-class trash, but they sold in the thousands. (112)

Abani then references a whole section from one of the pamphlets "Beware of Harlots and Many Friends." The referencing of Onitsha market literature allows for the city to be explored through a textual landscape. The texts here – books, pamphlets – are being represented as consumer products in circulation within the city, as part and parcel of goods within its networks. The tactile nature, as goods in circulation, of this representation underscores their relevance as not only academic, sentimental products, but also as products that speak to the condition of the subject in the postcolonial city.

Their subcultural relevance and their mass consumption reflect a creative imagining of literacy within the miasmal, informal city networks. It also gives Abani the chance to re-inscribe the culturally creative nature of literary activity within the informal city network as well as reference a historiography of popular cultural products in postcolonial Nigeria.[111] In this activity, Abani uses the novel to demonstrate the potential of the text as an archive of the "metropolis". In this way, the text or the act of writing can be considered as portraying the "metropolis as an archive" (Mbembe & Nutall, 2004:352).[112] This "Lagos novel" references both the popular and canon of literature, in view of the protean nature of cultural politics within a marginal point of navigation in the city's landscape.

The everyday issues dealt with in this popular literature reveal a gendered representation and perception of the city. With titles like "Mable the sweet honey that poured away" and "Beware of Harlots and Many Friends," laws governing morality are spelt out, making conspicuous the female body, the "harlot," as subject and object of derision. This literature attempts at moral and cultural gate-keeping, and assumes social entropy as extant within the cityscape. At the same time, the cityscape is reflected through a hierarchy of gendered labour division, in which even within an informal economy where theft, drug-dealing, extortion and trade in human parts is rife, the sex worker is considered illegal. There is in this idea of the popular, a patriarchal, ultra-masculine framework of interpretation, because even within the informal economy, the female gender remains marginalised. These informal economies are exacerbated by the absence of state support of the basic provision of food, shelter and clothing. They thrive by sheer cultural creativity, but are also overseen through a patriarchal perception of morality, decency and rules of behaviour.

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[111] Okome (2002) "Writing the Anxious City: Images of Lagos in Nigerian Home Video Films" examines the historiography of the city through the cultural products in circulation. Okome points out "Thus, it was the Onitsha market literature that began the critique of citiness as opposed to rurality, which became amplified in the city novels of Cyprian Ekwensi"(321). Hence it is through the text that discourse on Lagos began and Abani's referencing of Onitsha market pamphlets goes back to, arguably the origins of the "Lagos novel".

[112] Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall 'Writing the World from an African Metropolis' 347-372.

Therefore, the market is a storehouse of cultural knowledge, societal rules and mores on appropriate behaviour. The market in this sense becomes a "micro-public" as Watson (2006:18) says of those marginal public spheres that are never the sites of theoretical and practical consideration in matters of policy, design or planning. It is also a place of "enchantment" and of "phantasmagoria," reflecting the psychic state of the city. Occupied by free-flowing imagination and subjects who are a reflection of what Mbembe and Roitman (2002:99-129) call "The Subject in Times of Crisis,"[113] the market is a conspicuous meeting place in the landscape of the city, allowing its inhabitants an illusion of choice and agency and the ephemeral catharsis found in spending power that the market offers to clients.

Yet the market, populated mostly by petty traders is subjected to surveillance as portrayed in the ironic urban planning efforts to clear the city of informal traders, hawkers and food sellers. It restricts even further, the movement of those in the margins within the city. The constant police battles with street hawkers being cleared out of the streets of Lagos are represented, as Elvis witnesses, in his regular visits to the city. In one instance, a hawker whose wares are thrown into a fire by a policeman for illegal hawking commits suicide by throwing himself into the same fire used to burn his wares (74). Around the city is converging a collective sense of dystopia, anger and despondency from the informal settlements, as police man the city. This collective angst is located in the period of disillusionment in the postcolonial African city, where "crisis" has become central to the politics of everyday life. The collective anger is the result of what Mbembe & Roitman (2002) call a "crisis in space and matter" which leads to "explanation by the inexplicable" acts of suicide and mob justice. Considering the entropy portrayed in the decay in the built environment, a condition out of a "historical violence," subjects are plunged into a "prolonged state of anxiety and perplexity" (Mbembe & Roitman, 2002:125). We see Elvis witness inexplicable incidences of mob-justice as micro-public spheres turn into avenues for venting out the helplessness of the masses against the juggernaut of repressive state apparatuses in their attempts to police the crisis.

[113] Mbembe and Roitman refer here to figures who are constituted by the crisis of socio-cultural, economic and political fragmentation - a crisis of what they refer to as "space and matter".

These forms of mass violence are turned eventually into mass resistance and political mobilisation, when the state decides to raze down Maroko. In the representation of this actual historical event (Ahonsi, 2002), we see the forces of gentrification once again redefining the spatial politics of the city's landscape.[114] But we also see a Fanonesque revolutionary *lumpenproletariate* in the organisation of the inhabitants of this suspended, miasmal city to resist attempts to destroy their place of habitation. The military and police take control and spatial politics within the city of Lagos are redefined at the opportunity cost of hundreds of lives, including Elvis's father Sunday Oke. Meanwhile, Elvis's adventures end in his arrest, torture and release, only to find he has nowhere to call a home anymore, as he confronts built and human debris, including the mangled remains of his father. The imagery here is visually disturbing as we are exposed to death, debris and scavengers. It is the end of an era, borne out of revolutionary efforts from the *lumpen* against repressive state apparatuses. In this imagery Maroko is presented through decay. As an anatomy of destruction, Maroko has come full circle, in its creation and destruction and even in its decaying moment, the scatological imagery of a putrefying eco-system is visually powerful, collapsing the images of life and death and putting human and animal within egalitarian food chains:

> All around, scavengers, human and otherwise, feasted on the exposed innards of Maroko. They rummaged in the rubble as bulldozers sifted through the chaos like slow-feeding buffalo. Here some article of clothing still untorn; there a pot; over there a child's toy with the squeaker still working. There was a lot of snorting coming from a clump of shrubs as a pack of hungry dogs fed. The hand of a corpse rose up from between the snarling dogs in a final wave. (303-304)

This is the height of dystopia for Elvis and as he walks around in delirium, having been literally alienated from what he physically identified as a home, the city looks destitute to

[114] The forcible displacement of residents of Maroko led to the destitution of over 300,000 people with the parcel of land that was Maroko reclaimed parceled to high ranking military officers as well as private developers (Ahonsi, 2002:137).

him. The spatial practices of Lagos have been re-configured in what the government ironically calls "Operation Clean the Nation." The imagery of destitution is presented through the mass of beggar children. We read:

> His eyes caught those of a young girl no more than twelve.
> She cut her eyes at him and heaving her pregnant body up,
> walked away. He glanced at another child and saw a look
> of old boredom in his eyes. Elvis read the city, seeing signs
> not normally visible. (306)

The re-configuration of the city has suddenly rendered things visible for Elvis and the usual signposts have been defamiliarised. In the city, the people have been exposed to anxiety and schizophrenia:

> a man stood, then sat, then stood again. Now he danced. Stopped.
> Shook his head and laughed and then hopped around in an odd
> birdlike gait. He was deep in conversation with some hallucination.
> It did not seem strange to Elvis that the spirit world became more
> visible and tangible the nearer one was to starvation. The man laughed
> and his diaphragm shook, Elvis thought he heard the man's ribs
> knocking together, producing a sweet, haunting melody like the wooden
> xylophones of his small-town childhood. (307)

There is a thin line between dystopia and utopia, the spiritual and material. Otherworlds suddenly seem in dialogue with the living. In this state of delirium:

> Elvis traced patterns in the cracked and parched earth beneath his feet. There is a message in it all somewhere, he mused, a point to the chaos. But no matter how hard he tried, the meaning always seemed to be out there somewhere beyond reach, mocking him (307).

Later, Elvis finds himself in "Bridge City," another ghetto under the massive Lagos bridges. Space and time fuse into each other as Elvis falls in and out of consciousness. In this community of beggar children, "time lost all meaning in the face of that deprivation" (309), and surviving the evening seems like the goal of an entire lifetime. The city here is a jungle with a vicious law of survival of the fittest. In this part of the city, despondency is synonymous with images of children begging, selling and basically sustaining the day-to-day running of their destitute homes. The city has reached a nadir, basically grinding to a halt when the floods come sweeping. These conditions eventually coincide with Elvis's reunion with Redemption. In a fortuitous and serendipitous turn of events, Redemption gives Elvis his passport, with an American visa. This becomes Elvis final act of impersonation that eventually sees him through to "Graceland," to America.

In Abani's *Graceland*, Lagos is seen through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old who is faced with an impoverished material existence but a rich cultural environment built through the desire for flight and survival. While Abani constructs the structural dialogue of time and space (Afikpo and Lagos as Country and City), the narrative converges on the city in an attempt at plotting contemporary conditions of childhood. The squalor, filth, hunger, begging, sexual molestation and assault is borne by the children in the numerous instances that Elvis witnesses or is involved with. These childhoods are constructed within the dystopian and utopian planes of existence that speak to the socio-cultural and economic duality of Lagos. These planes of existence are in a conflicting dialogue with each other, reproducing liminal identities characterised by what Mudimbe (1988:5) has referred to as a "precarious pertinence."

The interaction and dialogue between realism and surrealism in the life of the city is dizzying, blurring the material conditions of existence and the imaginative ones. The city becomes therefore in Abani's case, the toponym for contemporary identities. It is within this dystopia/utopia, slum/paradise binary that contemporary childhoods are increasingly being constructed. Hence, as Lefebvre's (1996) prescient "Writings on Cities" posits, urbanisation has indeed blurred the binaries between city and country and the production of space has extended beyond the built environment to the cyber-environment and

therefore to thought processes which construct representative spaces, reflected in imagination and landscapes of desires that we see in *Graceland*.

Abani's idea of space and place works through a scatological imagery and non-attachment expressive of a fast and furious "rhythmicity" through what in borrowing the words of Mbembe and Nuttall (2002:369) can be referred to as "technologies of speed". The movement between cultural worlds is sped up by the power of imagination, the desire for survival and flight. The city, for Abani, is a place in which identities are in constant and dizzying mutation: mobility is diacritical to these (post)modern identities – transgender (as the next chapter discusses), circulation, translocation and transculturation are analytical terms for these forms of identity represented by the protagonist Elvis Oke. The idea of place and space is defined by circulation and mobility because of a transcultural and multicultural milieu.

Therefore, childhood in Abani's *Graceland* is a dialogue of multiple worlds in rapid and dizzying interaction within the time, place and space of the city. Childhood in the cityscape is constructed through navigation, mobility and circulation of bodies, goods, music, magazines and books. The city allows for the blurring of imaginative and concrete conditions. The city is a place in which modernity, through technology and forms of mass mediation affect identity formation. It is a highly unsettled space, that constructs postcolonial subjects who in the wake of increasing mobility of cultures, are spoilt for imaginative choices available. A pastiche of cultures, the postcolonial African city is the site of contemporary postmodern identities, within an increasing global order. The postcolonial condition of the city – survival, flight, utopia, dystopia, desire and imagination is an influential foundation for postmodern constructions of the self.

3.4 Conclusion

The contemporary Nigerian novel of childhood is constructed through nostalgia, place and space attachment, mobility, flight, dislocation, utopia and dystopia within shifting and alternating senses of time. Places and spaces within the time of childhood stand out

as chronotopes from which childhood figures are remembered and (re)figured. Textual strategies of dialogue through narrative structures, referencing and intertextuality are used on the one level and on the other level the novelistic genre allows for the discourse of authorial adult and childhood selves to participate within this complex matrix of time and space of childhood. Hence, contemporary Nigerian fiction is a practical textual construction of postcolonial and postmodern conditions defined by diasporic authorial consciousnesses. The spaces, places and times of childhood are a stylistic background for toponyms, metonyms and metaphors that define and describe emerging postcolonial and postmodern identities.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR

GENEALOGIES, DAUGHTERS OF SENTIMENT, SONS AND FATHERS.

4.1 Introduction: Genealogies and Father Figures

Having established that the narrative of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction is constructed through memoryscape in chapter two and storyscape in chapter three, this chapter moves on to the micro-relationships that define the memories and stories of childhood. The study has hinted earlier of the spaces, places and times of childhood as influenced by specific people – mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and extended family members. This chapter examines the micro-relationships as a reflection of another important dimension of the politics of identity formation in the narrative of childhood. Indeed, the identification of specific places, spaces and times of influence as examined in chapter two define spatio-temporal genealogies of identity. Adichie, for instance, draws a literary and familial genealogy through the construction of Nsukka as a chronotope. She therefore maps out her familial, literary, ethnic and national genealogies in Nsukka. This chapter turns to the notion of genealogies as portrayed in the intimate relationships of the family space, but which also intersect with the larger ethnic and national spaces.

The word "genealogies" as used in this chapter generally refers to family histories, to lineages that usually invoke teleology as well as developments along epochal lines. However, the study also realises that genealogies problematise tradition or as Jeffrey Minson (1985:7) says, "debunk cherished values by demonstrating their contingency and ignoble origins." To speak of genealogies is therefore to proclaim like Alexander and Mohanty (1995: xvi) that they are "comparative, relational and historically based." While genealogies are normatively linear, it is instructive to realise that temporality, their definitive marker, is what fosters linearity – the focus is more often than not teleological. More importantly, lineages, traced within the spatiality of the family unit are the frontier of an individual's embryonic sense of identity.

Genealogies are about bloodlines within family trees and the family tree with deep roots etched in the earth also has particular dyadic relationships that water it into continued existence. These relationships present a challenge, partly because the institution of the family is a social construct as, for instance, the notion of gender. The dyadic relationships continue to be examined in literary representation and criticism, perhaps owing to the fact that literary works have been affected by socio-cultural and economic shifts accelerated by the age of industrialisation and enlightenment. With the dawn of modernity, literary works have increasingly focused on the psychological, because modernity offers challenges to the concept of identity, particularly the "self" in its primary habitat of the family. In this way, we can begin to talk about the genealogies of the novel in relation to not only its form (Cohen, 1993), but also how it foregrounds the micro-spaces of the family as grounds for exploring the crisis of identity and subjectivity.

Therefore, Cohen (1993:3) argues that the novel as a generic form has had a genealogical evolution, and like the family which has moved from a "porous, extended network of relations" to a nuclear one, the novel has:

> Moved away from its seventeenth and eighteenth century origins in the loosely stitched accounts of picaresque adventure to become the intricate, psychologically resonant narrative form that I refer to as the domestic novel. (1993:3)

Cohen argues that the individual's psycho-physical contexts, in relation to other actors within the space of the family have become an increasing focus for the novel. Moreover, there are templates, within which the individual acts, which are created in the structure of familial genealogy and lineage. These templates are dyadic; usually historicised and reconstructed around the image and figure of the father. The father is the backbone of genealogy, of the family tree that stands across epochal times and is synonymous with all that represents history in the family as well as that indispensable core of identity. Implied

here are patriarchal genealogies and lineages that produce dyadic relationships which are constructed in relation to the figure of the father.

In general literary criticism, dyadic relationships within the family have been explored, around the figure of the father. This has been through literary psychoanalytic readings on Sigmund Freud's preoedipal and oedipal complexes (and the post-Freudian critique that followed – especially Lacanian). It has also been examined through the rise of feminism in its debunking of patriarchy. In Africa, the advent of colonialism foregrounded the discourse of the father, as colonialism itself wore a masculine and paternal face. In fact, continuities from colonial contexts have been drawn in postcolonial Africa by Achille Mbembe (2001). Mbembe examines how power is embodied by father figures whose presence is ubiquitous in postcolonial spaces. Mudimbe (1994) on the other hand has extensively dealt with the myth and reality of African identity, through the symbolic idea of "false fatherhood." Other critics like Muponde (2005) as well as Muponde & Muchemwa (2007) have examined the notion of fathers, fatherhood and paternity in African literature, drawing attention to the continuing problematic of father figures in familial contexts represented in literature. As a result, the figure of the father has spawned a discourse that cuts across several levels; ethnic, national and continental.

In African literary representation, the familial space where the father figure dominates is where an interesting, and useful criticism is developing, through the representation of childhood.[115] The discourse of childhood is portrayed through the father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter dyadic relationships. It is these dyadic relationships which define the micro-space of relations in the world of childhood, that allow us to position the discourse of childhood within that of genealogies, which are portrayed through the child's grappling with the father figure. Indeed, the identity of childhood, mostly assumed as simply homogenous as Oakley (1994) cautions, would seem to, in the increasing portrayal of family and domestic histories in contemporary Nigerian fiction, affect how genealogies are imagined and discoursed. The works of

[115] I refer here to such seminal research as Robert Muponde (2005) where he explores representation of the "nation-family" through childhood's relations with father figures. In his other text (2007) fatherhood and paternity are explored as critical nexus – as a critique of the national imaginary in Zimbabwe.

Adichie, Atta and Abani, which are to be examined here, focus on the dyadic relationships that define the world of childhood. The girlhoods and boyhoods of these works are informed by, as I have pointed out in the previous chapters in this study, a diasporic consciousness on the part of the authors, which forces them to return to the familial space to play out the nostalgic, cultural and traumatic memories of a childhood world. In this way, the portrayal of familial spaces and their histories allows them to deal with individual portraits of identity formation – boys and girls – which subsequently reflect on macro-spaces of identity formation that form a contextual background. On the other hand, these authors, aware of their "generational" identity, would seem to position themselves within a literary genealogy that in fact draws its building blocks on the relationship between fathers and daughters, as we will see with the sentimental relationship between Adichie and Achebe. Indeed, having been variously called "children of the postcolony," their works have been classified as of a "third generation". While the notion of generations is important in periodising literature, the notion of genealogies allows this study to avoid the pitfalls of temporal categorisation, while drawing our attention to the micro-relationships in the various childhood worlds depicted in Adichie's, Abani's and Atta's works.

The notion of genealogies therefore allows this chapter to connect several things: the nostalgia out of the diasporic need to go back to a familial space of childhood; the dyadic relationships foregrounding the challenged relevance of the father figure in the child's discourse of identity; the centrality of the figure of the father in defining the discourse on genealogy at both the micro-space of the actual family and the symbolic "nation-family" (Muchemwa & Muponde, 2007), which allows us to see the father figure as occupying multiple sites and spaces within society, while establishing the idea that colonial and postcolonial discourses on genealogy are continuous.

This chapter seeks to explore the dominant daughter-father and son-father dyads in the texts *Purple Hibiscus*, *Everything Good Will Come*, *Graceland* and *The Virgin of Flames*. In these texts there is a persistence of the father figure as a problematic, both in reality and in memory. Taking its cue from Lacan's (1988) idea of the father as a real, imaginary

and symbolic figure, this chapter establishes the figure of the father as the central problematic in the discourse of the identity of daughterhood and sonhood. Returning to the postcolonial context, the chapter addresses the discourse further, to the specifics of the postcolonial world by using Mudimbe's (1994) notion of "false fatherhood" to examine how childhood identity finds agency in an enabling postcolonial environment. The chapter therefore uses Lynda Zwinger's (1991) idea of the sentimental relationship between the father and the daughter, to explore how Kambili and Enitan in Adichie's and Atta's novels demystify the figure of the father, decentering his authority, while establishing the falsity of his legitimate claim to genealogy, in its real, symbolic and imaginary dimensions. In this way, the chapter argues that they establish *androgynous* genealogies. On the other hand, the sons in Abani's works, who are, as it were, *a priori* heirs of familial genealogy, problematise this inheritance by how they perform sexual difference. Their postcolonial environment allows them to rupture the biologically predetermined notion of masculine genealogy, and in this way they uncover the "falsity" of a paternal genealogical heirdom.

The figure of the father is therefore constructed at a confluence of levels; familial, ethnic, religious and national, at literal and literary levels, as this chapter will reveal. In dealing with the problematic of the father, we are, as Robert Con Davis (1981:2-3) also discusses, dealing with the "symbolic father." The symbolic father is one who is entangled in a state of absence and presence, possession-retention and love-hate. Davis takes his ideas from Lacan, who examines the father as located at the confluence of the real, symbolic and imaginary (1988). Lacan's (1988) ideas about the father in this chapter are meta-theoretical, especially in light of their specific context in psychoanalytical practice. However they open up a discussion on the father as a "discourse," which presents the problematic of masculine and patriarchal genealogies that then influence sexual and other forms of identity. If we consider Lacan's post-Freudian dimension of psychoanalysis through the dimension of language, then we can begin to relate his idea on the "name of the father" to that of discourse. In this way and in relation to the concerns of this chapter, the father comes as real, imaginary and symbolic discourse of identity for the son and daughter. He is embodied in a discourse which is found in the propositions and speech-

acts that come with his authority – the letter and the law, among others. Moreover, he is a definitive marker in the process of genealogising, or tracing lineages, especially for the purpose of constructing frameworks of identification. Indeed, the notion of genealogy would seem to be affirmed "in the name of the father." A critic like Pietro Pucci takes this argument further, saying that the name of the father takes on "the figure of anchorage of any discourse of fixed origin, to a transcendental signified" (1992:9). It is this fixed discourse of the father that allows us to see the importance of Cohen's (1993) ideas about the "daughter's dilemma" in her relationship with the fixed discourse of the father. The daughter would therefore seem to be as Boose and Flowers (1989) point out a "temporary sojourner" who, as this chapter establishes, exploits her sentimentality in decentering and delegitimising the fixed discourse of the father. Yet the meta-theoretical importance of Lacan's ideas about the father echo down to the postcolonial frameworks of discourse where the battle between the father and the son takes on, as this chapter explores the "falsity of fatherhood" (Mudimbe, 1994).

The critical backbone of childhood for this study demands the foregrounding of daughterhood and sonhood in defining the dyads, for various reasons. Firstly these texts have protagonists who are daughters and sons and whose worlds of daughterhood and sonhood are filters which they use to perceive and comprehend their childhood world. Secondly, these novels crafted in diasporic spaces, reveal a nostalgic quest for belonging by authors whose idea of childhood life is envisioned in a specific familial space and place,[116] in which the roles of a daughter or son are foregrounded as central to how they identify themselves. Thirdly, as sons and daughters, the protagonists in the texts grapple predominantly with the father figure, with father figures portrayed as central to genealogy of the family. They are portrayed as historical figures that predate and transcend the spatio-temporal markers of the familial space.

[116] In most of her interviews Adichie admits the fact that Nsukka, the actual place of her growth evokes memories that influenced her because while writing *Purple Hibiscus*, she had not been home for four years. Seffi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, is also drawn from her childhood neighbourhood in Lagos, a place where she was brought up.

This chapter examines how sons and daughters as defining the dyads, appropriate the father figure into their own worlds. Moreover, the world of childhood for these protagonists is defined by forces that allow them to pursue alternative sources and embodiments of identity to that signified by the father figure. In a postcolonial context, these daughters and sons occupy multicultural spaces in university towns and large cities that provide cosmopolitan environments, abounding with multi-ethnicities, nationalities and religions among others. While the father figure straddles the domestic space, it is imperative for the child to explore other spaces, to find other father figures in other places, such as at work and alternative sources and genealogies for the articulation and affirmation of identity. This becomes prototypical of a postcolonial environment, which creates representations of childhoods amenable to the idea of anti-foundations: of having multiple sites of authority, legitimacy and identity. Finding other fathers, for these postcolonial daughterhoods and sonhoods means, as we will see, exposing "false fathers" (Mudimbe, 1994).

It would be germane for this chapter to ask the question, where is the son-mother, daughter-mother dyad? While these are significant, they appear as supplementary dyadic relationships in the lives of the protagonists in these works. The protagonists avail the central problematic of the father figure to the reader. This can be explained through a number of reasons. Firstly, the girl-childhoods of Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* and Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come*, are constructed around what Zwinger (1991) refers to as "sentimental daughterhood," where the daughters do not only occupy a fictional space but also a literal one. Zwinger (1991:5) says, "the daughter of sentiment is here defined by and in relation to her fictional father, and by extension, her literary fathers as well". Zwinger however issues a caveat that these evaluations are "encoded in patriarchal readings of her".

Secondly, and beyond Zwinger's assertions of a patriarchal reading of the sentimental daughter, there are in the specific cases of this chapter, more complex symbologies of daughterhood at literary and literal levels. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie asserts in numerous interviews, the significance of her father, James Adichie as influential in her

childhood. In an essay in *The Observer*, she points out that "As a child, I thought my father invincible [sic], I also thought him remote." She speaks here with an affectionate attitude towards her father, in a tone that reflects the significance of father figures in her life. Moreover, Adichie and her family lived in the same house as Achebe at University of Nigeria in Nsukka and Adichie has acknowledged Achebe as a seminal inspiration, as well as a father-figure in her literary life. This is, notwithstanding, the conscious modelling of Papa Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* on Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*. Yet Adichie's idea of the father figure is not just of invincibility, but also of remoteness, signalling to us an equivocal sentimentality that does not seek to acquiesce but to problematise – a desire to transcend and break the boundaries of the father's "invincibility." In the case of Enitan in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, she is brought up by a father figure whose authority she later challenges as she grows up.

Chris Abani's *Graceland* presents a different dynamic in the problematisation of the father figure. Elvis Oke, the protagonist in the text, is portrayed as effeminate in his impersonation of the American pop idol Elvis Presley. Moreover, his affinity for the feminine is portrayed as a result of a mother who strongly influenced him in his formative period of growth before she died. Elvis's affinity for effeminacy is the reason for a very troubled relationship with his father, with whom he is in constant conflict. It is instructive to mention that Abani talks about his own problems with relating to his absent father. He also points out that male writers cannot represent female characters well because they have not experienced femininity.[117] Therefore Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and *The Virgin of Flames* present a discourse on transgender sexual experiences, with protagonists who try to negotiate their identities in the shadow of disturbing memories of father figures. The character Black in *The Virgin of Flames* has a problematic sexual orientation which is complicated further by the memories of the perpetual absence of his immigrant Nigerian father, the violence of his Salvadorian mother and the troubled relationship she had with Black's father. Black's problems with identity are protracted in his attraction to the transvestite "Sweet Girl." Black's life is constantly shadowed by memories of his strained relationship with his absent father during his childhood. His

[117] Abani says this in an interview at University of the Witwatersrand on 5th May 2006.

father was an immigrant Nigerian engineer who kept chasing after the "American Dream". Black's memory of his parents is therefore critical, reflected in the confounding portrayal of his sexual orientation in attempts at negotiating his multiple sexual identities.

Thirdly, Kambili, Enitan and Elvis are children growing up in a postcolonial world abounding with the baggage, myths and genealogies of fatherhoods that as Muponde & Muchemwa (2007) quite succinctly put "man the nation." These fatherhoods continuously create masculinities that pervade postcolonial national imagination. In the case of Nigeria, the series of military regimes had a face that as Kambili describes, was that of soldiers terrorising market women, kicking down their stalls, tearing their clothes and squashing their papayas. It was a childhood that was assaulted by fatherhoods and father figures in the national spaces, leading to a deeply problematic attempt for childhoods in this context to reconcile the idea of a genealogy of identity to one that is responsible for the chaos entrenched within the postcolonial political structures.

Finally, it is also important to note that the idea of dyadic relationships in the study of childhood takes into account that childhood is a constructed space. Related to this point is also that children are not a homogenous group. In the same away that gender is examined as a "construction" in adults, so is childhood: daughters and sons represent gendered childhoods. In fact, as Ann Oakley (1994) has argued, the idea of gendered childhoods helps to "denaturalise" the "phenomenon of childhood."[118]

It is from the conceptual contexts delineated above that this chapter makes its point of entry into the discussion through the ways in which daughters and sons relate to their fathers in contemporary postcolonial Nigerian fiction. Let us begin by examining the father-daughter relationship in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*.

[118] Oakley in the article "Women and Children First and Last" observes the tendency of male academics to treat children as a homogenous group; the tendency to "neglect gender" as crucial in understanding childhood.

4.2 In Her Father's House: The Sentimental Daughter in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come*.

4.2.1 the ontology of fatherhood

> We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie knows what is at stake, and what to do about it. Her experimentation with the dual mandate of English and Igbo in perennial discourse is a case in point. Timid and less competent writers would avoid the complication all together, but Adichie embraces it because her story needs it. She is fearless, or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war. Adichie came almost fully made.[119]

This remark was made by Chinua Achebe, a man who is widely considered as the father of modern African Literature,[120] upon the publication of Adichie's second critically acclaimed novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. While this comment might sound like many others usually on the blurb of a newly published novel, its significance lies in the fact that Achebe is the doyen of the African literary creative canon. It is also significant because the civil war, for Achebe and Adichie, is a shared critical memory. Both are Igbos, but of different generations and therefore, they share a cross-generational desire to grapple with a memory that is critical in understanding their genealogy, not just as members of an ethnic Igbo nation but more specifically for Adichie, as part of familial genealogy.[121] Thirdly, Adichie's works have often been linked intertextually with those of Achebe.[122] The comments in the epigraph are crucial for Adichie not only because of the stature of

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[119] See www.themorningnews.org/archives/birnbaum

[120] See Ker Talpade David's (1997) "Modernism and the African Novel."

[121] Adichie lost her grandparents and her parents lost property during the war – chapter two of this study deals extensively with this memory as traumatic and cultural.

[122] See Heather Hewett's "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation." This notion of intertextuality, which connects Adichie's work to that of her forebear, can be seen as an implicit literary genealogy, found in the sentimental relationship between a literary father and daughter.

Achebe's works in the African literary canon but also because of a strategic gesture of affirmation on the part of Adichie. In fact, the two writers are related through a coincidental historical convergence, which Adichie points out:

> Chinua Achebe and his family lived in Number 305 before we moved in. I realize now what an interesting coincidence it is that I grew up in a house previously occupied by the writer whose work is most important to me. There must have been literary spirits in the bathroom upstairs.[123]

This essay underlines the symbolic importance of the father in Adichie's imagination. As in Lacanian psychoanalysis Achebe is the symbolic father, who is "the law and the letter."[124] The father represents what Adichie calls "Odeluora" which means, one who "writes for the community" – it is symbolic of the paternal ontology of the law. Indeed, if we recall, in Achebe's Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, wisdom and judgement was affirmed in many instances beginning with the expression "as our father's said."

Achebe's remarks towards Adichie signals to us the sentimental relationship between a father and a daughter that we will explore in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good will Come*. The protagonists, daughters in their father's houses experience sentimentality which from a psychoanalytical understanding invokes readings about the politics of heterosexuality within the family. Moreover, the sentimentality between father and daughter has been described by Ingrid Walsoe-Engel (1993) as "patterns of seduction" that represent what another critic has called the "daughter's dilemma" (Cohen, 1993). Walsoe-Engel (1993) captures this dilemma and sentimentality through the idea that the father has a natural desire of possessing his daughter who equally wants to escape her father's world, which she feels is confining her sexuality. The sentimental daughter's

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[123] See Adichie's essay "The Writing Life" where she remembers the desks – including her father's – where she learned to write. Sunday, June 17, 2007; Page BW 11.

[124] In Adichie's essay titled "As a child, I thought my father invincible, I also thought him remote," she points out that her father was given the title "Odeluora." In this essay it is symbolic that the art of writing for her was developed on her father's desk in his study room. In this case we see the dimensions of symbolic, real and imaginary father implied in the essay.

dilemma is in this chapter contextualised in the realities of female childhoods in the contexts of postcolonial worlds. While psychoanalytic conceptions remain latent as theoretical underpinnings in examining gendered childhoods, their inward focus on the nuclear family constrains these conceptions to the notion of gendered identities. The multi-cultural world that these girlhoods are located demand that we break familial and even national spaces. These new postcolonial contexts or geographies of reading, allow us, as we will for instance see with Abani's works, to find useful the post-Freudian work of Stephen Frosh (1991; 1994). Let us begin with a short discussion of the political context of Adichie's and Atta's texts.

Purple Hibiscus and *Everything Good Will Come* are set in postcolonial Nigeria, in the era of military governance. The former is set in the mid 1980s to later 1990s while the latter between the 1970s and 1990s. These periods in Nigeria are historically marked by a series of military governments. In between the first republic of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in 1966 and Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979, four military regimes took over in a battery of coups and countercoups. Between the second republic of Shehu Shagari and Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, five military regimes controlled Nigeria in the second wave of coups and counter-coups.[125] This period was affected by economic oil gains, losses, corruption, human rights abuses, and international sanctions against Nigeria among others. These were generally devastating effects in what the acclaimed Nigerian novelist, poet and essayist Ben Okri describes as an "*abiku* nation" – where he uses the metaphor of a "spirit-child" to allegorise the young nation-state.

The daughterhoods of Adichie's and Atta's protagonists, contextualised in the political history outlined above are therefore affected by militarised masculinities, and violent fatherhoods. The historical context delineated can be argued to have defined fatherhood, father figures and paternity in various ways. It is in this case instructive to examine how

[125] From January 1966 to 1979 Nigeria was under the military governance of Aguiyi Ironsi, Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo. From December 1983 began a second wave of military governance in the following order: Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Ernest Shonekan (caretaker civilian leader), Sani Abacha and Abdulsalam Abubakar.

the father figure, in light of the political and historical contexts above is constructed in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come*.

In the postcolonial contexts of these texts, the father represents the patronymic continuity between the colonial and postcolonial nation-state. This stature is related to Nigeria's history of military governance, whose face is represented by father figures. These father figures feign magnanimity and religious belief in public while perpetuating human rights atrocities through bureaucratic back channels. This Janus-faced nature leads us to a second perspective of what constructed this father figure: religion.

Religion in Nigeria is an influential factor in the construction of identities, be they political, social or cultural. The regional politics in Nigeria that curved out geographies of violence as Toyin Falola (1998) discusses, were partly created at the altar of religion. The Northern, South-Eastern and South-Western regional blocks that have become dominant and normative political zones in Nigeria have been historicised in the consolidation of religious beliefs across time – before, during and after colonialism. Islam and Christian religions reinforced a patriarchal discourse of fatherhood. Moreover, because of political and economic turbulence caused by corruption, mass poverty created a convenient ground for the entrenchment of religious belief. Political protagonists also played upon this atmosphere by continuously embezzling funds for personal gains while appealing to divine intervention with messages of hope.

Hence, the idea of the father comes with the legitimacy of religious practice and the selective demands of religion that provide political expediency and the consolidation of power. Religion becomes essential to defining the hold on power and its performance. This performance is aided by communal victimhood, a condition that helps to entrench the pursuit of religion as not only escape from the socio-economic and political turbulence, but also reflective of a genuine hankering after human dignity. The military regimes, continuously seen as interim solutions to governance slowly got trapped by the allure of power and used whatever means at their disposal to legitimise their hold on power. Under the charade of a clean-up exercise, a repressive grammar developed. The

extra-judicial repressive state apparatuses crushed dissent through torture, public flogging, executions, and unexplained disappearances of dissenting individuals under the pretext of cleaning up the mess left behind by civilian governance.

Rhetoric of "discipline" became, during this time, a way to sanction the use of violence by the (military) state. The perpetual image of the state as the father and the citizens its children helped sanction the use of corporal punishment, public executions and torture while at the same time dispense wealth and property to specified elites to maintain the image of a magnanimous fatherhood. The state, represented by the military figure and his foot soldiers embodies a paterfamilias who clamps down on dissenting children "for their own good" and "for the good of the nation."

From the above description of the political and historical canvas, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come* challenge the status quo of their time through the childhood protagonists. The childhoods of Kambili and Enitan are constructed at a time of this political turbulence. Kambili and Enitan are both aware of the murders, human rights abuses, some which they experience fleetingly, as Kambili does at the market:

> A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short Afro [...]
> As we hurried past I saw a woman spit at a soldier, I saw
> the soldier raise a whip in the air. The whip was long. It
> curled in the air before it landed on the woman's shoulder.
> Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing
> papayas with his boots and laughing. (*PH,* 44)

Enitan, on her way to church with her mother witnesses:

> The soldiers jeered and lashed at cars with horsewhips. We pulled
> over to let them pass. A driver pulled over too late. Half the
> soldiers jumped down from the truck and dragged him out of his
> car. They started slapping him. The driver's hands went up to

> plead for mercy. They flogged him with horsewhips and left him there. (*EGWC*, 69)

In the scenes above, the whip in the air, which can be read as a phallic symbol, is meant to conquer and force subjection out of the market women and the man. The military regime's persona is hyper-masculine and the flagrant abuse of power upon the women in the market is similar to that of other marginalised masculinities represented in Enitan's context.[126] Kambili later (de)familiarises the incident above in an interesting way: she localises it in her childhood world, reading it through that space in which she plays the role of a daughter:

> I thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I had not seen her face, but I felt that I knew her, that I had always known her […] I thought about her too on Monday as Papa drove me to school. He slowed down on Ogui road to fling some crisp naira notes at a beggar sprawled by the roadside. (*PH*, 44)

The above represents Kambili's reflection and domestication of the national political canvas. She is physically removed by virtue of living in an upper middle class home yet she can relate to it – she feels that she has always known this woman.[127] In this way, Kambili delineates a vision for the reader. The reader is drawn to closely connect Kambili's visceral knowledge of what is going on outside to what for her feels like what is happening at home. It is not a coincidence that Kambili later thinks about this woman while driving with her father to school – these thoughts have invoked the figure of her father and what he represents. He is the central problematic in Kambili's life throughout the text. He is an overbearing and sadistic father, whose violent disposition echoes the militarised masculinities on public display by the soldiers.

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[126] One can, as Muchemwa and Muponde (2007:xv) point out, see the existence in this society of "marginalised and emerging masculinities that also seek to unmask the strategies of domination employed by hegemonic masculinity" – hegemonic masculinity in this context is represented by the soldiers.

[127] What we find in most cases with Kambili is not simply an allegorical reflection of the nation but a domestication of it, creating a much more nuanced reading of the text.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan's knowledge of the political landscape is portrayed through the arguments her father and uncles have on the veranda of their house as well as the daily radio broadcasts that make her conscious of the fact that she is a Yoruba and that the advent of the civil war was pitting "Igbos" versus the "rest of the Nigerians." As the coups led to counter-coups, curfews became Enitan's experience of the political atmosphere. Unlike Kambili, Enitan's childhood was not cloistered by high walls and coiled electric wires. But, like Kambili, the curfews and political atmosphere are a background to her central concerns. Enitan says, "There was a dusk to dawn curfew in Lagos and I wanted it to end so I could have the house to myself. I was not interested in the political overhaul in our country" (*EGWC*, 67). Both Enitan and Kambili delineate boundaries of experience that are most important to their narratives.

The delineation of protagonists concerns, their marking of boundaries lies in a constant attempt at re-evaluating their positions as daughters and how their sense of daughterhood grapples with the authoritarian father figure at home and in politics. These daughters maintain an ambivalent relationship with the father as reflected in the way they relate to him. For them, the figure of the father is traditionally mapped out because of its centrality in familial genealogy. The daughter, unlike the son, is as Boose and Flowers (1989) postulate, conspicuously absent from the discourse of familial genealogy and traditions. Boose traces a genealogy of daughterhood in familial history and points out that:

> While yet within her father's house, a daughter is set apart from the other three members as the only one who does not participate in extending its integrity into history. When her patronymic identity as daughter is exchanged for one that marks her as wife, she is still the alien until she has once again changed her sign to "mother of new members of the lineage" which by implication means mother to a son. (1989:22)

Boose (1989) concludes that daughters, unlike sons, are "temporary sojourners" within the family who seek legitimation outside familial boundaries. This idea is important in examining how daughters, by seeking external legitimation, actually decentre the figure

of the father as authority, lineage and as genealogy. They set the discourse beyond the familial space it is anchored, in their search for alternative affirmations to their biological fathers. It is this idea that is significant in underlining their relationship with the father as appropriate to opening up an extensive discussion on the representation of postcolonial identities, which seem to enable alternative spaces for fatherhood.

Boose (1989:33) also mentions that the daughters' struggle with the father is about "separation and not displacement." This separation is explained by David Wilbern (1989:96) as: "Together yet apart, their ambivalent bond blends conflict and comfort, rejection and identification, seduction and betrayal. It persists indelibly in memory, dream, theory and practice." The textualising of the daughter's struggle with the father figure creates possibilities of imagination and criticism at the centre of the struggle's ambivalence and dilemma. This relationship exposes the slippages of affection and disdain, love and hate, belonging and non-belonging. In a sense they position the daughter at an anti-foundational, anti-genealogical vantage within the familial space. The daughter's ambivalent position, as a temporary sojouner, is the kind of atmosphere which Kambili presents and deals with in *Purple Hibiscus*. Kambili delineates for the reader her boundaries of experience and concerns. To say that an examination of this experience is simply allegorical of the bigger experience of the Nigerian nation is potentially limiting. The representation of the daughter-father dyad in *Purple Hibiscus* is derived from Adichie's sense of historical and experiential continuities with an aim of delineating them within the familial and national spaces. While the daughter-father dyad is informed by socio-political experiences specific to Nigeria, the daughter's constant hankering to get beyond high walls and barbed wire fences locates her concerns out of this limiting familial and national experience. Hence for Enitan, "everything good will come" with freedom out of her limiting marital space.

Adichie constructs the narrative structure of *Purple Hibiscus* around Kambili's experience with the father figure. She orders the different sections of the narrative with liturgical grammar from the catholic calendar, around the ceremony of the "Palm

Sunday."[128] This symbolic structure built around the "Palm Sunday" ceremony has led some critics to classify *Purple Hibiscus* as an overtly "Catholic novel."[129] The idea of the father as a Subject in this religious structure is significant. The father is the centre of the structure, holding it together and as Kambili suggests to us at the beginning, when the father breaks down, it signals a collapse of the entire legitimacy and relevance of the structure:

> *Things started to fall apart* at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagree (*PH*, 1) [Emphasis added]

The statement above delineates for the reader, the father figure as the central force in Kambili's life. Yet this statement also points out the climaxing of a bottled-up conflict, triggered off by the son's dissidence. There is rich symbolism that the son is named Jaja.[130] Furthermore, this statement also portrays Kambili's position in the household, as the temporary sojourner with fleeting participation. That the conflict is triggered off by the male protagonists in this house is also not lost to us.

Papa Eugene's fit of rage as expressed in the first line of the text explains the critical role of religion in the relations in this family. It explains the central role of religion in constructing the discourse of the father. Kambili articulates this further by describing the status accorded her father: "Father Benedict usually refers to the Pope, Papa [her father papa Eugene] and Jesus- in that order. He used Papa to illustrate the gospels" (4). The ubiquity of the figure of the father is evident here:

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[128] "Palm Sunday" is a Christian movable feast which falls on the Sunday before Easter and signifies the triumphant entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem.

[129] Anthony Chennells (2008) in his paper "Inculturated Christianity in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus" refers to the text as a Catholic Novel. Paper presented at the International Conference of the Humanities at university of Pretoria.

[130] The name Jaja is also alludes to the historical Jaja of Opobo (1821-1891) a Nigerian merchant and founder of Opobo state. Born in Igbo land and sold as a slave in Bonny, Jaja who was originally called Jubo changed his name to Jaja in dealing with the British whom he resisted, breaking away to form his own Opobo state. He was a king with rebellious instincts, something we see Jaja in the text also possessing.

> On some Sundays, the congregation listened closely even when Father Benedict talked about things everybody knew, about Papa making the biggest donations […] or about Papa paying for the cartons of communion wine. (5)

Papa Eugene's omnipresence as we shall see reminds one of Achille Mbembe's (2001) arguments, about how the father figure saturates postcolonial space, through his visibility and embodiment in the autocratic leader, who is sentimentally referred to as "the father of the nation." Papa Eugene is a ubiquitous figure, revered like "God the Father". His presence in the household is smothering, and even during his absence, the schedules drawn and posted neatly in Kambili and Jaja's bedrooms act as portraits of his omnipresence.

Interestingly, Papa Eugene's idea of fatherhood is forged from an anti-genealogy – of his hatred for his own father Papa Nnukwu. Papa Eugene in an Okonkwo-like manner despises his father's weakness, accusing him of being a heathen and therefore a failure. He refutes his father's paternity on grounds of religion, believing, with conviction in Christianity's role in providing him an identity, education and economic success. He therefore embraces the paternity of his in-laws, of his wife's father, who was a staunch Catholic. He places a portrait of his father-in-law dressed in official Catholic regalia in the living room of his house. He proscribes, in his household, contact with his own father Papa Nnukwu, allowing his children, just fifteen minutes to visit him when they occasionally travel to their rural home in Abba. Papa Eugene, like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* rejects his paternity under the pretext of what Gikandi (1991) in his description of Okonkwo, calls "self-invention." Okonwo builds the image, according to Gikandi, of the "being-for-itself,"[131] yet as Gikandi (1991:40) observes, "the laws that structure the son's unconscious acts have been predetermined by the father."

[131] Taken from Heideggerian philosophy this neologism, used by Gikandi implies "self-determination," in reference to a being who as Jean-Paul Sartre says is abandoned to be free.

Papa Eugene's idea of self-invention, similar to Okonkwo's is an illusion, because the critical memory of his father, Papa Nnukwu, spurs his actions and motivates his sense of identity. He wishes to attain complete autonomy from his paternity, by rejecting his father. Throughout the entire story, we hear nothing relating to his mother. Indeed, Kambili's sense of identity as she has been made to understand is paternal. The irony though is that Papa Eugene's alternative to his rejected paternity is maternal related: he speaks fondly of his father-in-law who was a Catholic missionary in the colonial era. As Kambili observes:

> It was so different from the way Papa had treated my maternal grandfather until he died five years ago […] Grandfather was very light-skinned, almost albino, and it was said to be one of the reasons the missionaries liked him […] He insisted that we call him Grandfather, in English […] Papa still talked about him often, his eyes proud, as if grandfather were his own father […] Papa had a photo of Grandfather, in the full regalia of the Knights of St. John, framed in deep mahogany and hung on our wall back in Enugu. (67-68)

Ultimately, Papa Eugene's idea of identity finds a patrilineal alternative in his father-in-law. It is also interesting that while Papa Eugene rejects his biological father on religious grounds, his father, Papa Nnukwu, has an interesting interpretation of their broken relationship:

> "I remember the first one that came to Abba, the one they called Fada John. His face was red like palm oil; they say our type of sun does not shine in the white man's land. He had a helper, a man from Nimo called Jude. In the afternoon they gathered the children under the Ukwa tree in the mission and taught them their religion. I did not join them, where is this god you worship? They said he was like Chukwu, that he was in the sky. I asked then, who is this person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission?

> They said he was the son, but that the son and the father are equal. It was then that I knew the white man was mad. The father and the son are equal? *Tufia*! Do you not see? That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal." (84)

For Papa Nnukwu, there is a cross-generational conflict where the power relations are reversed: at least according to this "mad logic" of the trinity, as the narrator describes it in *Things Fall Apart*. Papa Nnukwu sees this conflict with his son as resulting from a reversal of power relations, caused by his son's religious beliefs. What is interesting though is that his son's name is actually invoked alongside that of the Pope and Jesus at the sermons in the Catholic Church at Enugu. Moreover, Papa Eugene is also portrayed as the biblical son Jesus, in an incident where after giving a hefty donation for a local church "He led the way out of the hall, smiling and waving at the many hands that reached out to grasp his white tunic as if touching him would heal them of an illness" (90-91). One is reminded also of *Arrow of God*'s ambivalent ending in which the people of Umuaro henceforth "harvested in the name of the son."[132]

4.2.2 the sentimental disposition of daughterhood

The daughters, as temporary sojourners, are represented here by Enitan and Kambili as well as by Kambili's aunt Ifeoma. They are sentimentally attached to their fathers. However, they maintain a critical sceptism to paternal hegemony. While they live, in borrowing the words of Bhabha (1994:13) "unhomely lives" by virtue of their ambivalent positions as temporary sojourners in the familial space, they expose the gaps of the masculine genealogies represented and embodied by father figures. Daughterhood's ambivalence allows for a critical appreciation and appropriation of the father figure. They occupy an in-between space that constantly associates and dissociates its identity with the patronymic family. They therefore embody a process of continuous searching for

[132] Achebe, quoted in Ezenwa-Oheato (1997:178-19), talks of the new found legitimacy invested in the sons because of their missionary literacy, an experience, that gave the sons authority and new power hence turning the "natural order" of things in which everything was usually invoked "in the name of the father."

alternatives to patriarchal ways of familial identification. The daughters' presence erases the boundaries of the family, its certainties of identity and orthodoxy. Therefore, the claim can be made that the representation of daughters in the texts here embodies slippages of identity within the familial space; they problematise paternity by calling into question its certainties and conventions. Moreover, the daughterhood, of Kambili and Enitan occupies an intriguing space because of its postcolonial context.

Enitan, born on the independence of Nigeria considers herself a "child of the oil boom."[133] She says: "Like any generation defined by the economics of their childhood, we were children of the oil boom, and therefore we were children who had benefited from the oil boom" (77). Enitan grows up in a cosmopolitan environment and her neighbourhood is peopled with different races and religions (26). Her family is middle-class, and her father a Cambridge schooled lawyer. Enitan's closest friend Sheri is of Nigerian and English parentage. In addition, the author Seffi Atta grew up in a family where she went to the mosque on Friday and then to Church on Sunday.

Kambili also lives in an upper-middle class family, with a father who is wealthy and respected in public. Unlike Enitan, her childhood is cloistered with a middle class indifference to her neighbourhood. Kambili lives behind "high walls" and "coiled electric wires," and has a fleeting experience with the larger postcolonial world, mostly apprehended from behind the windows of her father's car. What connects her to Enitan is the hankering to get out of a confined (pater)familial space. It becomes a successful attempt when she goes to the University of Nigeria at Nsukka to visit her aunt Ifeoma.

Daughterhood in both these texts embodies an innate transcendental quality. While occupying a postcolonial milieu fuels this quest to rupture familial frontiers, the daughter's relationship with the father is at the centre of daughterhood's supposed vocation. The sentimental disposition of the daughter towards a father figure also gives

[133] The expression reflects Seffi Atta's perception of her generation: one that was created by economic conditions that paved the way for migration to Europe and America, because of the gains of a booming Nigerian oil economy. Hers can be referred to as the first generation of extensive writing from postcolonial Nigerian's in diaspora – a product of migration, and exile that represented a strong wave of actual brain drain in Nigeria, which intensified in the 70s and 80s.

an androgynous dimension to her idea of genealogy and identity. Kambili and Enitan problematise normative ideas of genealogy that privilege the father figure while acknowledging the importance of this normativity within the sum total of what they consider as their composite identities. Significantly however, they arrive at androgeneity through a systematic and comprehensive unpacking of the figure of the father.

Through this relationship, they engender an interesting dimension in postcolonial imagination, one that has been traditionally related and dominated by father figures. They delegitimise paternity by rupturing and multiplying the margins of their existence, in a manner that links up their postcolonial condition to the wider and more problematic condition informed by postmodernity. In other words, these postcolonial daughterhoods are at the heart of a process of decentralisation, delegitimation and multiplication of margins indicative of contemporary Nigerian fiction.

Kambili's life in *Purple Hibiscus* is defined by the discourse of the father – Papa Eugene – who suffuses his household with his decrees, creating an atmosphere of silent obedience. He represses dissent through physical punishment, legitimising his violent actions with religious decrees. Kambili particularly bears the brunt of this silence and repression on regular occasions. Brutal punishment is applied on her regularly, but her attitude towards her father remains genuinely yet cautiously sentimental, because she understands that at the core of her father's violence, also lies a problematic history of identification. It is Kambili's critical sentiment towards her father that perhaps makes her the only person in the household able to *actually* love and see beyond the image of a violent father.

Kambili's devoted admiration to her father comes surprisingly in the wake of an atmosphere of entrapment: "The compound walls topped by coiled electric wires, were so high I could not see the cars driving by on our street" (9). Her father's house which is located in an upmarket area is spacious but has an internal architecture of silence:

> Our steps on the stairs were as measured and silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave a scripture or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterward. (31)

This is a silence of entrapment, created by an overbearing ultra-paternity that smothers through its ubiquity, while being aided by religious ritual. The sentiment Kambili builds is perhaps her precocious way of absorbing the crisis of identity that is embodied by her father. She also realises that the physical and psychological entrapment can be transcended by erecting similar forms of entrapment. She therefore builds a psychological carapace to deal with her sense of entrapment. Hence her sentiment is constructed by embracing the rituals prescribed by her father. What is interesting is that while her actions sometimes seem robotic, due to repeated rituality, she is precocious and portrays a selective sentimental disposition that maintains her status as not only a participant observer in the rituals, but one that directs the reader to the fact that hers is critical sentimentality that seeks a constructive rather than reductive understanding of her abusive father.

In her father's house, Kambili is also aware of and familiar with an atmosphere of violence. Her precocity and selective interpretation of this violence is best portrayed in this incident:

> I was in my room reading James chapter five […] when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it. If I imagined hard enough, then it would be true. I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long […] sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty. I heard the door open […] Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme border. (33)

Kambili knows the reality of the violence and experiences it, but she goes beyond assuming that her father is maliciously violent. She understands her father's missionary history and strives to love him. Moreover, Papa Eugene has his own ways of expressing love, including the ritual activity – the sip of love: "The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. But it didn't matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa's love into me" (8). Kambili has developed a carapace around these ritualised experiences of pain. Her most sentimental and definitive moments with her father are ironically when he administers corporal punishment. She realises that these moments are important in exposing the chasms of his masculine persona. She, in these moments articulates passive resistance and psychological superiority quite unlike her brother Jaja, who overtly resists punishment.[134]

Kambili's sentiment towards her father is fearful, for he, like Okonkwo rules his family with a heavy hand. A discourse of discipline and perfection is enforced by corporal punishment. Papa Eugene expects perfect scores at school and a strict adherence to Catholic ritual. Yet Kambili actually loves her father and through the violent encounters she has with him, she probes into the weaknesses of his personality; those that give insight into his problematic paternal legacy and chasms within his masculine persona:

> Papa crushed Jaja and me to his body. "Did the belt hurt you? Did it break your skin?" he asked, examining our faces […] Papa shook his head when he talked about liking sin, as if something weighed him down, something he could not throw off. (102)
>
> He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. (194)

[134] Heather Hewett (2005) has read Kambili's rationalization of the abuse using the object-relations theory of Ronald Fairbain (1952).

These are poignantly definitive moments of connection for Kambili with her father: moments of self-abnegation for the sake of understanding him. This connection at the instances of violence expose those grey areas of Papa Eugene, similar to those of Okonkwo's rage that speak of a different story from the rationale of his actions. While through his relationship with Ezinma Okonkwo spares luxury for sentiment, Papa Eugene's relationship with Kambili builds a deeper sentiment in these acts of violence. These violent moments acquire a sadistic form of a love bond between father and daughter. They are perhaps the only moments that Kambili can take advantage of to domesticate her father, to articulate resistance and to expose the chasms in his fraught and fragile sense of identity – one that is illusively running away from its paternal predetermination (Gikandi, 1991).

From the outset, violence seems an outrageous reason for connection between father and daughter, but it underlines the daughter's complex position in her father's house and in his mind. Her sense of identity is found in the process of *negotiation*, of possession and retention, love and hate, inheritance and non-inheritance. It is a conscious act of negotiation that also portrays the dilemma at the centre of her identity. The daughter exploits the sentimental space she occupies in her father's house to articulate meaningful resistance to paternal forces. The daughter's predicament here is articulated in the dilemma of identifying her father as a normative source of identity while trying to make meaning of the validity and primacy of violence in the father's performance of the same identity. The father embodies a duplicitous characteristic of familial genealogy and the daughter a disturbing conscience; the more reason why she is a temporary sojourner in the familial space.

The daughter upsets the certainties of familial identity. What is also interesting is that the daughter plays the role of a significant link within the tenuous familial structure. Cohen (1993), in her examination of the "Daughter's Dilemma" in the "domestic novel," examines Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Cohen uses psychoanalytic theory to examine Clarissa's condition of Anorexia Nervosa, a commonly experienced eating disorder by daughters in middle-class families that are often symptomatic of the unstable structures

within the family unit. The daughter, in Cohen's (1993:2) words is "the visibly symptomatic member of a pathological system to which each family member contributes." Cohen examines eighteenth century family systems and how they maintained stability through a "triangulation" system that had the father, mother and children occupying the three points of the triangle. This triangulation was a system whose dysfunctional nature was portrayed in Anorexia Nervosa – a condition that consequently portrayed the daughter's "dilemma." The daughter holds a significant role in the functional structures of the family. For instance, Nyasha's anorexia in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, is a condition that comes out of not only Nyasha's dysfunctional relationship with her father, but also of the identity crisis embodied by Babamukuru. Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come* is a subject at the centre of her parent's conflict, mostly brought out through a divided sense of loyalty (38). Enitan stands between two warring forces of her father and mother. The conflict of religion between her parents is constantly played out in her presence, despite the fact that sometimes she is made a pawn in this same conflict. It is therefore not surprising that her parents divorce in her absence, portraying for us the stabilising role she plays in the structure of her family.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili becomes a witness to the disintegration of the family structure. Her identity as a narrator does much to emphasise this point. Her role as a daughter in the family further substantiates her ambivalent status. She becomes the appropriate person from whom a story like this can be told. She literally suffers from the intrinsic turmoil that destroys her family. She suffers the weight of her father's overbearing presence and the oppressive silence from his ultra-paternal control. She becomes a psychological martyr in this familial space, sometimes inadvertently averting violence. In an instance when her brother Jaja defies religious ritual by walking out after dinner before Papa Eugene said the grace, Kambili literally suffers on Jaja's behalf because she knows how "blasphemous" this act can be interpreted by her father. And nothing can be more punishable in this household than defying religious ritual (14)

Kambili refracts attention from the "blasphemous" act of her brother Jaja, hence averting the imminent punishment that was to be visited on Jaja. This choking incidence is a reflection of the silenced body of Kambili, something which, as her cousin Amaka notices, is in the silent tone of her speech when she visits her aunt at University of Nigeria in Nsukka. The constant violence Kambili experiences is worsened by the psychological damage it also does to her. She stands as an embodiment of the damaged psychological fibre in this family. Interestingly, such incidences provided for Kambili's domestication of her father. She saw in him signs of more anxiety than anyone else in the family:

> Papa's breathing was always noisy, but now he panted as if he were out of breath, and I wondered what he was thinking, if perhaps he was running in his mind, running away from something. I did not look at his face because I did not want to see the rashes that spread across every inch of it, so many, so evenly spread that they made his skin look bloated. (15)

The use of the first person narrative point of view allows Kambili to express that dimension of her imagination in probing the legitimacy of the father figure. These are always poignant moments of the growth of her consciousness. In their own way these moments raise her emotional maturity over the rest of the family. Perhaps she alone can actually feel the disintegration of the family, for it has accumulated in her imagination. She does not say it to her mother after her father throws the missal in a fit of rage – she thinks it:

> Maybe Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realizing it, only just letting myself think it. (15)

The figurines that break are symbolic for Kambili's mother, who often polishes them after her husband beats her up. For Kambili, their breaking into pieces means something significant. They multiply Kambili's sense of the marginal and therefore inscribe a sense of the crisis of the father figure. The breaking of the dancing ballet figures with Papa Eugene's violent gesture is an augury of the rupture of his authority and therefore the multiplication of margins. It portends the crisis of his legitimacy: the missal, which is a relic of religious significance that symbolises his authority and legitimacy, has been de-consecrated by his violent gesture. Kambili's imagination conjures up these symbolic, sometimes metaphoric meanings, made possible by her theistic upbringing. In this sense, she finds her father a complex individual, something that is partly lost to the rest of her family members. She builds her sentimental disposition to her father substantially from an inner need to demystify him, and an instinctive impulse to reach out beyond her familial or even national condition. There is nostalgia for the alfresco, which is beyond just being outside the exclusive suburb of "coiled electric wires" and "high walls." Indeed the breaking figurines which multiply her feelings of marginality can be seen as rupturing the exclusivity of her entrapment – a postmodern moment signalled right at the beginning of the text. In fact as Appiah posits, the postmodern is created at that moment of the "multiplication of exclusivity" Appiah (1992).

In the process of multiplication, exclusivity is demystified, ceasing to be a projected ideal and reference point. Kambili's sense of marginalisation arises out of a constant feeling of exclusivity. The overuse of catechism by her father contributed to chants of "backyard snob" from her friends at school. Within her world of ideals and perfections, her father stands as an unassailable embodiment of these ideals. He urges her on, punishes her, brutally even, to drive his point home. He successfully attempts to subdue her body but the real battle for Kambili is psychological. Her imagination wanders, into a metaphysical realm in which she actually questions the ideals that Papa Eugene stands for. Through her imagination, she transcends the physical barriers of entrapment represented by the architecture of the house. She also builds a psychological carapace that allows her to maintain space for a secularised understanding of the world that she yearns to encounter someday. This world comes through the eventful visit to Nsukka, which is credited with

the disintegration of her Enugu home. Kambili's story takes the shape of a memory, one she symbolises with the hibiscus flower: "But my memories did not start at Nsukka. They started before, when all the hibiscuses in our front yard were a startling red' (16). The different shades of the hibiscus flowers symbolise the trajectories of Kambili's memories and subsequently of her augmentation out of her familial space. Nsukka paints different shades to her imagination, provides a different colour of the hibiscus flower and most significantly, provides alternative father(s). Nsukka multiplies the idea of exclusivity, of "distinctions" that Appiah talks about in his reference to how the postcolonial and the postmodern connect.[135]

Kambili finds functionality in Nsukka, she finds how pragmatism can demystify the metaphysical, how religion is secularised and domesticated by material realities. The young priest, father Amadi, embodies a foil for Kambili's father and the priest Father Benedict in Enugu. He is young and liberal, an antithesis to Kambili's knowledge of a father. Father Amadi symbolises new power and new freedom that multiplies the distinctions and exclusivities associated with the idea of the father as represented by Papa Eugene in his household. While Amadi is "the father," he is also "the son," with new legitimacy and pragmatism. He arouses in Kambili indistinctness and indeterminacy, sexual feelings, filial love and penitence at the same time. He is in Kambili's socialisation, a bundle of contradictions. He brings out, a part of her imagination she has never articulated until now: "My chest was filled with something like bath foam. Light. The lightness was so sweet I tasted it on my tongue, the sweetness of an overripe bright yellow cashew fruit" (180).

Out of her father's house, Kambili finds multiple voices and perspectives in Nsukka. She finds a family headed by a single mother (her aunt Ifeoma) and the experience re-orients

[135] Appiah (1992) uses the artistic metaphor of the "Yoruba Man with Bicycle" to launch a discussion into the functional nature of the concept of postmodernism in the postcolonial world. That while the sculpture of the man with the bicycle can be interpreted by the western reader as a pastiche of culture, its sculptor, the postcolonial subject "does not care that it is the white man's invention – it is not there to be Other to Yoruba Self; it is there because someone cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as Africans as novelists" (152).

her perception of the father figure. In Nsukka, Kambili's experience of a humorous world becomes instrumental in getting her out of her psychological indoctrination and oppression. She finds and experiences laughter and spontaneity which is opposed to the regimental nature of her father's household back in Enugu. The world here is liberal and without a domineering father figure, something that is initially disconcerting for her. Laughter becomes a metaphor for growth and freedom in *Purple Hibiscus*. Through laughter, silence is broken, allowing for a dialogic atmosphere with heterogeneity of voices. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili parodies and domesticates the patriarchal authority represented by her father, together with its religious grammar, through her experience of laughter.

In this new scenario her absent father is initially present, as a conscience, whenever some religious ritual or other as Kambili understands it is flouted. Kambili's conscience is initially haunted by the regimental schedule she is used to back home. Here she sees multi-coloured plates, a low ceiling, earthworms in the toilet bucket and many things she has never experienced. The idea of cramped space is exploited in Kambili's new experience to create an ironical sense of freedom and to multiply the sources of authority. Laughter and music populate this new space and fill it with a polyphonous speech. The new space at Nsukka is juxtaposed to the silenced one in her Enugu home. In the midst of this newfound freedom and space for articulation, Kambili realises a new secular religion that debunks and decentralises her biological father from the originary discourse on identity. Nsukka therefore falsifies Kambili's internalised ideas of fatherhood. In fact, while at Nsukka, the news of her father's death raises interesting observations about the "death" of patronymic genealogies of identification.

4.2.3 the "death" and "falsity" of fatherhood

Upon the actual death of Papa Eugene, Kambili experiences a significant rupture of what she considered authentic genealogy, memory and identity: "I had never considered the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die. He was different from Ade Cocker, from all the other people they had killed. He had seemed immortal"(287). The

possibilities become stark at this juncture and the need for self-affirmation grows stronger in Kambili. Her brother Jaja subsequently questions the belief system his father had built his identity upon – the logic of the trinity and the relations between God the father and the son. In a telling moment, in reference to the idea that the script of human lives has been ordained and written by "God the father," Jaja sarcastically says that:

> "Of course God does. Look what He did to his faithful servant Job, even to his own son. But have you wondered why? Why did He have to *murder* His own son so we could be saved? Why didn't He just go ahead and save us". (289) [Emphasis mine]

What Jaja says is prophetic, for in the symbolic sacrificial story of the son, lies Jaja's own story as the son in this household – he sacrifices himself, by admitting to have killed his father and is taken to jail in an effort to protect his mother, who committed the actual crime of poisoning her husband. There is, of course, something Oedipal about this self-sacrificial act. It is a time of reckoning, a generational shift akin to the ending of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (230). The scenario at the end of *Purple Hibiscus* allows us to draw conclusions about the death of fatherhood which signals the increasing agency of sonhood and daughterhood. It is also symbolic of the crisis of legitimacy in fatherhood.

In light of the postcolonial contexts of the texts here, one is bound to draw conclusions about the patri-centric frameworks, the paternal genealogies that influence postcolonial subjectivity. Mudimbe's (1994) notion of the death of imaginary, symbolic and real fathers can help us see these connections. Mudimbe's notion of the "death of false fathers" therefore raises interesting conclusions:

> there is the fear of death (symbolic or real), expressing itself in a wish for the disappearance of the "father": after all, what does he really know of my problems? What is he still doing around? The father's discourse does not really address my real experience, seems completely nonsensical, and I cannot submit

to it. (183)

There is a crisis of subjectivity that underscores the idea of "false fathers." Mudimbe implies that tradition, symbolised by the father at the moment of his death seems invented for the child. Upon the death of her father, Kambili realises the mortality and limitations of his authority, as well as how his power is constructed through religious ritual condoned by a male dominated society. As Kambili has experienced, and as she realises upon his death, the power of the father is one constructed in line with the tradition of Catholic ritual and Jaja is here to remind her of the biblically symbolic death of sons at the hands of fathers. Papa Eugene's death means the real and symbolic death of tradition, which as Eric Hobsbawn (1983) reminds us, is "invented."[136] "Invented tradition" is embodied in the father, as Kambili reckons at the end of the text. The death of the father would therefore seem to signal the "falsity" of his invented tradition as well as of his illusive immortality, omnipotence and omniscience. The "invention," which takes on a "falsity" upon the death of the father underlies the crisis of subjectivity and identity on the part of daughterhood and sonhood. The activity of invention, as with Papa Eugene's rituals, seems to be ruptured at his death, exposing to the daughter that her sentimental disposition, which was a strategy of dealing with her "dilemma" as a "temporary sojourner," was in fact as Mudimbe has pointed out a "make-believe" world of filiation (1994:190).

Indeed, the pre-determinative conditions that come with the discourse of the father, the codes and most of all the sentiment is used as a weapon to unearth these codes and to unmask the inventions that substantiate paternal authority. Kambili lives each day in her father's house with a suffering that allows "an opening out onto make-believe" (Mudimbe, 1994:190); a world in which her father is immortal, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. The rupture of this make-believe comes with her experience of alternative fatherhood in Nsukka. Most significantly, the grand paternal link, of Papa

[136] Hobsbawn (1983:1) proffers that tradition is substantially constructed through invention of ritual. He speaks of tradition as a "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."

Nnukwu, that had been severed, for religious reasons, is re-inscribed as a new level of biological fatherhood, represented by history and culture which has previously excluded the daughter in her father's house.

Mudimbe (1994:192) therefore posits that the complexities of the child's relations with its father come with the father who "in the name of privileges of the blood, seniority, tradition," summons the child and "establishes [...] an order of duties and ambitions conceived by an ancient memory that he represents." The father in this light "incarnates the law of survival and the sign of the future." There is something burdensome, Mudimbe infers, in the statement "I am your father." To quote Mudimbe (1994:192) at length:

> The father's autobiography here becomes a kind of history. His word is accorded a permanence that follows us from place to place and across the years. It becomes the memory of the world […] the child, crushed by such authority, withdraws into a position of weakness while, at the same time, the child would like to affirm a new authority and the voice of new ways to come. But a sovereign discourse, that of the father, clearly signifies a mortal refusal to the child's desire for power. "I am going to look elsewhere," the child thinks, and thus arouses suspicions that dictate a rereading of the familial memory. (192)

Indeed, Kambili's awakening during her stay in Nsukka consisted in "looking elsewhere" for sources of authority and identity, for alternative figures of authority – for other fathers. Enitan's dilemma, much simpler than Kambili's, allows her more choice and agency. She is confronted by a battle for filial loyalty in her familial space, staying with her father and even training, like her father, to be a lawyer. She is however also confronted with the "falsity" of his genealogical authority when she stumbles upon a brother she never knew.

The daughters, as this study demonstrates, engage not primarily with the person but the idea of the father. They become, unlike the sons, temporary sojourners with a vantage status of problematising genealogy and identity. For the daughter, the father therefore represents a critical memory to be reexamined and problematised. As she questions her role within the family, the daughter asks herself crucial questions that can relate to her status as a postcolonial subject. The texts discussed here, have been examined within the context of postcolonial imagination, with an aim of using the indeterminate and unhomely life of the daughter as represented in the texts, as part of understanding postcolonial identities in contemporary Nigerian writing. This fiction can be considered "familial fiction" as a sub-genre.

There is, as we have witnessed with the daughter-father dyad's representation in fiction, the confrontation, by the daughter, of the idea of knowledge, memory and identity represented by paternity and embodied by the father. As authors, Adichie and Atta confront a complex reality of identity as Africans in diaspora. More significantly, they make their contribution through literary and literal fatherhood(s). These fatherhoods, as it were, have shaped the imagination and experience of identity, in the narratives of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

In shifting attention now to the sons in Chris Abani's works, perhaps we would pose the question; are the sons, as *a priori*, inheritors of genealogy facing a different challenge all together? Do they, in their predetermined roles as heirs of genealogy, find their positions as indeterminate and unhomely within familial genealogy like the daughters? I would like to return to the question Mudimbe (1994:192) raises on the nature of father-son relationships. Mudimbe asks:

> What if the father to which you have subjected yourself is an imposter: a false father who wrongly usurped the position of authority? What happens then to the son? What about the status of memory: if I'm confronting a false father who has imposed a false word on me, what sort of memory am I rejecting? (192)

4.3 "In the Name of the Son": Critical Legitimacy of Fatherhood, Sonhood and Masculinities in Abani's *Graceland* and *The Virgin of Flames*.

4.3.1 "false fatherhood" and critical legitimacy

> In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son (*Arrow of God*, 230).

Using the father-son metaphor, the epigraph evokes Christianity's "mad logic," as the narrator refers to it in Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart*. It implies the death of tradition and traditional authority, the crisis of legitimacy and consequently, of the symbolic order of communal identity in the village of Umuaro. In Achebe's fictional villages of Umuofia and Umuaro, custom, tradition and law are validated by a constant oral invocation of what "our fathers said." However, Christianity now shifts symbolic authority and moral/spiritual capital to the son, who arrives in Umuaro with an alternative view which challenges the traditionally symbolic power base of the father and the established institution of fatherhood.

Through Christianity's redefinition of world views, sonhood gains legitimacy by its provision of an alternative myth of identity in which traditional logic is overturned, with the "Holy Trinity's" figurative blurring of the hierarchy between "the father" and "the son." In this particular Umuaro scenario, there is a proliferation of the narrative myths of belief and the traditional/customary ways of doing things, which challenges the wisdom historically embodied in the figure of the father. There follows a crisis of recognition and legitimacy of the father as the symbolic progenitor and embodiment of a discourse of knowledge, power and identity. The idea that the father represents a "false" genealogy becomes apparent, and is crucial for allowing the son to seek alternative sources that allow him to forge his own identity.

In light of Achebe's use of the father-son metaphor to represent and open up a discourse on the spread of colonial modernity in Africa, this section extends this metaphor by examining the representation of contemporary postcolonial worlds and identities in the fiction of Chris Abani – in how the father-son metaphor is used to (re)examine ideas of genealogy, inheritance and identity, through the gendered discourse of masculinity. In other words, the father-son metaphor represents a reservoir of ideas on knowledge, power and identity, including the debate around postcolonial subjectivities and the influence of global cultural movements.

As in the earlier sections of this chapter, Mudimbe's (1994) argument on "false fathers" extends Achebe's debate further by positing that the discourse of the father consigns the child to a position of marginality. Mudimbe underlines the child's increasing feeling that it lacks honour and status within the real and symbolic world of its father. The child begins to question their hereditary identity, while seeking alternative ones that present an oppositional discourse which becomes ground for new legitimacy and power. As Mudimbe (1994:192) says, "the child would like to affirm a new authority and the voice of new ways to come." Mudimbe's idea of "false fathers" questions the myth or reality of the father as progenitor of discourse on knowledge, power and identity.[137] His thesis on the symbolic falsity of fatherhood is informed by a critical attitude towards the knowledge created and theorised about Africa, in politics, art, the sciences and all spheres that ascribe a critical tradition to Africa. As Mudimbe intimates, "Postcoloniality," a definitive condition of post-independence Africa, is a creation of colonial patriarchy. In a sense, postcolonial subjects inhabit a symbolic order that was legitimated at the juncture of political independence, in which the "sons of independence" took over power from colonial patriarchy, going on to establish a vulgarised and pervasive patriarchy through such symbols as the "father of the nation," as Mbembe's (2001) trenchant critique depicts.

[149] In his earlier debate in *The invention of Africa* Mudimbe (1988) is critical of *postcoloniality*'s claim to knowledge, tradition, art and identity.

Kortenaar (2007), like Mudimbe, posits that the generational conflict playing out through the metaphoric father-son relationship in the representation of postcolonial realities is found, at a macro level, in the illusion that power was handed over to the "sons of independence." This illusion reflects the strength of the traditional law and letter that founded the authority of the father figure. Kortenaar implies that this illusion, once unveiled, would lead to a desire for the "death of the father," and new legitimacy for sonhood.

In recent times also, Muchemwa & Muponde (2007: xv-xxiii), argue specifically about the "fatherhood-paternity-manhood nexus" in colonial and postcolonial contexts. As a discourse in Zimbabwean literature and society, this nexus underscores the importance of re-examining masculinities in such contexts as father-son relationships and in what Muponde in his essay refers to as "narratives of self-making"[138] that herald new legitimacies for sonhood, away from traditional biological inheritances and paternal genealogies.

Traditionally, sons in Africa are born in a teleological order, taking over the baton from their fathers – born "in the name of the father." However, the new realities in their postcolonial worlds provide for *possibility* and the invention of a new discourse "in the name of the son," much like Achebe puts it in the epigraph that began this section of the chapter. The son is caught in a conflict, at the crux of a critical memory of fatherhood and that of newfound sources of identity that seek to displace, even delegitimise the discourse of the father. Sonhoods in contemporary Africa confront a deluge of identity alternatives found in the increasing mobility of cultures and the worlds that come with them, via the pervasiveness of forms of mass media and other sources of new media, which create hyper-realities, spatial and temporal utopias, flights of imagination and landscapes of desires that challenge their genealogical forms of identity legitimation.

[138] See Robert Muponde (2007) "Killing fathers," p. 17-30.

4.3.2 postcolonial sonhood(s): material dystopia and cultural utopia

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have extended information circulation to new levels of cultural mobility that have created what Frederic Jameson (1991) calls "spatial utopias." The Baudrillardian simulacrum has become characteristic of this information age, especially the pervasive influence of Euro-American cultural artefacts in postcolonial Africa. Hence, for the sons in postcolonial Africa, growth is influenced by mobile cultures, an increasing experience of spatial utopianism and flights of imagination. Other worlds are brought to the localised familial space through information infrastructure, and the rapidity of this movement of cultures increasingly defines and affects childhood identities and cultures and hence begins to construct new forms of postmodern identities.

In a situation where the culturally symbolic authority that came with the figure of the father is in decline, a new sense of responsibility comes with childhood. The son, a priori masculine heir of familial genealogy, is burdened with expectations of maturity, with penurious material conditions on the other hand creating an accelerated cultural exposure and growth outside of his father's influence.[139] It is in this kind of postcolonial world that the protagonists in Abani's works are depicted – they struggle with a problematic sense of identity that is complicated by multicultural socialisation at the margins of the city. The memories, images and figures of their fathers largely inform their attempts at negotiating livelihoods and selves in the city. Problematic notions of masculinity define the identity framework provided by the father-son metaphor that Abani's texts provide, in depicting these micro-relationships as central to (re)defining ideas of genealogy and identity.

Chris Abani's *Graceland* is set in an informal settlement called Maroko in Lagos Nigeria. It is a sprawling slum characterised by abject penury and a cultural porosity brought

[139] Indeed, Appiah (1992:157) is amazed at cultural productivity in Africa, he says: "despite the overwhelming reality of economic decline; despite unimaginable poverty; despite wars, malnutrition, disease and political instability." He therefore concludes that "The contemporary cultural production of many African societies – and the many traditions whose evidences so vigorously remain – is an antidote to the dark vision of the postcolonial novelist."

about by a desire for escape and what in the words of Bhabha (1994: xiii) can be called "a culture of survival": Maroko is actually a site of "vernacular cosmopolitanism."[140] In Maroko's hybridized soundscape, Highlife music plays alongside reggae music and Nigerian Afro-fusion. The presence of bioscopes, strewn over the slum showing "John Wayne" and "Actor" movies alongside Eastern Kung fu Movies sums up this landscape of desire that overhangs the material dystopia in Maroko.

Chris Abani's *The Virgin of Flames* is also set in downtown East Los Angeles, another marginal location in the megalopolis, with a protagonist named Black. Black is a thirty-six-year old painter trying to negotiate his identity cloaked by the shadow of childhood memories. Elvis and Black share an entrenched displeasure of the memories of a childhood of physical and sexual abuse, an attraction to transvestites and a disturbing relationship with the figure of the father in their lives. In the wake of transsexual and transvestite dispositions, Elvis and Black practice and adopt marginal and problematic gender positions and sentiments, and the fact of their biological sonhood presents a set of complexes in their relationships with their fathers, in memory, for Black and in reality and memory for Elvis.

Elvis's maternally-inclined genealogical sentiment is expressed in his love for the music of Elvis Presley, something his late mother impressed upon him. For economic reasons, he impersonates Elvis Presley, but this activity puts him at odds with the normative discourse on gender – how masculinity is perceived, constructed and performed in this society and more importantly, how it is historicised in his relationship with his father and the male figures in his childhood life. His impersonation ritual involves using beauty products to adorn his face in an attempt to reproduce an image of Elvis Presley, as well as keep the memory of his late mother alive. These activities are perceived as effeminate by his father and also, as we shall see, by the overtly patriarchal society he lives in.

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[140] I refer here to Bhabha's idea of vernacular cosmopolitanism in reference to the cultures of the marginalised immigrants and diasporas in the West. According to Bhabha, it is a functional cosmopolitanism that consistently erases the gains of "globalised cosmopolitanism" and its illusionary idea of "global development."For Bhaba, vernacular cosmopolitanism is the essence of "cultures of survival" in marginalised, economically poor communities at the edges of the urban nation. Refer to Bhabha's (1994) "Looking Back, Moving Forward: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," pp. ix-xxv.

Graceland's narrative structure alternates the present and the past, giving the reader regular flashbacks into Elvis's life in the rural village of Afikpo, when his mother was still alive, while building up his artistic growth through an alternation of the chronotopes of narrative space and time. Significantly, the past is Elvis's unconscious; repressed in it are taboo subjects like the raping of his cousin Efua by his Uncle Joseph (64) and a graphic description of an incident where he was sexually molested and raped by Uncle Joseph (197-198). It is not surprising then that Elvis's masculinity is troubled from its early traumatic moments.

Elvis's attitude towards his father is therefore bitter and defiant, for he feels his father is complicit with his plight, something that can be argued as an overcorrection on Elvis's part. The image and figure of the father informs his critique of masculinity. He protracts his anger at being raped and sexually molested to his father, leading to a bitter distrust, a feeling of entrapment and longing to get out of a "closeted space":

> Elvis stood by the open window. Outside: heavy rain. He jammed the wooden shutter open with an old radio battery, against the wind. The storm drowned the tinny sound of the portable radio on the table. He felt claustrophobic, fingers gripping the iron of the rusty metal protector. It was cool on his lips, chin and forehead as he pressed his face against it. (1)

Despite this initial feeling of claustrophobia, which anticipates Elvis's critical attitude to gender as we will see later, there is also an inherent feeling of self-loss and invisibility in the big city of Lagos, something that Chris Dunton (2008) says is characteristic of the "entropy and energy" of Lagos city as a narrative space. A position of marginality allows the protagonist to disappear into the elaborate city canvas, whilst allowing him to be creatively experimental as we see of the other characters Elvis interacts with, including Redemption, the King of Beggars, Okon among others.[141]

[141] Chielozona (2005) refers to "Cosmopolitan Solidarity" as the condition of the protagonists as they "negotiate transculturality" within the chaotic nature of Lagos. This negotiation, enhanced by the sense of

Chris Abani creates an intricate cityscape, which becomes Elvis's canvas as he tries to paint the story of his current life. The scenes in Lagos alternate with the countryside scenes of Afikpo, which are portraits of memory that unravel Elvis's familial history. Lagos as we see in the first chapter of the book is portrayed with the shrinking of economic potential for Elvis, who resorts to a survivalist self-employment through the impersonation of Elvis Presley. The memory of Afikpo therefore represents a nostalgic and maternal sensibility for Elvis:

> Beatrice laughed and set the plastic disc on the record player. The needle scratched the edge a few times as though undecided, then launched into the throaty call of Elvis Presley. Beatrice grabbed Elvis and began to dance with him. Her illness made her movements slow, although it was not hard to see they were once fluid and smooth. (42)

Elvis's encounter with multicultural worlds therefore begins at this early age, and the memory of Afikpo depicts a troubled relationship between Elvis and his father. It reflects by way of juxtaposing, a masculine texture of the present cityscape that leaves Elvis in a marginal position as he attempts to hack his way out of the liana of Lagos' underbelly while eking out a living. Indeed, he paints the caricatured image of a frantic "sex worker" as he attempts to attract attention with a poor impersonation of Elvis Presley:

> It build [sic] up slowly, one leg sort of snapping at the knee, then the pelvic thrust, the arm dangling at his side becoming animated, forefinger and thumb snapping out the time. With a stumble, because the wet sand, until he adjusted to it, sucked at his feet, he launched into the rest of his routine. (12)

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marginality, invisibility and hollowness is not only what characterises and makes visible "vernacular cosmopolitanism" but also essential to the "poetics of invisibility" (Bhabha, 1994:85).

Black, the protagonist in Abani's other novel *The Virgin of Flames*, is in a similar position to Elvis. Living in the shabby East Los Angeles' inner city, his painting career cannot sustain his daily needs. Because he cannot pay models, he impersonates them by painting himself:

> Since he was broke he couldn't afford to hire any models, which is why he was sitting in front of the mirror trying on face paint. He intended to dress up as her and use himself as a model, painting a more detailed cartoon from his reflection. (5)

Black dresses as a woman, while engaged in a project of painting a caricature of the "Virgin of Guadalupe." We never get to see whether Black earns his keep through the painting; most instructive however, is that through it is his obsession with simulacrum in much the same way as Elvis does in his impersonation of Elvis Presley. In both their histories is a hatred of the father figure, a distrust of the memory represented by him and, in the case of Black, a troublingly absentee father as he recalls a recurrent dream, "My mother and I are always drowning in that living room, but my father has his back turned to us, looking out of the window. No words are ever spoken. Just him looking out the [sic] window" (247).

Elvis's impersonation of Elvis Presley as an attempt to eke out a living portrays him as a marginal figure and reveals his masculinity as troubled and repressed. This is especially clear in the face of the colonel's brutality.[142] The colonel represents "hegemonic masculinity."[143] During the repression and torture, the colonel's men attempt to physically emasculate the victims, reflecting what we see happening to Elvis (295). Elvis and his father, deracinated from Afikpo to Lagos, are helpless in the face of the brutal masculinities of the military regime. Father and son's plight dissolve into each other even as the father tries to assert his superiority in the familial space. What is left of his

[142] Elvis is caught and tortured by state representatives over civil unrest and "the colonel," symbolic here of the State Repressive Apparatus, superintends this torture.
[143] This is a term that Muchemwa & Muponde (2007) use to refer to the ultra-patriarchal, "superphallicism" characteristic of the state's patriarchal economy.

authority is merely biological, for he, like Elvis is facing larger symbolic ultra-masculine orders represented by the military regime through the character of the colonel in the text, whose physical absence is ironically his pervasive presence. The colonel, a high-ranking official in the military government is notoriously rumoured for his overseeing of hideous forms of torture, as Elvis later experiences.

Through the construct of gender, Elvis's father tries to maintain traditional authority and legitimacy over his son. But Elvis problematises this through his impersonation activities which involve using feminine beauty products. In these activities is the son's new-found way to negotiate a "culture of survival" as well as to reflect a historical experience, when the idea and experience of fatherhood represented violence, incest and rape – things that psychologically impacted on Elvis's understanding of fatherhood and gender. Moreover, it is the porous boundaries of the cultural landscape of postcolonial Nigeria that allow for Elvis, through simulation, to problematise the performance of gender, by way of impersonation.

4.3.3 "a view from elsewhere": cross-gender discourse and androgynous sonhoods

Elvis problematises the concepts of masculinity and femininity by his practice of impersonation. He adorns himself with make-up as he prepares for his impersonation activities, in a manner comparable to Black in Abani's *The Virgin of Flames*. Elvis carries a leather pouch around his neck, one of the few relics that belonged to his mother. It contains a list of recipes for Nigerian cuisine (11). The recipes are used by Abani as intertexts between the chapters of the book. They are textual artefacts of memory that represent, for Elvis, a feminine genealogy that is not only vestigial of the past, but which he nostalgically performs in his impersonation activities. The pouch has a fetish-like appeal for Elvis, who keeps rubbing it tenderly in his moments of self-reflection.

Black carries, on his neck as well, a picture of himself in his infancy, wearing a dress. It is an artifact of memory that says something significant about his complex gender

disposition. He remembers his father telling him that, as an infant, they had to masquerade him as a girl for him to survive from magical attempts at ending his life (164). For Black, these were nostalgic times, for up to the age of seven when the threat to his life was presumed over and the mask had to be unveiled, the worst of times began: his father's absence as well as the physical abuse from both his parents. It was the beginning, for Black, of gender consciousness. Black grew up to hate boyhood, yet girlhood, something that he was made to perform by manner of adornment, before the age of seven, was also problematised by a violent mother.

For Black and Elvis therefore, there is a porous line between masculinity and femininity and their biological corollaries – maleness and femaleness. Elvis and Black perform androgeneity. Sexual difference for them is a technique of dealing with a critical memory of a troubled parentage, of finding a way to earn a living and navigate through multicultural worlds of contemporary Nigerian city life. Their economic lives are entangled with their sense of identity, one which they negotiate through socially intolerant perceptions of sexuality. For them, their fathers represent very problematic notions of identity. Yet because the normative idea of identity is heavily invested in notions of sexuality (Frosh, 1994), Elvis and Black's biological nature as males puts them in a confrontational position with their fathers in memory and reality – because of how they *perform* sexual difference.

Both protagonists problematise the notion of gender. Through simulation and impersonation, they give an alternative meaning to the idea of biological sexual difference as definitive of gendered identity. They give a "view from elsewhere," beyond the binary of masculinity and femininity. It is a different understanding of androgeneity that is functional and practical to their plight as "second-class citizens" of their society. The problematic idea of gender performed by Black and Elvis curiously reflects Chris Abani's attitude towards the received notions of identity based on gender. They speak also to Abani's own problematic relationship with an absent father in his childhood.[144]

[144] Chris Abani's 5th May 2006 talk at the Department of African Literature, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Instructively also, they illuminate, in the words of Stephen Frosh (1994:10) "the struggle to write as a man about sexual difference; that is, to find a way of writing from the subjective position of 'masculinity' and yet emerge into a space which unsettles that position and its assumed complementarity with 'femininity.'"

Frosh posits that to write as a man about "sexual difference" is to seek to "transgress" gender assumptions in a manner that involves a process of deconstructing the "constructed categories" of gender. According to Frosh, masculinity and femininity "are constructions which are built around anatomical difference, signifying only because they are granted significance in the context of the particular power relationships that constitute, and historically have constituted, our social environment" (1994:11). Muchemwa & Muponde (2007) also highlight the critical relevance of seeing the slippages and coalitions of masculinities and femininities within the larger symbolic order of patriarchal economy. Moreover, beyond the idea of significations, the pragmatic dimension of gender is found in the creation of fixed categories that give an illusion of essence, depicted by what Frosh calls "the realities of power" and subsequently inverting what is subjective to be objective, what is psychological as physical and what is a behavioural state, be seen as chromosomal or anatomic. Frosh's ideas are informed by Lacan's seminal essay "The signification of the phallus" (1966), in which Lacan argues that the ultimate signifier for masculinity is essentialised by its attributed synecdochic equivalence to the penis.[145]

Practically, Elvis and Black deconstruct gender, through performance, in a manner that pits them against the father figure, in memory and in reality. Societal perceptions consider this performance taboo and even the state, the ultimate symbolic phallic order, that ultra-presence of fatherhood, represented by the Althusserian "Repressive State Apparatus" (1976:136) proscribes this performance:

Admiring himself from many angles, he thought it was a shame

[145]The penis, for Lacan is the visibility of masculinity and therefore made to appear as an *essential* signifier, "the signifier of signifiers" – the "transcendental signified".

> he couldn't wear makeup in public. That's not true, he mentally corrected himself. He could, like the transvestites that haunted the car parks of hotels favoured by rich locals and visiting whites. But like them, he would be a target of some insult, or worse, physical beatings, many of which were meted out by the police, who then took turns with their victims in the back of their vans. (77)

Elvis leaves it for the reader to discern how taboo subjects are punished and yet how, through the workings of prohibition of taboo, as Freud would have it, is also a strong element of desire, raising in this prohibition an innate sense of ambiguity, reflected in the statement "physical beatings, many of which were meted out by the police, who then took turns with their victims in the back of their vans" (77).

Elvis's existential moments are accompanied by emotions that play out his helplessness and reveal the claustrophobic reality around him. These moments are evoked during his activities of adornment, especially in rehearsal for impersonation. The destitution he lives in delegitimises his father as breadwinner, and entrusts in him his own future as he realises he is abandoned to be free and to fashion his way out of an economic instability and a multi-layered identity crisis: "What if he had been born white, or even just American? Would his life be any different? [...] without understanding why, he began to cry through the cracked face powder" (78).[146]

Informing Elvis's disposition to effeminacy is his spite for his father. Notwithstanding the incestuous rape from his uncle Joseph, his multicultural experience of the world has uprooted him out of the normative idea of a genealogy of fatherhood, into the possibility of androgynous transsexuality that exists, unfortunately for him, in reality, out of the society he lives in. His father represents a deficient masculinity, and an absence that can be complemented yet transcended, by the femininity engendered by the memory of his mother – one that will also propel him to the "Graceland" of his dreams and imagination.

[146] Indeed one could say that the city "emasculates" the masculine familial genealogy, reflected in Elvis's father's loss of his symbolic capital as breadwinner and therefore custodian and gatekeeper of familial identity.

Yet his father's annoyance at his impersonation activities might as well be attributed to the memory of Elvis Presley as an object of rivalry, since his late wife took to making Elvis Presley her hero, as was the *zeitgeist* at that time. In another sense then, father and son are caught up here in the tangle of memory, rivalry and spite, playing itself out through the constructed and now contested idea of masculinity.

For Black, his parental heritage presented a genealogical dilemma, "With an Igbo father and a Salvadorian mother, Black never felt he was much of either" (37), while his father embodied an uncanny absence:

> On her deathbed, his mother had accused him of always siding with his father. He wished now that he'd had the words to say: it's not that I hated you or loved him more […] how could I hate a man who never really existed for me? (173)

> My father was searching for something, but I have no idea what […] I thought he was an artist at heart, or at least a scientist like Einstein: a dreamer. I thought that was why I have the same existential melancholy (196)

Black's melancholic existence and perplexing sense of identity is embodied in the "space ship" he built, where he spends most of his time, on the roof of the "ugly store." He embodies an alien (sic) sense of identity in which is inhered an attempt at a process of self-invention. In similar existential moments to Elvis in *Graceland*, Black reflects on his "crisis" and agonises over it during the process of adornment, when he puts on the makeup: "He simply didn't recognize himself; at least not as Black. He began to cry. He struggled against the melting mascara. Pulling himself together, he realized that his face looked even darker against the white dress and blonde hair" (77).

Black's libidinal desires take a very graphic image through the constant descriptions of the turgidity of his penis. Yet this sexual desire is directed at a transvestite named Sweet

Girl to whom Black is attracted. While Black knows that Sweet Girl is male, Sweet Girl seems to appeal to him because of "her" complex effeminacy – it is interesting to note that the omniscient narrator refers to Sweet Girl as "she." Even more interesting is the idea that Sweet Girl claims to be a lesbian. Sexuality and sexual difference in biological and constructed senses form part of Black's struggle to reconcile his fragmented self. The penis, biological signifier of his masculinity, is insufficient in giving him a stable sense of self. He feels inadequate in practicing heterosexuality and yet derives pleasure at being raped, describing it as a "burning which felt right" (138). Black hankers to experience femininity, to be feminised, and at the end of the text, Sweet Girl performs the act of physically disguising Black's genitalia. Black goes through conflicting emotions and desires during this incident, which culminates in an explosive reaction of his fragmented self.

In a bid to reconcile his heterogenic self, Black realises he not only deconstructs received notions of identity defined by masculinity, but that he is in a continuous process of re-invention:

> The fact of the matter was that he was obsessed with origins,
> and he believed that in his case, origins held the key to self-
> discovery. It seemed though, that those with a clear sense of
> the past, of identity, were so eager to bury it and move on, to
> reinvent themselves. What a luxury, he thought, what a thing,
> to choose your own obsession, to choose your own suffering. Him,
> he was trying to reinvent an origin to bury so he could finally
> come to this thing he wanted to be, and he knew that if
> he didn't find it soon, it would destroy him, burn him up. (123-124)

Elvis and Black are both in an existential crisis, living in penurious conditions and trying to negotiate a means of living through the very problematic core of their identities. To engage with a rapidly transforming world necessitates having a reorganised self yet the case of Elvis and Black is otherwise. It is exacerbated by their inhabitation of a

contemporary culture which is also in an incessant process of *postmodernisation*. Elvis's *weltanschauung*, for instance, is constructed though a television and video experience. In his childhood, his mother inducts him into this world and his teacher encourages him to learn from representations of extraneous realities. This experience and worldview has created a landscape of desires that is in conflict with these protagonists' immediate realities. Moreover, this worldview is directly in opposition to the teleology represented, for Elvis, by his father Sunday Oke. Furthermore Elvis's activity of impersonation is itself a form of resistance to the economic reality he is living in as well as to fatherhood and all it represents – origins, authority and legitimacy. The impersonation involves a dance act, expressive of Elvis's desire for freedom, of the creative energy of the world he inhabits, of resistance to forces that create the same world and yet a tribute to maternal memory which represents an alternative sense of identity and genealogy to that of his father, Sunday Oke.

Black's painting expresses his obsession with the idea of *image*. We could say this about Elvis's impersonation and its goal of simulating – which is a representation of the *image* of Elvis Presley. Black impersonates models for economic convenience; he cannot afford to pay models to pose for his paintings. Both protagonists occupy what Frosh (1991) refers to as "postmodern states of mind" which characterise contemporary cultures that are fragmented, ontologically defined by surface meanings – what Jameson (1991) calls a "depthlessness" – which only processes the *image* which has become a pervasive metaphor in contemporary culture. Both protagonists experience their self through interaction with images, in painting and in what Frosh (1991:31) refers to as "communicational and computational networks". They both consume (or are they consumed by?) the process of postmodernisation. There is an absence of teleology or closure in the narratives of their experience. An open consciousness exists and an inchoate sense of "selfhood" into which the absence and illegitimacy of the biological father is played out, including the core concern of a problematic masculine perception of the world.

The sons in Abani's works negotiate their relationship with their fathers through the idea of masculinity. In this struggle is also an attempt to deal with forces of contemporary culture. Theirs, in Lyotardian terms is a "postmodern condition" (1984) that provides for a "postmodern state of mind" (Frosh, 1991). It is a struggle with the idea of origins and teleology, against a dominant narrative of masculine identity. In this struggle is the relationship with the father figure. As sons, they live in a symbolic and arguably, for Black, an imaginary order of fatherhood, either in memory, reality or both. This order as it turns out is defined by their biological inheritance – maleness –, which is an *apriori* signifier to specific goals and attitudes of socialisation. Elvis's father Sunday Oke makes it clear for instance that "Elvis is my son. Not my daughter" (62), and uses violence against Elvis to make this point clear. But for Elvis this goes beyond biology, for in the same biology does he feel the deficiency of his identity, which is aggravated by the presence and actions of his father. Yet in the same biology, there exists infinite possibilities that for Elvis will provide an exit out of the claustrophobic world he presently lives in.

In Elvis's impersonation of Elvis Presley is his destiny: "Graceland." His impersonation activity underpins the creativity and resistance, definitive of the world he is living in: a world he shares across the continental shores with Black, his older contemporary, who is caught up in the puzzle of a troubled childhood in the form of a critical memory of his parentage. Through his impersonation, Elvis gets to mirror a different self and occupy a transcendental world, similar to the masquerade world in Achebe's Umuofia and Umuaro societies. Indeed, he uses the image of a mask dancing, in his escapades at the beaches in front of tourists. Eze Chielozona (2005) posits that the movement in space and time between Afikpo and Lagos is informed by Abani's goal to represent a multi-faceted reality, one similar to Achebe's concept of the mask dancing.[147] Elvis also experiences the same reality, by virtue of his sonhood, through the aspects of masculinity and femininity. Yet these realities are not mutually exclusive as they may appear; they

[147] The metaphor of the dancing mask in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is in fact reflective of the complexity of the philosophy of binaries in Umuofia, including the masculine-feminine one that Okonkwo fails to moderate in his perception of the world.

confront each other and collapse into each other, blurring space and time, making them "unpresentable" (Lyotard, 1984) in a manner that represents a "postmodern condition."

With Black is also an intricate psychological battle arising from the physical understanding of his self, and from a temporal dimension – the memory of his childhood. The landscape of (East) Los Angeles, "the city of angels,"[148] is Black's canvas. Considered the centre of Television and Film, it is a suitable location for Black's creativity and resistance. In many ways Los Angeles and Lagos share the condition of multiculturalism. They are both migrant cities that provide discourse for resistance from normativity and yet space for a creative self to flourish. They provide, for both protagonists, a "culture of survival," liberating their socialised senses of genealogy, allowing them to, through performance, critique the assumptions behind sonhood and articulate creative resistance congruous to their postmodern conditions.

4.4 Conclusion

The sons, uprooted from the domesticity of their families, therefore seek their independence through reifying sexual difference. They have intricate connections between economic pursuits, gender identity and the contemporary culture they are trying to negotiate around: Eze Chielozona (2005) refers to this as "Cosmopolitan solidarity" with protagonists attempting to "negotiate transculturality." The father-son dyad acts as a template to problematise the idea of genealogy, teleology, and origins that engender a post-modern sense of authority and legitimacy for fatherhood and for the father figure.

The sons in Abani's works are not archetypes, this is due to contemporary realities they are living in, where the traditional markers of identity held as definitive of the self are torn down and demystified and replaced with alternative ones. They, unlike daughters do not have a sentimental disposition to their fathers, whom they, *ab initio*, demystify as

[148] Abani uses the popular myth of origin of Los Angeles as the "city of angels" through the protagonist's vision of the Angel Gabriel, acting as his conscience and something like a guardian angel. Black's long term project throughout the text is also to paint a distorted image of the "Queen of Angels" of "Guadalupe" as described in the text, related to the actual Mexican origin of the formation of Los Angeles as a city.

insufficient as sources to refer to, in dealing with the multicultural realities they face. Also, unlike the daughters, they have a teleological order of inheritance and therefore are not destined to occupy an ambivalent space within familial genealogy. They cannot afford luxury for patriarchal sentiment, for their world is functional yet fraught with infinite alternatives, possibilities and potentials beyond the grasp of their sexualised identities.

Therefore, the idea of "false fathers" is a relevant revelation for the daughters in their fathers' houses, as well as the sons. Yet for the sons, it is iconoclastic, by breaking the myth of masculinity because they confront the orthodox structure of identity that transcends the intangibility of genealogy. Their experience of the multicultural cities of Lagos and Los Angeles is more direct, their senses of the "self" face a more intense battle against fragmentation and tolerance/acceptance of sexual difference is conspicuous in their process of identity construction. The contemporary postcolonial and postmodern condition as we see in Adichie, Atta and Abani's works is consumed more by the sons than the daughters, reflected in their performance of sexual difference through their transsexual, bisexual and transvestite dispositions.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE

CHILDHOODS AS POSTMODERN IDENTITIES.

5.1 Introduction: Childhood as Embodiment of Diaspora

Having explored childhood in view of the micro-relationships of familial genealogies in the previous chapter, this chapter presents a more complex cultural milieu with multiple genealogies. In chapter four, the notion of genealogies is examined in relation to an arborescent family structure that is organised by a patriarchal framework. They are gendered versions of familial genealogies. In this chapter, the notion of genealogies is complicated by multiple heritages and legacies that underline a diasporic childhood experience. Here, genealogies transcend the binaries of the paternal and maternal. In this chapter, genealogies are complicated by a history of multi-continental cultural mobility and therefore multi-national, even transnational family histories that point to multiple genealogical frameworks of identification. Childhoods here are seen through ruptured continental boundaries, and by problematising definitions of a specific racialised and geographical framework of identification.

The childhood(s) open up new and complex vistas of experience, and present analytical challenges, by their embodiment and consumption of a diasporic *weltanschauung*. As the preceding chapters have constantly invoked, authorial diasporic anxieties and consciousnesses still form an influential context. The discussion turns to the idea of diaspora as embodied in childhood and to the idea of childhood as a multicultural and transcultural theme and discourse. The type of childhood here is multi-racial, multi-national and multi-continental, and therefore the product of multiple genealogies. Sometimes these types of childhood could adopt the other prefix "trans," in theoretical talking points where they transgress and violate boundaries of experience – seeking what Deleuze and Guattari (1988:7) call "lines of flight." In other words, these childhoods present a rhizomatic plane of discourse on identity because of their disruption of arborescent frameworks of genealogical identification.

Moreover, while this study has been engaged in examining childhood in the context of postcolonial terms of reference and experience, in terms of world(s) that are substantially rooted in a practico-sensory experience that is geographically located in Africa and specifically Nigeria, what happens when this experience shifts to a consciousness? Mudimbe (1994) must have had this in mind when he talked about Africa as an "idea." In this case childhood is a discourse and a product of a specific consciousness. The shift to the notion of diasporic consciousness as an experience of childhood is in this chapter contextualised in physically uprooted childhoods that are constructions of memory. As image and figure, they embody the idea of diaspora. In this way childhood is useful in problematising the distinctive Nigerian or even African experiences. However, the diasporic childhoods allow us to extend and disrupt categories of classification, locations of generations, provinces of writing and distinctions of experience. In this way, these childhoods literally transcend familial, ethnic, national and continental boundaries, classifications, categories and all those regimes that seek to define distinct spaces of experience. This chapter therefore examines childhood from the perspective of the postmodern. Childhood is read here using the tenets of postmodernism.

The term postmodernism is used here in line with Patricia Waugh's (1992) definition of it as a "structure of feeling" which is implicated in the regimes it wants to disrupt.[149] The childhoods to be studied here are the product of an embodiment of diasporic sentiment, torn between the prevalent myth and idea of Africa and the reality and experience of Europe. Hence, the dynamics of diasporicity shift between the notions of "experience/embodiment" and "idea." In other words, childhood in this chapter is examined as the product of a mythical experience of Africa and a practico-sensory experience of Europe. In this chapter, the works of Helen Oyeyemi will be examined as presenting childhoods that portray what Brenda Cooper (2009) has called "New Diaspora."[150] This chapter examines the identity struggles of the child protagonist

[149] Patricia Waugh (1992) "Introduction," p. 1-10.

[150] See Brenda Cooper (2009) "The Middle Passage of the Gods and the New Diaspora: Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*," p. 108-121. For Cooper, this is the "New Diaspora" informed by Oyeyemi's own experience – arriving in London at the age of four and can now "barely remember Africa" and so her sense

Jessamy Harrison in *The Icarus Girl* (2005) and the images and memories of the childhood of Maja in *The Opposite House* (2007). The novels present childhoods whose physical locations of experience is London, while their mythical and psychic locations of experience is Africa. The idea of childhood depicted in these novels, in its memories, images and figures reflects Oyeyemi's mythic and ideational relation to Africa, having migrated to London with her parents at the age of four. Unlike Adichie, Abani and Atta, Oyeyemi's experience and relationship to Africa is a consciousness found in the stories, myths and legends that connect her to her parents as first generation migrants in her familial genealogy in London. Moreover this relationship is also informed by the generations of black British people who form a black diaspora that traces its genealogy in the multi-continental slave trade.

The childhoods of Jess and Maja are engaged in an identity struggle that not only reflects Oyeyemi's experience of a diasporic childhood, but also the tensions of worlds and cultures in conflict. This chapter firstly examines Jess's psychosomatic identity struggles in light of the Yoruba mythology of twinning and *abiku* childhoods, which are in conflict with interpretations of an *alter ego* in Jess's London milieu. Yoruba mythology, from Jess's maternal genealogy is portrayed as a framework of identity in conflict with an English world in which Jess's "weird" demeanor is not only interpreted as the psychological effects of an *alter ego* but also as ontological of Jess's "half-and-half," mixed racial confusion. In a sense, the idea of an *abiku* childhood is complicated by racialised frameworks of interpretation and difference. Secondly, Maja's images and memories of childhood in *The Opposite House* are examined as part of an identity discourse that is going on within Maja's presently adult self. These images and memories which she identifies with Cuba and her childhood are historiographic talking points about Maja's sense of black subjectivity. This subjectivity is linked to "black Atlantic" slave history, cultural practices, customs and rituals like Santeria, which connect Maja to a long maternal genealogy. Maja realises that her sense of identity in London, can only be understood through journeying back to the history of the "black Atlantic" and the

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of diasporicity is linked or akin to that loss of memory that Cooper says "she only partially shares with slave descendants" and which spanned the "triangular space of trade between Britain, the West Coast of Africa and the Caribbean."

"middle passage." This journey involves navigating legends, myths, customs, practices and rituals that carry the texture of a *mestizo Afrocubanismo*. Thirdly, in light of the competing frameworks of identity in *The Icarus Girl* and the tensions of black subjectivity in *The Opposite House*, the chapter foregrounds the mythopoetic narrative structure which Oyeyemi uses, as appropriate in reflecting the multiple heritages, influences and traditions of not only the protagonists, but also of Oyeyemi's imaginative subjectivity. In foregrounding this notion of mythopoeia, the chapter finds that Oyeyemi borrows from Yoruba and Greco-Roman mythology, Dickinsonian poetry, English fairy tales, legends and myths to create a meta-fictional structure that presents these childhoods as postmodern identities of a "new world" and "new Diaspora."

Oyeyemi's writing reflects the tensions of embodying a diasporic identity. There is a multiplicity of consciousness always at play in her novels, explored through twins, doppelgangers and variant physical and magical worlds. Having moved to London at the age of four, Oyeyemi was thrown into a world she needed to assimilate immediately and she says in interviews that she spent a big part of elementary schooling without friends, reading, writing and inhabiting a silent, hermitic world of imagination that felt self-contained. Oyeyemi kept indoors most of her childhood, living in a council house in Lewisham, London. "I grew up doing lots of reading, writing and watching television," she says, adding that "I never saw friends outside school. I had an imaginary friend called chimmy and all sorts of imaginary things going on."[151] This hermitic period resulted in flights of imagination reflected in the characters of Jess in the *Icarus Girl*, Maja in the *Opposite House* and Miranda in *White is for Witching* (2009). These figures, images and memories of childhood are living in interstices of magical, spiritual and physical worlds that reflect tensions of identity and personality. Oyeyemi's writing therefore allows her to deal with the anxieties of growing up in a liminal state between belonging and non-belonging, a tension inscribed in her characters' anxieties of belonging to different worlds, places, spaces and zones of imagination and experience. These characters carry "residual and emergent" worlds portrayed in the palpable tension of their identity crises.

[151] Refer to http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/showbiz/article-8587015-heartache-of-a-real-sensation.do (accessed 24th February, 2010)

Appiah (1992) puts it well in his idea of "old gods and new worlds," reminding us of Raymond William's (1977) ideas about "residual and emergent" cultures and the tensions as they intersect with each other.[152]

5.2 Diasporic Childhoods: Worlds "against interpretation"

Drawing from diverse worlds, writings and other influences, Oyeyemi's works provide a mosaic of stylistic and thematic discourses, influenced, reflected and produced from the point of view of childhood. From the outset in this chapter, there is the idea of a diasporic canvas, laid out to explore the anxieties of its peculiar spatio-temporalities as Homi Bhabha's (1994: xiii) notion of "unhomely lives" postulates. In this way, the context of the diasporic is approached through the notions of "disjuncture and difference," which is the *modus operandi* of Arjun Appadurai's (1995) study of (post)modern cultural flows. While Bhabha examines diasporic time and space in terms of the notion of binary of the centre and the margin, and refers to the cultural erasure of boundaries set out by metropolitan nations, Appadurai (re)centre's differences and chaos as his point of departure, privileging the chaos that "structure the feeling" of what has been referred to as (post)modern sensibility. The diverse worlds, times, places and spaces of childhood represented in Oyeyemi's works therefore invite a plethora of reading approaches predicated around the ideas of difference, chaos, experimentation, magic, spirituality, myth and legends. These childhoods are intensely imagined, constructed in psychosomatic modes of being. They are constructed in worlds of imagination *qua* imagination, reflecting on the *angst* of diasporic subjectivity, generational tensions and myths, legends and stories of identification carried across continents with gulfs of difference in cultural perspectives, perceptions and practice. To talk about reconciling these worlds, spaces, places, cultures and ways of being is to be unrealistic. Perhaps the best way is to inhabit all of them as Cooper (2008a:52) says "simultaneously and

[152] Appiah (1992) "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" reflects on the fluid binaries between what is considered the traditional and the modern – the "new" and the "old."

strategically."[153] Hence the simultaneity of experience, realities and non-realities, magic and spirit is the conceptual ground in which these childhoods find a critical discourse.

The realities and experiences of diasporic existence provide childhoods that strive to live simultaneously and strategically, in worlds from which they were unrooted and uprooted before sensory consciousness, and which they were transposed to, for the development of their consciousness. These childhoods are essentially divided entities already, defined by disjuncture and difference, across landscapes of imagination and senses of identity. Split and multiple personality disorders are perhaps products and modes of apprehension for sensibilities that have been ruptured and redistributed across spaces, places and worlds associated with the process of growing up. Oyeyemi presents childhood(s), or vignettes of childhood figures, images and memories that resist or in borrowing the words of Susan Sontag (1992) are "against interpretation." They rupture schemas and programmatic attempts associated with aesthetic regimes of interpretation and discourse.[154] To bracket or decide her work as either black British or Nigerian diasporic writing is perhaps problematic in itself, by virtue of the author's divided and double, even multiple consciousness, as well as the autotelic consumption of a diasporic perspective and subjective position that transcends just a consciousness.[155] Oyeyemi's dynamic of childhood is therefore postmodern in discourse, in feeling and in representation. The principal aim for this chapter, and indeed this study, is not to reclaim a provincial category of writing or discourse, but to draw connections across spaces, places and worlds far apart: (dis)continuities within the discourse of childhood that push it to new frontiers of experience and therefore new meanings and aesthetics that bring the idea of childhood to greater significance in the discourse of the postcolonial and the postmodern. (Dis)connections are therefore to be drawn between postcolonial and postmodern ways of reading Oyeyemi's texts.

These reading practices are related to the idea of the diasporic as a space of (dis)continuities, difference, divergence and convergence of worlds, spaces, places and

[153]Brenda Cooper (2008a) "Diaspora, gender and identity: Twinning in three diasporic novels," p. 51-65.
[154] Susan Sontag (1992) "Against Interpretation," p. 48-55.
[155] The category "Black British" has been problematically used as a conceptual category for these writers, see Mark Stein (2004) and Kadija Sessay (2005).

times. Inhabiting this space, as Oyeyemi does is to face both a "pressured hybridity" (Gaylard, 2005) of "postcolonial imagination" and the structure of feeling of a postmodern dispensation. It is therefore a highly imaginative space, with subjectivity negotiated through imaginative processes. In this sense then the project of identifying oneself becomes a negotiated one, with the tensions arising from the subject's awareness and experience of different spaces, places and worldviews attempting to find cohesion. The tyranny that physical movement does to the diasporic subject is remedied by flights of imagination, in Sisyphean attempts at reconciling these diverse worlds into an organic whole. In Oyeyemi's case, time and space in childhood represents a phase of experimentation with imaginative possibilities and hence new subjectivities, obviously inspired by her state of mind at the time of writing. Oyeyemi's childhood was defined by the process of imagination; hence one could argue that her experience of childhood influences her imaginative subjectivity.

For Oyeyemi, imagination is a process of subjective identification, largely inspired and reflective of childhood space and time. It is a process that allows transition from one world to the other and from one identity to another, while confronting the limitations of anthropocentric frameworks of identity construction. Hence, imagination becomes a process for shamanism, and for reaching out to "a universal consciousness" of postmodernism (Ihab Hassan)[156] that Gaylard (2005) has stated, opens up a "Pandora's box of childhood fears, repressions, social taboos, secrets, neuroses, traumas, and the repository of wishes, dreams, the fantastic, the fabulous, and the transcendent" (3-4).The childhood that Gaylard privileges in this statement becomes the space for the transcendent, for experimentation with alternative forms and discourses that constitute postcolonial and postmodern forms of imagination, towards what he calls an "African postmodernity." Childhood is therefore a space of imaginative experimentation in the continuum of the spiritual and physical, and their slippages and combinations, a process that puts the discourse of childhood at the centre of postcolonial and postmodern forms of identity construction, formation and consciousness. The *being* of childhood, its *potency*, one could argue, is its symbolic capital in the dialectics of identity formation and how the

[156] Ihab Hassan "The New Gnosticism: Speculations on an Aspect of the Postmodern Mind," p. 60-77.

practices of reading it can be approached. As *being*, childhood is potent – it is an evolution and a process. This does not mean it is amorphous or nebulous, but rather that despite it being within structures of living and feeling that are adultist in orientation, its ontology is irruptive of the structures that shackle it. The repressions, fears, social taboos, neuroses and traumas of *being*, place childhood within the domain of imaginative subjectivity. Oyeyemi's fiction demonstrates the project of imaginative subjectivity, through several talking points. Having established the salience of childhood as a space, place and time of imaginative subjectivity and creativity in Oyeyemi's fiction – also arising from autobiographical experiences – it follows that the tropes of meaning in her works are related to the experience of migration, the embodiment of diasporic identity and therefore the tensions that arise from the constant possession of her characters by ghosts of diverse places, spaces and times related to their childhood.

In Helen Oyeyemi's the *Icarus Girl*, the trope of the Yoruba *abiku* child is explored, albeit through a doppelganger and twin motif. The protagonist, eight year old Jess is possessed by a spirit twin by the name Titiola (Jess, for the inability to pronounce this name, gives her the nickname TillyTilly), who is presented as an *alter-ego*, of Jess's Nigerian genealogy. TillyTilly is the result of the actual death of Jess's twin called Fern, at birth. The trope of the *abiku*, famously portrayed by the Nigerian author Benjamin Okri, is in this case complicated by a racial dynamic, as well as a crossing of geographical and cultural borders – across continental barriers. It is pitted therefore against such things as modern forms of psychology, themselves scientific myths of (post)modern dilemmas of identity. Hence in this tale of twin childhoods and doppelgangers is the tension of myths at the centre of childhood's struggle with diverse and divergent belongings and genealogies. These can be referred to as diasporic *abiku* childhoods. However, the power of the *abiku* motif is to allow worlds and identities to intermingle and to take us away from exclusively anthropocentric identity frameworks. In fact, the power of imagination is explored in the *abiku*'s ability to switch worlds, places, spaces and times, stretching childhood's economy of imagination to elastic ends. Ethereal and celestial worlds, products of this imagination reflect on the decentred subjectivity of the protagonists in Oyeyemi's novels, and also (re)centre childhood as a discourse of

influence in contemporary forms of processing and forming identities. Childhood is therefore deployed to draw trajectories on multi-national and multi-racial senses of identity that are rampant in diasporic experiences. The *abiku* motif becomes part of the process of mediation that allows the protagonists in Oyeyemi's work to live at the intersection of different continents, cultures, places and spaces and therefore simultaneously claim multiple histories, genealogies and therefore identities.

But living in a world of multiple identities, histories, genealogies, spaces, places and times comes with the experience of being a decentred subject, and therefore the site of a vicious identity struggle. It could well be argued that the quest for simultaneously living and embodying various identities signals the anguish for the lack of a definitive space of enunciation. Oyeyemi's works dramatise the anguish and anxiety through the split personalities of her protagonists, the *alter egos*, the warring doppelgangers and twins. At a macro-level, racial, national and ethnic identities clash, each with their varying spatio-temporal genealogies and histories competing for visibility. At a micro-level, the politics of identity involving the individual self, and that sense of the selfhood, as a *cogito ergo sum* is under intense scrutiny. Rationality, thought and the individual senses of identity which Appiah (2005) ascribes to the elements of wit, intelligence, among others, become crucial elements of critique in the everyday world of existence. They are the "ethics of identity," which according to Appiah provide a deontological framework of identity being problematised. These micro-aspects of individuality are the site for an intense battle of the self for the childhoods in Oyeyemi's works. Jess struggles with trying to decipher who she is, often times keeping to the safety of her mind and thoughts and locking herself in cupboards. She is engaged in a struggle to reconcile her split psyche, and this gets complicated when she travels to Nigeria where she faces the psycho-spiritual realities of her maternal genealogy, in the form of a twin spirit, apparently her spiritual and magical double.

Jess's trip to Nigeria unearths the mythologies of her maternal genealogy and her return to London is affected by her being possessed with her double TillyTilly and therefore haunted by the place whose only link through her maternal genealogy is the dead twin

Fern. Hence the magic of places and spaces becomes important in understanding Jess's split personalities spread over the two continents and accessed through her stream of consciousness. The way to present the idea of living in two continents and cultures simultaneously is through a psycho-spiritual existence of childhood, which finds its affirmation in Gaylard's "Pandora's box" of the fears and repressions of childhoods' *lebenswelt*. The trope of the *abiku* child opens up grounds for the exploration of psycho-spiritual frontiers of existence that define these childhoods, in a manner that allows us to map childhood discourse into the micro and macro aspects of identity formation being discoursed in Oyeyemi's fiction. The child figure in *The Icarus Girl* is the site of an identity process, of reconciliation, simultaneity, experimentation and multiple consciousnesses. This figure is at the centre of a debate on the frontier of frameworks that define identity. It is at the centre of a project of imagination, in which its engagement with postcolonial terms of reference and identification are ruptured by the attitude and the feeling of an embodied postmodern experience, and borne of diasporic *identification*. It is on this complicated and polemic note that Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* is located.

The Opposite House takes on the idea of myth and identity. It portrays the lives of a Black Cuban immigrant family in London, taking us through the annals of diasporic history. The protagonist of the story, Maja, is brought by her parents to London from Cuba at the age of five. Cuba and its childhood memories haunt the adult Maja. Moreover, Cuba is where she can trace her genealogy to various continents, places and spaces: "In my blood is a bright chain of transfusion; Spaniards, West Africans, indigenous Cubans, even the Turkos – the Cuban Lebanese" (98). This statement captures Maja's sense of identity and history. Traced back to West Africa, Maja's family, descendants of Cuban sugar plantation slaves are presented as having traversed a triangular spatio-temporal map of slavery – Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. They are products of a tri-continental history. Moreover, *The Opposite House* reflects on the entanglement of spatio-temporal maps, embodied in the identity *angst* of Maja and her family, through an intermeshing of mythical tales, multi-lingual subjectivities and the pastiche of multiple beliefs, customs and religious rituals made visible through material cultures and practices. Pantheons that cut across Africa, the Caribbean and Europe are

blended together in an effort to live across eons, oceans and continents. The narrative structure of *The Opposite House* reflects the angst and the entanglement of identity practices, customs, rituals and material cultures. This is achieved through a mythopoetic narrative structure that involves the magical realist narrative of the "somewhere house" of multiple gods with multiple origins, and the story of Maja and her family living in London. These worlds are juxtaposed against each other as part of a mythopoetic narrative structure that sustains the different worlds, cultures, spaces and places that they explore. Maja's mother Chabella's altars for the hybrid pantheons of Afro-Cuban and European gods is the visibility of material cultures synecdochic of the hybrid, pastiche and multiple beliefs, customs and rituals that explain the variant genealogies of identities being discoursed in the novel.

Maja, the female protagonist in *The Opposite House* is therefore a product of multinational histories, which converge in Cuba, the place that haunts her present existence, as she says, "I close my eyes, and my Cuba comes […]" (106). Myths and realities of origin are therefore separated by a thin line, as is the physical and spiritual world of humans, gods and deities. The narrative also weaves in and out of these worlds, hinting at multiple influences in history, mythology, legends and tales. *The Opposite House* stretches the frontiers of historico-mythical experience and consciousness, heralding the "New Diaspora" that enacts multiple selfhoods, acquired in the actual migration of bodies, histories and mythologies across different continents. Maja's mother Chabella, for example, demonstrates this through her multi-lingual subjectivity. She speaks English, French, German and Spanish while she also practices Santeria religion – an Afro-Cuban hybrid religion that merges the worship of Yoruba deities with the veneration of Roman Catholic saints. These syncretic sacred practices foreground religious histories that reflect migrant cultures, portrayed in what Appiah (1992) refers to as "old gods, new worlds." The notion of syncretism can be found in the idea of religious belief in the *Opposite House*. Religious practice, performed by Maja's mother, is associated with the notion of transient identity construction, in which hybrid and syncretic gods become a metonymic reflection of movement of history, myth, belief and bodies, from one continent to another. Santeria religion here is not only symbolic and

metonymic of diasporic identity, but also a visible product of a fusion of mythologies and histories of identity. This apparent syncretic logic of religious practices has been examined by Appiah's (1992) discussion on religious beliefs, rituals and practices, which are aimed at problematising notions of rationality, theory, tradition and modernity. Appiah uses specific case studies, to push for a syncretic logic of co-existence that is found in the enactment of religious rituals, beliefs and customs by human and non-human actors.

Appiah's symbolic use of the biblical phrase "in my Father's house" allows him to construct an argument about the complex ontology of the diasporic subject whose antecedents are African in genealogy, culture and mythology. He maps out the numerous tributaries that constellate at that space between "the postcolonial and postmodern."[157] Appiah discusses religion, its rituals, customs and practices as an essential part of identity formation, or as part of the process of formulating converging strands of identity. It is interesting to therefore see how religion in Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* is a marker of how Maja's mother identifies herself. Indeed religious artifacts reflect residual cultures that have a mobile history and are therefore metonymic of contemporary migrant and diasporic identities portrayed in the novel.

Religion on the other hand, introduces another notion of spirituality, where ways of identification are related to otherworlds. In fact, the tyranny caused by the mobility of childhoods, cultures, histories, legends and mythologies creates possibilities of imagination that transcend the fixity of place, history, culture and senses of identification. Imagination becomes an act of rupturing the boundaries of realism and grappling with fractured and fragmented histories, culture and identity. Imagination here is a process of identity formation, and of finding coherence out of fragmentation. The notion of spirituality allows for imagination to process itself in a specific direction, as part of a way of identification, of a history or mythology of identity, as in the case of Chabella. The notion of spirituality in Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, is also pursued through the identity

[157] Appiah's own experience of his childhood in the Ashanti region of Ghana, his bi-racial status and life in Europe and America allows him to present interesting experiential arguments about the syncretic nature of diasporic subjectivity.

struggle of the protagonist Jess. She is possessed with an *abiku* spirit of her dead twin and therefore haunted by her maternal Nigerian antecedents. A trip to Nigeria foregrounds this possession, as her body and soul fight to maintain an organic whole and find coherence within their discourse of identity formation. Another trip to Nigeria at the end of the text becomes one of self-exorcism. Oyeyemi's works therefore explore psycho-spiritual worlds, as part of a process of identity formation for the protagonists, whose physical worlds are a product of the mobility of bodies, myths of identity and history. At the present, these worlds are haunted by not only the childhood places they have come from, but also the histories, legends and mythologies of these places. Africa is an idea, a myth and history that can be traced through actual bloodlines in *The Icarus Girl* and through myths, legends and transnational historical events in *The Opposite House*.

5.3 "Limitless vistas of fantasy": Reading the Magic and Reality of *abiku* Childhood

The portrayal of these worlds, therefore works through the process of experimentation, with narratives that are de-centred and fragmented. Positions, points of view, albeit influenced by childhood images, figures and memories, are multiply determined by the simultaneity of histories, myths of origin and senses of identity. The reality of the present is distorted by the magic and spirituality of history, as the chronotopes of space and time are distorted. Indeed, how do you portray spatio-temporally fragmented diasporic worlds? In the world of childhood (as a figure, image or memory), is contained the potential for experimentation. As a figure, childhood's world embodies evolution and transition as it is always at the interstice or ambiguous space of *becoming*. As a memory, it contains a diasporic consciousness for the adult self who looks back with nostalgia and longing, making the adult self at the present moment feel internally diasporic, because of an awareness of movement in time and space in their period of augmentation. As an image, it draws on a semiotics of play, desires, fears and what Cooper calls "the limitless vistas of fantasy" (1998:16), or what Gaylard calls "wishes, dream, the fantastic, the fabulous, and the transcendent" (2005:4). These childhoods are portrayed as sites of experimentation with new forms of identity and of the self that rise from autobiographical

experiences of migration and heritage: of multiple histories and genealogies inherent in myths and legends that inform the identity politics of diasporic selfhood.

The portrayal of these childhoods therefore takes on, using the words of Jacque Ranciere (2006) a "politics of aesthetics," in which representation becomes grounds for portraying a plethora of narratives, worlds, influences and points of view that politicise the way we have come to know regimes of representation. Terrestrial and celestial worlds intermingle; reality and myth co-exist in ways that problematise notions of linear space and time. The *abiku* childhood of Jess for instance is complicated by its crossing of continental borders and by its mixed race ontology. Indeed, how can the *abiku* motif that has been associated with an African literary historiography and a Yoruba worldview, and that has been normatively read in the context of a Nigerian spatio-temporality, be read in a newer cross-border, cross-race context? Do the critical tools of magical realism, used in reading this motif (Cooper, 1998; Gaylard, 2005), suffice in a case that is complicated by race and a transcontinental context? Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* poses some challenges to these tools of critical analysis.

The predominant critique of magical realism from both Cooper (1998) and Gaylard (2005), points to the socio-political and economic conditions that attend to Africa as a continent with a history of colonialism, as well as with a particularly fragmented and chaotic political climate. Artistic forms therefore take on dimensions that reflect on this fragmented and chaotic socio-political and economic environment. The question is; how do you capture the fragmentation, chaos and anarchy through artistic forms? Magical realism, for these critics, allows for the portrayal of diverse and alternative realities. Multiple influences, traditions and histories complicate the space and time chronotopes of artistic representation and so magical realism allows for what Cooper calls a "disrespect of boundaries" (1998:39), of space and time. Furthermore, Cooper asks, is it a mode, genre, style or politics? (12) This question collapses the argument on form and content, allowing it (magical realism) to thrive on "transition, on the process of change, borders and ambiguity" (Cooper, 1998:15). Indeed, mobile childhoods, as in the case of flights of imagination and senses of identity as represented in Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, invite,

but are not limited to, representational strategies like magical realism. The notion of a racialised *abiku* would seem to complicate magical realism as a prism of analysis that has been predicated on a specific Yoruba worldview. In fact, in the case of *The Icarus Girl*, a Yoruba worldview is one of many perspectives in contention for the protagonist Jess. In view of such competing worldviews, Harry Garuba (2003) offers an interesting analytical paradigm, which he refers to as "animist materialism," predicated on his idea that:

> [M]agical elements of thought [in an African social, cultural, economic and political milieu] assimilate new developments in science, technology, and the organization of the world within a basically 'magical' worldview'. (267)

In this way, Garuba (2003) proffers, the world is continuously "re-enchanted." If we consider Garuba's analytical paradigm, in the light of, for instance Jess's competing frameworks of identity – an *abiku* worldview contesting a scientific psychoanalytical one – then we might want to make the assertion, as he does, that:

> A recurrent theme in accounts of the meeting between traditional ways of life and modernity is the clash of cultures and the agony of the man or woman caught in the throes of opposing conceptions of the world and of social life. In these narratives a binary structure is usually erected, and within this world the agonistic struggle of the protagonist is drawn. The animistic trajectory of accommodation sketched here appears to belie the rigid binarisms of this narrative and to undermine the agonistic relationship often drawn by an elite in search of sites of agency and identity. What may be much closer to reality is that animist logic subverts this binarism and destabilizes the hierarchy of science over magic and the secularist narrative of modernity by reabsorbing historical time into the matrices of myth and magic. (270)

Hence, Garuba seeks to problematise the hierarchies of worldviews, albeit through how modernity is assimilated in animist worldviews via the "re-enchantment of the world" by magic. Indeed, the competing worldviews of the *abiku* child have always been in contention with the scientific notions of child mortality rate in Nigeria. However, while Garuba's analytical paradigm seems to encompass what he calls a "multiplicity of representational practices" (2003:272) and therefore a larger scale of representative practices, the context of Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* still foregrounds the challenge of a racialised and migrant myth that manifests itself in ways that point to simultaneously competing interpretations. In other words, what happens when the myth of an *abiku* child – in its (sur)reality – manifests itself in grounds of racial contestation and therefore of simultaneous interpretative contexts? How can this "animist realism" of the *abiku* child be read in a diasporic and cross-cultural context?

The *abiku* child who traverses multiple worlds is a *topos* of representation, as well as an image and figure who embodies memories, historical and mythical landscapes in the imaginative subjectivities of the novel. The *abiku* becomes, in the words of Cooper, a "fictional device of the supernatural, taken from any source that the writer chooses, syncretized with a developed realistic, historical perspective" (1998:16). *The Icarus Girl* uses the motif of a transposed *abiku* as an entry into a supernatural and spiritual world which connects together Jess's world in London, to the other in Lagos Nigeria, pitting these places as zones of continuity and simultaneously as gulfs of difference in her multiple worlds. However, the magic of the *abiku*, to connect seemingly disparate and multiple worlds, allows for a semblance of coherence in Jess's life, as well as a nodal point from which one can draw trajectories on the path of Jess's schizophrenic and nervous subjectivity. Indeed, Gaylard (2005) makes the observation that:

> [M]agic is enabled by the belief in interconnection and correspondences; that all things are in relation, association, contiguity, contagion, correspondence, and proximity with each other, and hence influence may be extended from one to the other. (44)

Magic, as Gaylard proffers, allows for the defamiliarisation of realist perspectives. In fact, defamiliarisation links the new to the old, and therefore produces a synthesis of newness. In this way, "old gods" are brought into the "new worlds" of London, as we will see with the case of Maja's family in Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*.

Moreover, *abiku* childhood is a project of imagination. It engages with imaginative subjectivities that range from as collective planes as those of nations and cultures in the allegorical representations in Ben Okri and Cheney-Cocker's works, to those as micro-subjectivities as individuals in Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*. Potentially, *abiku* childhood's adoption of postmodern attitudes is a politics of resistance portrayed in its suspicion of adultist grand narratives as well as of what Gaylard refers to as "linearity, closure, which leads to indeterminacy and decentering and emphasis upon the apparently marginal, irrelevant and incommensurable" (2005:35). Gaylard's observations pick up on Cooper's (1998) views about the ways in which magical realism makes use of postmodern devices and this is perhaps where the two critics also realise the analytical shortcomings of magical realism. Gaylard locates the use of these devices, at the juncture of postcolonial experience and postmodern attitudes and consciousnesses. However, Gaylard, points out that "postcolonialism inflects postmodernism with a sense of urgency and an emphasis upon the precise geopolitical location of any given entity or phenomenon" (2005:244).[158] This statement allows us to acknowledge the context-specificity of these devices, to be able to locate them in discursive formations that underlie their usage and open ways in which to assess authorial specificities, for instance, as part of a context that defines the usage of these devices.[159] We are therefore, from the start, made aware of the speaking positions of authors, and of the "nomadic identities" that underlie not only the intellectual lives of theorists and critics who espouse the postcolonial and the postmodern (Cooper, 1998:12-13), but also the fiction writers like Oyeyemi, who are conscious of their own

[158] Gaylard's (2005) assertions can however be problematically construed to imply that the "postcolonial" provides the experience, while the postmodern provides the "aesthetics".

[159] Indeed, Linda Hutcheon (1988) also explains that a postmodern poetics, unlike a modernist one, informs discourse with the notion of "context," so that context provides the "pedagogies" like that of Bhabha's (1994) "historicism" which is echoed in Brian McHale's (1987) notion of "ontology," a notion he examines in relation to modernism's "epistemology." The idea of a context for these critics highlighted specific ways of approach and analysis, something which they ascribe to postmodernism.

subjectivities, duplicities and complicities as diasporic subjects who can trace their genealogies and multiple histories in different continents in their craft. This consciousness and awareness underlies the notion of "self-reflexivity" that ironically puts in doubt diasporic subjects' sense of "rootedness." Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Gaylard argue that "self-reflexivity" is important in destabilising the positions of narrative authority and authorial voices in the text. In other words, the imaginatively subjective landscape of *The Icarus Girl* and *The Opposite House* can be found in the anxiety of narrative and authorial voices, if we for instance, keep in mind Oyeyemi's position as a diasporic subject.

Therefore, diasporicity becomes a conceptual context that informs the discursive formations of Oyeyemi's works. As this chapter began by pointing out, the notion of the diasporic perspective, in relation to the other chapters is a shifting dynamic, in which in Oyeyemi's works it takes on an experiential and embodied subjectivity as compared to just the authorial diasporic consciousness in the works discussed in previous chapters. Indeed, Oyeyemi who is part of a "new diaspora" is distinguished by the new temporal classifications of the offspring of first generation post-independent African immigrants to Europe and America, whose parents are their direct genealogical link to Africa. As a defining and conceptual dynamic, diasporic subjectivity is differentiated by aspects of time and space, by histories of migration and exile, whether self-imposed, involuntary, voluntary, economic, political or social. The products are ascribed variously as immigrants, migrants, exiles or refugees. These varieties of migration diverge at the point of departure from putative homelands, but converge at the shared history of mobility, as well as the notion of nostalgia or a "homing desire" (Brah, 1996:180). The notion of diaspora is moreover underlined by the processual element of mobility/movement, something outlined by Gilroy's (1993) use of the ship as a chronotope in his idea of the "black Atlantic." The desire for home and the homesickness of fiction (George, 1995), the anthropocentricity of the notion of diaspora (Braziel & Mannur, 2003)[160] as well as the shifting cartographies of diaspora (Brah, 1996) are all underlined by the mobility of

[160] See Braziel, J E and Mannur A (2003) "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies," p. 1-23.

narratives, histories, myths, legends and therefore diverge and converge at points of differentiation and disjuncture. This methodological outlook of the notion of diaspora is well outlined by Avtar Brah:

> Multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory. It is within this confluence of narrativity that 'diasporic community' is differently imagined under different historical circumstances. (183)

The importance of narrative is underscored in the statements above, pointing to an inexorable search for coherence, for linkages of memories, stories from macro and micro ethnoscapes of the diasporic community. In a sense, as a "diasporic community," imagination is essential in its process of identification. Through the narrative process, whether in divergence or convergence, this "diasporic community" finds ways of identification in an already globalised cultural terrain. In fact, as a community the diaspora is de-territorialised, making use of imagination as a methodology for creating networks of identification that Appadurai refers to as "diasporic public spheres" (1995:22). For Appadurai, these spheres are aided by forms of mass media that break through national and continental boundaries, making *diasporas* culturally in connection with their homelands.

The project of imagination underlies how diaspora can be conceptualised. Indeed, the realities of diasporic subjectivities are mediated by imagination. In this way, Oyeyemi's life as a child was mediated by the project of imagination. Having moved into Lewisham London, enrolled in a new school and facing a different culture and neighbourhood, her imagination mediates her subjectivity towards these new circumstances. Her characters in *The Opposite House* are a portrayal of the anxieties of imagination – they live in a diasporic space which is filled with histories from Cuba, Germany and West Africa. These various histories are simultaneously lived, through aspects like language and

religion. For example, Santeria religion practised by Chabella in *The Opposite House* is a pastiche of cultural practice that connects together the disparate histories of her diasporic family. The other narrative of the "somewhere house" is a mythopoetic attempt by Oyeyemi, juxtaposed as a magical reality of simultaneously co-existing histories and myths, with one door facing Lagos and the other opening up to London. *The Opposite House* portrays the complex narratives of diasporic histories. The genealogies of the family of Maja are constellated, via different continents with different histories. The predominant history is that of slavery as it is a point of confluence for all the other narratives that leads us to the recent history in this narrative of the sugar cane plantations of Cuba. In light of the complexity of genealogies and histories, the narrative in *The Opposite House* is mythopoetic: a constellation of mythical worlds and genealogical strands that make up the history of Maja's diasporic familial lines. The myth and magic of the "somewhere house" is made to co-exist with the reality of Maja's family living in London. The "somewhere house," is portrayed as a home that is neither here nor there, its precariousness, as part celestial, part terrestrial, portrays the fragility of a diasporic sense of belonging and identity. Its mythical portrayals, with characters that can be recognised from a variety of pantheons and religious myths presents a mythopoetic narrative structure that works like a syzygy.[161]

5.4 The Racialised *Abiku* in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*

Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* uses doppelgangers to create a twinning motif, by contrasting the main protagonist Jessamy Harrison with her *alter ego* TillyTilly. At the same time, the *alter ego* is contrasted to the *abiku* identity of Jess, one that is later revealed to be maternally linked to the death, at birth, of her twin sister named Fern. As an *abiku*, Jess is said to live in the real world, the bush and the spiritual world. Her precocious demeanour is defined by her uncanny silence. She keeps to herself, hiding in cupboards and writing haiku poetry.[162] Her preference for enclosed spaces embodies her

[161] In using the word syzygy, I echo Gerald Gaylard's description of African postcolonialism, in terms of how it is a practice in syzygy – where writers and critics constantly engage with the notions of similarities and differences and the thin lines separating them. They use the devices of postmodernism, where those similar or dissimilar are always read as seemingly connected in one way or the other.

[162] Haiku is originally a form of Japanese poetry adapted in English and consisting of three lines and seventeen syllables.

feeling of self-containment: "Jess preferred cupboards and enclosed spaces to gardens" (4). She lives in her imagination, and the novel mostly delves into her stream of consciousness. Her imagination is presented as what defines how she subjectively apprehends the world around her. Indeed her imagination soars, Icarus-like, with disregard for what people around her think of it. Reclusive and hermitic, she shies away from places outside cupboards, choosing to remain morosely silent:

> Outside the cupboard, Jess felt as if she was in a place where
> everything moved past too fast, all colours, all people talking
> and wanting her to say things. So she kept her eyes to the ground,
> which pretty much stayed the same. (4)

In her flights of imagination, she writes Haiku for hours (6-7). Jess's unusual deportment is further complicated by an impending trip to Nigeria, the land of her maternal genealogy, which haunts her imagination. We are quickly warned that "it [her identity struggles as we witness later] all STARTED in Nigeria" (6) [Emphasis retained]. As she makes the physical journey with her parents to where "it all started," it is like a date with destiny – she is journeying to face that "Pandora's box" of fears, repressions and anxieties. Nigeria in the distance that she can imagine it is a dark, hydra-headed monster that looms "out from across all the water and land," and with animist ascriptions "reaching out for her with spindly arms [...] wanting to pull her down against its beating heart, to the centre of the heat, so she would pop and crackle like marshmallow" (9). Having done some research on her own about Nigeria, its reality in her imagination becomes magical. It acquires a personified monstrosity that is about to catch up with her. Her sense of the self becomes multiple in recognition of the (inter)subjectivity that defines her *abiku*-ness, her practico-sensory self, as well as her *alter ego*. She throws a tantrum, screaming at the "leering idea of her mother's country" (9) and therefore causing a public spectacle in the plane. The complexity of this (inter)subjectivity is captured however in the statement that: "some part of her was sitting hunched up small, far away, thinking scared thoughts, surprised at what was happening, although this was not new" (9). Jess's *alter ego* is portrayed, within herself as that haven that is self-contained,

cloistered from the chaotic self and cocooned from the destructive tantrum-throwing self that exposed itself ignominiously to the aeroplane public.

Jess's sense of oddity, at the airport, which is reflected in her stream of consciousness with the reference "half-and-half child" (13), seems to position her in the grey area between her mother's Yoruba linguistic fluency and her father's white statue-like out-of-place demeanour (12). The similarities and contrasts of place, space, smells and colours, with people walking around her makes her imagination fly, increasing her sense of schizophrenia and paranoia about her idea of belonging in these two seemingly disparate physical and cultural worlds of London and Lagos. Her maternal grandfather's home becomes the place of genealogical discovery, as well as the recovery of her Nigerian roots. Arrival in Nigeria opens up a different reality, as new cultural names from maternal genealogies are found for her. Her Nigerian name, Wuraola, is recovered for her by grandfather Gbenga Oyegbebi.

Interestingly, grandfather Oyegbebi's name, means "kingship lives here," (27). Hence, the signifiers of genealogical history are embodied not only in this maternal patriarch of Jess but also in the spatio-temporal history of the Oyegbebi compound. The tales of lineage-retention and extension are passed down to Jess by Aunty Funke (31). The material cultures portrayed in the built environment and their genealogies, as explained by Aunty Funke, represent an anchoring of the genealogy of the Oyegbebi household, as it is traced from the 1870s for Jess's benefit. The contrast, of course is found in Jess's paternal genealogy, which is of a different mould – of individualism, of a non-spatial order and not determined by the extended familial ones that she finds in her Nigerian one. Considering her status as an *abiku*, this genealogical history foreshadows Jess's tensions about her sense of place in the world. As an *abiku*, her place in the world is one of unrootedness, what to borrow McCabe (2002) words can be called "vagrancy and errancy."[163] McCabe provides a detailed examination of the concept of *abiku* in the Yoruba cosmological history, outlining etymologies of the term as well as delineating how as a term, it's meanings are layered and how this concept not only has mytho-

[163] McCabe, D. (2002) "Histories of Errancy: Oral Yoruba Abiku Texts and Soyinka's 'Abiku,'" p. 45-74.

symbolic capital, but also material dimensions reflected in rituals, customs and practices. Therefore, in grandfather Oyegbebi, Jess is pitted against the forces of lineage retention and perpetuation, for he embodies in the cosmological realm, forces that will soon destabilise her existence. McCabe calls these forces the *ile* – cosmological forces that work towards "fettering" the *abiku* child into an exclusively terrestrial existence. By re-naming her Wuraola, Grandfather Oyegbebi symbolically retrieves Jess, appropriating her into a Yoruba worldview, and in a sense interpellating her into the same world.

Things get complicated when Jess discovers the presence of another person, who knows her by name and who lives in the abandoned "Boys' Quarters." When TillyTilly appears to Jess, it occurs as an innocuous event, the uncanny nature of it l hidden in Jess's need to find a friend, in this strange and alien environment. TillyTilly, as Jess names her, appears at first, as a local girl, shaped and dressed like a destitute girl. While Jess could make out her age, she ignores some of her physical oddities; her strange dark eyes and disproportionate physical features. Like a phantom, she appears out of nowhere and for a moment, Jess feels as though this has been her shadow, something familiar – perhaps the figment of her own imagination? TillyTilly echoes Jess's voice, making it seem like Jess was dealing with a doppelganger (42-43). TillyTilly's magical abilities, including her omniscience, represent the wild side of magic that at first seems real for Jess, who thrives in this wild, magical world she is being driven into. Taken by the hand, Jess is led to experience magical feats, as TillyTilly opens the padlocks of the amusement park and seems to have access to Jess's grandfather's study. The reader is awed by the two girls' seemingly effortless access to the knowledge of varied intellectual traditions including the poetry of Coleridge, Anglo-Arthurian legends, the Bible, among other forms of knowledge that Brenda Cooper (2009) attributes to Oyeyemi's sense of herself as a product of multiple narratives, worldviews and cultures. Indeed, as Cooper (2008b) also observes, the title of the text emerges from Greek mythology, while the consciousness and attitude of imagination is influenced by the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Certainly, the eccentricity of Dickinson's poetry, its examination of death and immortality, draws parallels with Jess's precocious demeanour, her affinity to closeted spaces, her flights of imagination and the magical realism that underlies her *alter ego* and *abiku* personalities.

The Icarus Girl is therefore a product of a medley of influences which include myths, traditions, narratives, poetry and legends that explain the author's sense of her genealogy in her new diasporic world. Cooper refers to this as part of the imagination of a "New Diaspora" that collapses boundaries between Black British writing and writings of the Black Diaspora in the "new world." For Cooper, the sense of identity for writers like Oyeyemi is signified by things such as the texture of their hair as well as their skin colour, which connects them to the diasporic blackscape, despite its differentiated histories, myths, legends and narratives. Hence, Cooper's (2008a) earlier argument about material cultures in postcolonial migrant writing is extended further.[164]

For Jess therefore, her multiple genealogies of history, time and place, provide a variation of narrative, myth and the influence of legend, hence her familiarity with a medley of literary, intellectual, mythical and historical narratives. *The Icarus Girl* delineates the agony of defining herself, indeed her multiple selves, and her first voyage to Nigeria starts as a process of self-immolation, towards a rediscovery of herself. The idea of temporality, as it stands now is complicated. Jess's life at the moment, as we realise at the end of the text, is already determined and influenced at the point of her birth, when her twin sister Fern dies. As she realises later, her life is scattered before and after birth. She occupies multiple worlds defined by an *abiku* identity vicariously lived through the shadow of her dead twin sister Fern and the other magical realist world brought to her by TillyTilly. TillyTilly is a syzygy-like persona who has much in common and also in contrast with Jess, but who provides her with the necessary flights of imagination. Jess's multiple personality therefore foregrounds simultaneous spatio-temporalities, defined by myths, legends and narratives of death and life as well as her racial extraction as a "half-and-half child."

Her sojourn through the abandoned "Boys" Quarters" (68-71), portrays gothic-style narrative, as she tries to uncover the grotesque and haunted architecture. The "Boys

[164] Cooper (2008a) extends her examination of diasporic writing from an earlier position about material cultures by linking a "new generation" of African writers to an earlier tradition of diasporic writing that is informed by major dispersal events in history like the slave trade.

Quarters" is portrayed as an architectural synechdoche of Jess's sense of the self: abandonment, haunted emptiness, as well as an autotelic hunger to explore the mysteries of its silenced, dark, dank and cobwebbed corridors. Opening each door seems like a journey into discovering the inner terrains of her hidden past (69). Her discovery of the shrine with candles, as well as the charcoal-drawn image of the grotesque-looking black woman with "thick, glossy hair" (70), is one that is to have far-reaching consequences in her psyche during the moments of her flights of imagination. The shrine represents material cultures of worship, and towards the end of the text, images, figures and statues collapse into each other as this particular image in the shrine takes centre stage in Jess's battles with her multiple personalities.

Her multiple worlds and genealogies are in constant battles with each other while her flights of imagination make her reach a state of delirium that affects her physical state of health. A return to England after discovering TillyTilly and her magical worlds and capabilities results in a state of delirium, fevers and the expectancy of TillyTilly's imminent magical arrival. The indeterminacy of this "strange illness," as discovered by her doctor (76), is the portrayal, of an indeterminate psychosomatic state. It is temporarily remedied by "*pepe* soup with digestible specks of ground beef in it by her mother, and chicken soup with barley by her English grandmother and she began to sleep properly again" (76) – A soothing mixture of food from both cultures. Indeed, she is a "half-and-half child" of multiple culinary cultures and whose sense of wholeness means a simultaneous and strategic imbibing of these cultures.

In her classroom, the image of "Miss Patel reading a passage about Sir Francis Drake's travels from a thin hardback book" (77) portrays the hybridity of her world of mixed narratives, legends and practitioners (Miss Patel) of a "New Diaspora." Jess's world ranges from the faraway narratives of her Nigerian maternal forefathers, the legends of their existence in the nineteenth century, including the relations that "had all scattered across Nigeria, some as far as Minna and Abuja, others to Benin, Ife, Port Harcourt" (31), to the legendary narratives of Sir Francis Drake's oceanic escapades. Myths, legends and narratives are the genealogical legacies that contextualise her sense of identity in this

"new world." These diverse worlds however bring out a violent disposition in Jess's many selves in the form of "panic attacks" accompanied by bouts of screaming. They seem to create intense feelings of isolation on her part, aggravated by a comment from a classmate, Colleen McLain that "Maybe Jessamy has all these "attacks" because she can't make up her mind whether she's black or white!" (82). Her perpetual state of tension, nervousness, precocity and hermitic disposition culminates into these attacks as she struggles to reconcile her culturally fragmented selves.

When TillyTilly shows up in London, the magical world opens up, as she is once again teleported to houses, in an invisible state. The line, for Jess, between what is real and magical is very thin. Images and reality have a thin line separating them. The world of imagination, particularly in the fiction works referenced, present interesting parallels: narratives from diverse worlds re-create Jess's worldview and her sense of the self. The imaginative landscape in her life can also be likened to her mother's vocation as a writer who spends hours on her computer, isolated from her family and in her own imaginative world. The power of narrative, in proffering a sense of the self, is found in the many stories her mother reads for her, including the sessions where she reads the stories she writes to Jess. Jess lives in her imagination, the power of it allowing her to traverse TillyTilly's magical world, to experiment with reality and blur the lines between the terrestrial and celestial, the real and unreal, the dead and the living, the fictional and non-fictional. It is these stories which construct a landscape of imagination, that define her childhood. That she precociously lives in her imagination also reflects the thin line between her own imaginative subjectivity and, as explained earlier, authorial subjectivity and experience. Her hermitic, precocious and magical world of childhood reflects the author's own struggles to live in a self-sufficient imaginative world, having faced a new and radically different cultural reality in Lewisham London, after only arriving at the tender age of four. The (inter)textualities we find in *The Icarus Girl*, which occur allusively in the form of legends, myths and historical narratives, reflect authorial influences – portraying Oyeyemi's diverse intellectual influences – a product of not only wandering imagination but also a nomadic identity.

The process of writing, portraying Jess's childhood life, is therefore one that Oyeyemi navigates, portraying the diverse narratives and storylines that influenced and affected her own childhood. These are stories and narratives of identification that portray the disjuncture and difference of diasporic identity process formation. The centrality of fiction, indeed the meta-fictional structure of *The Icarus Girl*, which is found in the numerous allusions to imagination, to varied fictions and narrative formations, reflects the importance of imaginative subjectivity on the part of the author and indeed as definitive of diasporic identity formation. To find stories and narrative formations that one can relate to, that in one's childhood, as in the case of Oyeyemi, defined its identity, that helped in ways to reconcile a scattered self and that allowed for a self-contained identity formation is a central concern of *The Icarus Girl*. Through meta-fiction, the characters in different books and stories that Jess interacts with seem to transmute into her real world. Indeed her imaginative world is central to the *worldliness* of the social formations that define her life. She seems to move in and out of imagination, living in and out of stories and works of fiction. Characters in these works jump out of the page and into her life, re-creating and re-forming her subjectivities.

Parallels can be drawn sometimes between the meta-fictional allusions of *The Icarus Girl* and authorial experiences. In examining the diverse fictional allusions and storylines that can be drawn in *The Icarus Girl*, Jess's imaginative world and sense of subjectivity is influenced by such characters as Beth in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. This text, a mid-nineteenth century publication, set in a house in Concord, Massachusetts in America, has striking autobiographical childhood experiences influencing it, much like *The Icarus Girl* and Helen Oyeyemi's own childhood experiences. As allusions are drawn to various texts like *Little Women*, the characters in those books are read within the text itself, with Jess, the protagonist, and a character in *The Icarus Girl*, involved in a self-reflexive and meta-fictional process of reading:

> It seemed that Beth, who was far and away her favourite character in the book, was now [...] kind of mean. She stayed in the house all time and she didn't like anybody, and she was

> always hiding from people and watching them and feeling jealous because they were healthy and she wasn't. But this was all wrong. Beth was the one whose words and character Jess held closest to herself, the one who broke Jess's heart by dying as bravely as Jo had lived. Jess began to think that maybe she wasn't reading *Little Women* but another story altogether and it wasn't a very good story. (97)

Indeed, Beth's demure and precocious deportment is something that one can draw parallels, with Jess's own deportment in *The Icarus Girl*, best brought out in the syzygy of character creation between Beth and Jo, parallels with Jess and TillyTilly. The simultaneity of similarities and contrasts can be drawn in the character-creation process. This is part of a strategy that collapses and draws boundaries at the same time in *The Icarus Girl*. Meta-fiction therefore allows for the process of writing, on the part of Oyeyemi, to be a self-reflexive process, on the influences of her imaginations and thoughts. At the same time, it is part of a postmodern strategy of fragmenting the narrative structure of the text by creating layers of fictional worlds imbricately positioned – fiction within fiction. The language and style of representation uses an animist, magical realist and postmodern narrative style that not only places the real and the imagined in contiguity with each other but also blurs the lines between them.

In *The Icarus Girl*, images metamorphose into reality, imagination into reality and vice versa. Indeed, even bodies metamorphose into other bodies, as with Jess becoming TillyTilly and vice versa towards the end of the text. Moreover, Jess's mother's vocation, immerses her into a world of imagination most of the time. She is wont to be found in her bedroom, staring into her computer or typing away. Jess's mother's sense of her "self" is defined by narratives and stories, and the world of imagination is part of the process of dealing with her sense of nomadic identity. Writing, for her, is a practical process of seeking answers, self-reflecting and reconciling scattered senses of identity. Imagination is therefore a notion that defines the characters' worlds, and it comes in variations of myths, legends, dreams and works of fiction among others. Jess is constantly haunted by

images, teleported into worlds, in which these images become actual beings reaching out to her.

In the instance mentioned above, where Jess is involved in self-reflective reading of the book *Little Women*, we are instantly teleported into some kind of a dream world. Jess herself is teleported into a magical world, with images of a man trapped in a bottle and the other more conspicuous one, of the charcoal-drawn woman, reaching out from the Boys' Quarters with her grotesque hands. The image drawn here is akin to the buoyancy of the flying saucer, flying carpet, or broom that can be connected to Latin American magical realism. The feeling of flight and teleportation recurs as Jess moves closer to a tougher battle with her multiple selves and as she struggles with the process of individuation. Flight, buoyancy and motion here also relate to the Greek legend of Icarus and Daedalus. Hence we can ask ourselves whether there is *hubris* to Jess flights, buoyancies of imagination, and the simultaneity of multiple self-hoods, and whether, like Icarus she becomes a tragic hero, by flying too high to her death. Imagination is the means through which flight takes place in *The Icarus Girl*. But the worlds of imagination and reality co-exist through the presence of TillyTilly, Jess's double, who seems to embody the "Pandora's box" of Jess's Nigerian connections. TillyTilly is the embodiment and the gateway to the myths, legends and narratives of twins and doubles, the stages of life and death, of what could be and could not be, what is and what is not, in the immediate context of Jess's late Twin sister Fern, and the apparently unfinished Yoruba customs and rituals that haunt Jess's life. She is the medium that blurs what is magical, animist and realist in Jess's life. As she carries Jess into magical feats, including invisibly spying on Jess's classmate Colleen McLain, the world of imagination, magic and realism crumbles. There is a process of "intertrasmutation"[165] beginning to happen as Jess acquires these magical traits, further blurring the perceived boundaries between herself and TillyTilly. This process reaches a climax at the end of the text, when

[165] This is a term I borrow from Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). Soyinka uses it to examine the process in which myth and reality interchange in the narratives and legends of the celestial and terrestrial, specifically how the Yoruba pantheon found a metaphysical connection with human beings.

TillyTilly and Jess morph into each other, in an attempted reconciliation of Jess's multiple selves.

The idea of intertransmutation can be related to that of (inter)subjectivity. As in the case of the *abiku* figure, subjectivity appears in forms that are both terrestrial and celestial. When diverse worlds are traversed, worlds that are associated with different senses of materiality, then the process of intertransmutation occurs. *Abiku* children for instance have lives before and after birth, they inhabit not only these multiple worlds, but also, as we realise with Jess, the world of the bush and the wild as castaways. The bush is associated with ghosts and djinns;[166] it is a world of spirits inhabiting the materiality of a human world. This indeed is the "animist realism" that Garuba (2003) refers to. For Jess, materiality is imbued with the spiritual, as her double TillyTilly makes her realise, that she can be invisible, that she can be magically teleported from one place to another.

When Jess is taken to the psychologist Dr McKenzie, the notion of subjectivity takes on psychoanalytic dimensions, while returning us to the significance of imagination. What is important to see here is the ways in which the notion of subjectivity is treated to a clash between the legends, myths and narratives of a Yoruba cosmological world and the modern scientific form of psychoanalytic observation through Dr McKenzie. As a "half-and-half" child, Jess's worlds are separated by cultural gulfs in the process of understanding subjectivity. However, the instructive thing here is the role of narrative in the case of psychoanalytic observation, and that of legend and myth in Yoruba cosmology: that both forms of practice are underscored by the importance of story-telling. Moreover, Jess's multiple personality or *abiku* status as a child of many worlds, with many personalities, and subjectivities is a common denominator underlying these diverse interpretative systems. The multiple worlds, selves or subjectivities, however, can only be understood through the notion of imagination. Imagination takes on several forms: on the legends and myths that implicitly underlie Jess's genealogical histories, and the stories and narrative acts that come out in her conversation with Dr McKenzie.

[166] The bush in Nigerian literature has also previously carried similar symbolic significance in the fiction of Amos Tutuola.

The portrayal of Dr McKenzie's first session with Jess (123-124) foregrounds the process of imagination and story-telling, as central to psychological analysis. The role of narrative is foregrounded in Dr McKenzie's attempts at locating "The Position of the Unconscious."[167] Indeed this psychoanalytical session's delving into the realm of imagination through narrative and story-telling is an act of "transference" in which the reality of Jess's unconscious, according to Dr McKenzie is being unfolded. It is an enactment of Lacanian (1978) ideas on the fundamentals of the psychoanalytical process. Jess and Dr McKenzie are involved in the process of analysis through what Lacan refers to as the "free association" of speech between the analyst and analysand. This process results in the production of the "subjective division" of Jess. Lacan ascribes to this subjective division, the name "unconscious" – that indeed the analysand's unconscious has been accessed through the act or ritual of transference via the free association of speech through narrative and imagination, between the analyst and analysand. In this case Lacan observes the loss of being of the central focus of analysis – their *being* escapes them, as with Jess:

> 'Mummy.'
> 'Um. Big. No – '
> 'Daddy.'
> 'Small. Smaller, I mean. Than – '
> 'School.'
> 'Nobody.'
> 'Jess.'
> 'Gone.'
> 'Where have you gone, Jess?'
> She had no idea,
> That was surprising, too. (124)

[167] I am referring to Lacan's seminal essay "Position of the Unconscious: remarks made at the 1960 Bonneval colloquium rewritten in 1964," which for Lacan defines the aim of a psychoanalytical session.

At the heart of Lacan's (1978) ideas on the unconscious, is the importance of language as an organising principle of mental schema. His meta-theories on the psychoanalytical process underscore the significance of language through imagination and narrative as central to the process of transference and therefore access to the unconscious. As a post-Freudian psychoanalyst, he used language to delve into the unconscious, to derive the notion of "subjective division," and to come up with his seminal tenets on "The Position of the Unconscious." At the centre of these modern forms of psychoanalysis is language, which is explored through the process of narrative, story-telling, and is guided by an imaginative process similar to the legends and myths that help understand the histories and genealogies of *abiku* children, dead twins and other celestial beings in Yoruba cosmology. Myths and legends are part of an essential narrative make-up that defines the phenomenon of spirituality. They are also part of the oral histories of communities (Quayson, 1997), and points at which pan-ethnicity and collective senses of identity can be derived.

The ontology of Jess's childhood is therefore defined by the simultaneity of the animist, magical and realist. Her double, TillyTilly, is the visibility of a magical worldview. She mediates the two worlds for Jess, appearing and disappearing at will. She is a haunting presence in Jess's childhood, while at the same time, an invisible and friendly companion. In Jess, we see Oyeyemi's own childhood, when she had to create an imaginary friend, playing with her in closed doors, after the culture shock of a new environment in Lewisham London. Jess's loneliness and feeling of difference and alienation makes her childhood similarly imaginative in character. While TillyTilly can be considered a figment of her imagination, the reality of her for Jess, is tangible, creating at most times an illusion between what is real and what is imagined or perceived. In most cases, the gothic nature of the houses or circumstances when TillyTilly appears, allows space for suspension of disbelief. Horrific silences, darkness and sharp staircases create flights of imagination and fear on the part of not only Jess but those around her (135-141). TillyTilly becomes real yet imagined as she appears, isolating Jess from the rest, making her *actually* disappear. In a Harry Potter like scenario, Jess travels "down, and through the staircase, the carpet and the actual stair falling away beneath her feet as if she

and Tilly were going underground in a lift that would never stop descending" (139). The feeling of buoyancy and a spiralling downwards, the dizziness, as well as the descent into a bottomless abyss is a *leitmotif* that characterises the precariousness of Jess's childhood: its sense of spatio-temporality and therefore of identity. She is at a continuum, a point of intertransmutation and intersubjectivity, as "Ever since she had come back from Nigeria, she felt as if she was becoming different, becoming stronger, becoming more like Tilly" (143).

Nigeria in this sense becomes a transformative experience of self-recovery for Jess. To become "more like Tilly" means to assume an imaginative and magical subjectivity. Perhaps it also means to approach the climax of personality (dis)order. For her to imagine herself her double (TillyTilly), she seems to be approaching a form of reconciliation of herself, but at the same time morphing into or even being consumed by this new personality. But TillyTilly is an embodiment of her Nigerian fears, as we realise later. TillyTilly carries with her the myth and legend of a life before birth, a spirit childhood which will soon dawn on Jess and whose reality has always seemed implicit in the many chidings about her uncanny comportment at school and at home. Jess has therefore, after her first visit to Nigeria, been "possessed" or embraced by the reality of her spirit childhood. Her experience in London however introduces the dynamic of race and therefore of a different sense of intersubjectivity through the practice of psychology, portrayed in her sessions with Dr McKenzie. The cultural differences in practices, through varied customs and rituals split her world into two. Indeed, her psychic troubles are made complex by different cultural positions in relation to the idea of multiple subjectivity.

In a sense, the ideas of culture and subjectivity are important in reading Jess's predicament in interesting ways. The different cultures and colours that define her genealogy are in a struggle for co-existence. Her genealogically diasporic context of identification is located in a space of increasing senses of disjuncture – she is haunted and possessed by a mosaic of mythologies, legends, stories and narratives which fragment her sense of identification with any particular culture. As a psychic subject, she is defined by

multiple structures of feeling: at the outset, by her mixed race biology and essentially by the genealogies of varied parentage, which come with different histories and cultural baggage. This places her at the centre of the tension between the diasporic person's psychic subjectivity and the forces of culture already in tension in that diasporic space. The diasporic space is one of creative tension, where imagination reigns, through a deliberate process of recreating myths, legends and other narratives related to the identification process. There is a creative tension in this space, redolent, as in Jess's case, with the fantastic and the fabulous. Examinations of where the discourses of psychoanalysis and cultural theory meet discuss them as "thresholds" (Donald, 1991) of psycho-social experience and identity. Donald for instance, points to the "irreconcilable" tension between psychic subjectivity and cultural determinism. He insists that there is no seamless fit between the subject, their sense of psychic identity and the socio-cultural dimensions they derive from, despite these dimensions being their locus of existence.[168] The more reason, as Robert Young (1991) points out there is the notion of the unconscious as a concept that defines the interminable tension and the incompatibility between psychic identity and social frameworks of identity.[169] The diasporic space however complicates the matter further, by virtue of increasing the feeling of fragmentation for the psychic subject.

Diasporic subjectivity is hence characterised by the ceaseless struggle for reconciliation and conjuncture. It is defined by imagination, because the process of trying to reconcile fragmentation requires imagining connections that would otherwise never be thought of. Diasporic subjectivity occupies a space of fluctuation that requires a constant process of imagination. This is similar to what Fanon (1967) says about the colonised zone of occult instability in which there is fluctuating movement being constantly shaped by imagination. Imagination gives shape to this flux, aiding in the process of dealing with the psychic fragmentation. Imagination seeks coherence and conjuncture; it seeks to find a connection that would suture fragmented selves and personalities. As in the case of Jess, imagination allows her to create fantasies that deal with the tension between her

[168] James Donald (1991) "On the Threshold: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Studies," p. 1-10.
[169] Robert Young (1991) "Psychoanalysis and Political Literary Theories," p. 139-157.

psychic self and her already fraught diasporic subjectivity. How others perceive her, as a "half-and-half child" who is torn between racial identities, foregrounds the incompatibility of the social identity frameworks or structures of feeling with her own psychic subjectivity and sense of identification. Indeed her feelings of alienation draw her further away from herself, as she constantly deals with the paranoia of being called weird. Living at the edge of multiracial and multicultural genealogies, her imagination is influenced by legends, myths and narratives from the multiple genealogical frameworks of identity.

The narrative, through legends and myths is one way in which Jess tries to reconcile the syzygy that defines her sense of herself. The incompatibility of her multiple selves, of her racial genealogies and the cultural worlds that come with them demands for imagination, for fantasies, informed by the myths and legends that cut across the histories of England and Nigeria. Indeed, one could see a clash of cultural subjectivities, portrayed through the different ways in which the *abiku* child becomes a condition that is diagnosed as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), or some kind of schizophrenia that needs the intervention of the psychologist Dr McKenzie. The process of psychologising is defined by free association, hypnosis and narrative processes, as Dr Mckenzie tries to unravel Jess's unconscious. This underscores the importance of narrative and imagination, components which are central to how Lacanian psychoanalysis defines the unconscious – as structured like and through a language. The metaphors and metonyms that construct the symbolic order in Lacanian psychoanalysis can be seen as part of the process of imagining connections from incompatible elements. Indeed, metaphors provide for us the problematic relationship between the signifier and signified – the arbitrariness of their ascriptions. Metonyms on the other hand, ascribe a part to a whole, as representative of a whole. Both metaphors and metonyms function within the symbolic order and structure of language. Indeed metaphors and metonyms portray the images of contiguity and mutual exclusiveness. The psychic subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis is therefore defined by language, while their unconscious is accessed through the activities of free association and transference, mediated by language. The unconscious, visible through dreams, parataxis, jokes and slips of tongue exposes the tensions of individual psychic

subjectivity and normative forms of cultural subjectivity in a larger societal framework of relations.

Jess's sense of the self is wholly immersed in her psychic state. There is a thin line between her conscious and unconscious. As demonstrated earlier, these states fluidly morph into each other as we see her move from the imaginative world of fiction into dreamland. These fluid movements between different states of mind even problematise her sense of the boundaries between imagination and reality. She only comes to terms later, with the notion that TillyTilly is a figment of her imagination, even though her status as an *abiku* provides an alternative view. In her actual states of psychosomatic delirium, she has visions and images that haunt her. The grotesque looking charcoal-drawn image of the woman with long arms becomes a real manifestation, allowing us to see the thin line between images, dreams and reality in *The Icarus Girl*. These states of delirium seem to be borderline nodes of intertransmutation and intersubjectivity on the part of Jess. She wrestles with otherworldly images, feelings and realities, stuck in between these multiple worlds tagging from varied directions. Distinctions between dreams and visions are blurred, as she is possessed by TillyTilly, whose features have since become more ghoulish, while she tries to reconcile the fact that she might be a figment of Jess imagination:

> "[...] Jessy, you guessed without me explaining, that
> I'm ... that I'm not really here. I mean, of course I'm
> Really here, just not really really here, if you see what
> I mean ... Most of the time I'm somewhere else, but I
> Can appear, and you haven't imagined me!" (156)

The long-armed woman seems to suddenly merge with the evanescing image of TillyTilly. It is always interesting, the way images, states of mind and worlds in *The Icarus Girl* merge into each other. As readers, we are constantly demanded to suspend disbelief while being simultaneously brought back to the real world. The animist, magical and the material act simultaneously as images, stories, dreams and visions morph into each other in rapid back and forth motion.

When the vision of the baby appears, puzzles begin to unfold in *The Icarus Girl*. The myths of doubles, twins and doppelgangers unfold. Jess's *abiku* world(s) unfolds simultaneously. The vision of the crying and dead baby apparently reveals her dead twin sister Fern: "there were two of you born, just like there were two of me. The other one of you died" (161), TillyTilly tells her. In Jess's state(s) of fantasy, delirium, and in her dreams, the puzzles open up, so that it is difficult for her to ascertain the reality of these claims. Her *abiku* personality dawns on her, as TillyTilly explains:

> "Your twin's name was Fern. They didn't get to choose a proper name for her, a Yoruba name, because she was born already dead, just after you were born. You have been so empty, Jessy, without your twin; you have no one to walk your three worlds with you." (161)

It dawns on Jess in this moment above that she is vicariously living the life of her dead twin Fern, that she lives in the multiple worlds of death and life, life before and after birth. As an *abiku* child, her identity is complicated by her multi-racial heritage. The death of her twin sister Fern, at birth, as it occurs later, is problematised by the unfinished rituals that accompany that death, on the part of her mother. Living in these multiple worlds occurs as a possession by shadows, ghosts and spirits and TillyTilly mediates these worlds, transporting and teleporting Jess across as an unlikely double, and a ghostly companion. The new knowledge about her dead twin sister Fern seems to be the artifice behind the jigsaw puzzle about her schizophrenic personality. Her missing twin means an incomplete sense of herself and the lack of a matching double. As TillyTilly says: "You have been so empty Jessy, without your twin; you have had no one to walk your three worlds with you" (161). As if to confirm this reality, when she confronts her mother with this metaphysically acquired knowledge, it comes as a shock to her mother who in a state of bewilderment, says to her father:

> "Three worlds! Jess lives in three worlds. She lives in this

> world, and she lives in the spirit world and she lives in the bush. She's an *abiku*, she always would have known! The spirits tell her things. *Fern* tells her things. We should've ... we should've d-d-done *ibeji* carving for her! We should've ... oh, oh ... Mama! *Mummy-mi*, help me ..." (165)

As an *abiku*, Jess's world is confounded by the fact that she was born a twin, and further by the fact that her twin died at child birth. Indeed, what we have with Jess is an intra-mythological fusion within Yoruba cosmology. While the notion of a racialised *abiku* seems to confound her diasporic identity, the fusion of two preternatural Yoruba worldviews complicates matters further. In Yoruba culture twins are believed to have supernatural power as well as links with both the worlds before and after birth. It is believed that the first twin is sent by the second one, to see how the world looks like, and then s/he would give the signal, by crying, for the second one to follow. The syzygial nature of their character is defined by one being introverted and precocious, with the other one extroverted.

The myth of twinning in the Yoruba society in Nigeria follows a belief system that some scholars have attributed to the "high perinatal mortality rate" of twins over the years (Leroy, Olalaye-Oruene, Koeppen-Schomerus & Bryan 2002:132).[170] Twins are therefore considered to have preternatural powers related to a particular *orisha* (god) of twins in the Yoruba pantheon. Incidentally, the Yoruba are found to have "the highest dizygotic twinning rate in the world" (Leroy eta l, 2002:132). Twins are believed to share one soul. Rituals and sacrifices are usually conducted a short period after the birth of twins, dedicated to the *orisha*. In the case of the death of one twin during birth, a special carving, called an *ibeji* is supposed to be made, after consulting a *babalawo* (high priest). This carving or statue is supposed to symbolise the soul of the departed twin. The importance of this statue is found in the idea that upon the death of one twin "the life of the other is imperilled because the balance of his soul has become seriously disturbed" (Leroy et al, 2002:134). These are the real fears of Jess's mother as quoted in the passage

[170] Leroy et al, (2002) "Yoruba Customs and Beliefs Pertaining to Twins," p. 132-136.

above. The restless precocity of Jess, the tantrums and states of delirium are therefore attributed, as TillyTilly tells her, to the emptiness occasioned by her dead twin Fern. The emptiness is mythically explained by the fact that her dead twin has destabilised the balance of her soul, having departed with half of it.

It is important, the way myths and legends related to the twinning phenomenon are connected to the Yoruba pantheon and also the way infant mortality rate is explained through the phenomenon of the *abiku* child – even more specifically, in the *ibeji* statue culture. For Jess, these mythical and legendary worlds are coming back to haunt her, as part of her mission in trying to identify herself and reckon with these hidden heritages and legacies. Moreover, Cooper (2009) points out the emergence of these legacies, in the myths and legends that cut across different continents as a project immanent in new diasporic identities. As pointed out earlier, Oyeyemi's family history influences the imaginative subjectivities of her texts. Therefore, Jess's identity struggle is informed by the author's consciousness of mixed heritages, stories, narratives, myths, legends and legacies. However, the notion of race would seem to mediate the crossing of multiple mythologies across Africa and Europe. Sabrina Brancato (2008) makes interesting observations about "Afro-European Literature(s)" as a new and emergent "Discursive Category" of writers in Europe who portray "heterogeneity of heritages, locations and allegiances" (2008:2).[171] In their writing, these authors portray the silenced histories, legacies and heritages that cut across the spatio-temporal axes of their movements to their present diasporic worlds. Brancato delineates the plurality of the languages, heritages and locations of these writers while paying heed to the specific contexts of individual experience. Brancato ascribes the category "Afrosporic literature" to this group of writers. In Oyeyemi's case, we can see the interaction of myths and histories. In *The Icarus Girl*, the role of narratives (fictional and historic), are made reference to, as part of what forms Jess's imaginative subjectivity. These narratives range from English piracy history and British royalty to Yoruba family histories and the myths and legends of twinning and *abiku* children. In *The Opposite House*, Afro-Cuban mythology, as we will see soon, is portrayed as a fusion of the varied and differentiated genealogical histories of

[171] See Sabrina Brancato (2008) "Afro-European Literature(s): A new Discursive Category?" p. 1-13.

the characters in the text. The practice of Santeria in *The Opposite House* is one such aspect that connects multiple myths and legends through its rituals, customs and practices.

The ontology of Jess's childhood is defined by an identity struggle. At the outset, her racial identity, as a "half-and-half child" seems to visibly put her at cross-roads, especially with friends at school. However this is symptomatic of the multiple heritages battling in her consciousness. The psychosomatic conflict, derived from multiple cosmological perspectives with different practices, is at the core of her identity struggles. *The Icarus Girl* contrasts for us the modern psychological forms of treatment, with the religious Yoruba cosmological alternatives of twinning and *abiku* childhood. Oyeyemi constructs these worlds through a meta-fictional narrative structure, privileging the act of imagination, through the implied myths and legends of Yoruba spirit childhood, the reference to fiction and historical European works as well as the symbolism of the Greek legend of Icarus and Daedalus that informs the title of the novel. Jess is surrounded by imagination and narrative. Stories are the warp and weft with which Jess weaves her sense of identity: she lives in them, feeling self-contained in them and in the power of their imagination. Her dreams, visions and states of delirium are woven together by her flights of imagination. Indeed this imagination constructs the reality of TillyTilly, who in turn becomes a subject of the myth and legend of *abiku* childhood. TillyTilly affirms the ontology of Jess's *abiku* childhood, while at the same time multiplies her psychic subjectivity. Claiming to embody the other half of Jess's departed soul. TillyTilly literally becomes Jess's twin, her double.

Childhood in *The Icarus Girl* is therefore portrayed in the fragmented and fragile subjectivities that multiply while occupying the margins of identity. Jess is portrayed in a matrix of discourses that reflect multiple heritages, legacies and genealogical histories. The myth and legend of *abiku* childhood finds itself in conflict with the one of modern psychology, as Jess's tantrums, states of delirium are defined as uncanny and bordering on madness. She is, in other words caught up in the dilemma of a racialised *abiku*; finding herself at the centre of bi-continental allegiances, heritages and silenced histories.

The notion of the *abiku* is indeed exotic in an English cultural landscape, where classmates, teachers and other acquaintances, faced with the dilemma of her screaming tantrums choose to explain it away as racial dilemma, as a product of her "half-and-half" childhood.[172] Jess seems to experience a different, alternative magical reality, implied by the now overwhelming hints Oyeyemi makes in reference to Yoruba mythology. It is an epistemological quest, on Jess's part, to rediscover the hidden knowledge in her genealogy that explains the magical reality that has taken over her life.

Her mother finally explains to her the notion of the *ibeji* statue and how it relates to the situation with Fern, her dead twin (182-183). This knowledge comes out as constitutive of a silenced maternal heritage. Told as a narrative to Jess, it sounds like a myth but its striking familiarity is portrayed in the image of the *ibeji* statue that Jess's mother shows her. As examined earlier, images in *The Icarus Girl* are imbued with mythical, legendary and magical potential, as they straddle between reality and Jess's dreams and states of delirium. When Jess's mother shows her the image of the *ibeji* statue:

> Jess looked and looked, then pulled the book from her mother's lap into her own, her fingers tracing the features of the statue, her lips moving in silent amazement as she tried to understand. The statue was beautiful, looked about half human height and was intricately carved – the broad lips, the sloping cut of chin, the stylised markings around the eyes. It was of a boy twin, but despite that, it was familiar. As she moved her fingers over the long, long arms of the statue, she realised that she had already seen one of these; a poorly done one, drawn with charcoal, not carved. (183)

The image of the statue becomes a metonymy for *abiku* twin childhood, relating to Jess's experience. Drawn from a text, the image can be examined as the material cultures that

[172] This ascription underlines a racialised essence, binarised in the exoticism of the "other half"' – the "black one," as seemingly the cause and effect of Jess's "psychic" problems.

characterise new diasporic writing (Cooper, 2008a). These material cultures portray the mobility of diasporic identity, in terms of how cultures are migrated through the text. Descriptive attention is paid to these images and metonyms of mobile cultures which are lost or hidden in diasporic experiences. While Jess can only relate to them as images in a book titled *All about Africa*, the *ibeji* statue image is familiar in her experience, with the charcoal drawing of the long armed woman in the "Boys Quarters," which constantly appears in her dreams and delirious states of mind. The images are the visibility of her silenced heritage, the tenuous links between her "half-and-half" childhood status in this diasporic space. The image appears and re-appears in her dreams and visions, as she struggles in the "wilderness of her mind." The notion of the mind as a wilderness is an extended world of experience for twins in Yoruba mythology. Jess's mother confirms this to her when she says: "Traditionally, twins are supposed to live in, um, three worlds: this one, the spirit world, and the Bush, which is a sort of wilderness of the mind" (182).

As the reality of her multiple worlds settles home, Jess and her imaginative double decide to actually morph into each other. In a bizarre and magical turn of events TillyTilly "jumped inside her" (190) and she "wasn't *there* anymore." This process of intertransmutation is the apotheosis of subjective fragmentation, where the magical is embodied and vice versa. This is, perhaps, the core of the vision of Oyeyemi in *The Icarus Girl* – the multiplication of personality in real and magical senses, when the psychic self and the embodied self intertransmute. In this way, the psychic self is incarnated, taking on bodily form. As an *abiku* child, her three worlds intertransmute. The "wilderness" of her mind incarnates as she acquires and becomes a spiritual self. It is a process of literal fragmentation:

> She was vaguely aware that she was still in the room, but
> it was now a frightening place: too big and broad a space,
> too full, sandwiching her between solids and colour. She
> felt as if she were *being flung*, scattered in steady handfuls,
> every part of her literally thrown *into* things. She could
> sense the edges, the corners of her desk, the unyielding

lines of her wardrobe. (190) [Emphasis retained]

This process of intertransmutation, triggered by the fragmentation of the self, is also one of sublimation and transfiguration, in which solid turns into air and vice versa. Spatiality acquires new dimensions, "too big and broad a space, too full," and the nature and texture of things becomes a part of her "self," as "she could sense the edges, the corners of her desk." Oyeyemi takes liberties in creating neologisms of nomenclatures, describing them as "Jess-who-wasn't-Jess" and "Tilly-who-was-Jess." The playful and frolicsome manner of events has a deconstructive attitude to it. The switching of personalities, the morphing of the magical into the real, the solid into air and vice versa, underlines the protean nature of subjectivity, personality and therefore of identity in this diasporic context.[173] Oyeyemi creates a matrix of narrative discourses, where the notion of multiple personality disorder is alternatively explained by that of Yoruba twinning and *abiku* childhood. These two worldviews feed off each other, at the expense of the scattered subjectivity of the protagonist Jess. What is poignant though in this battle of worlds and personalities, is Jess's struggle to define her identity. Her introverted and precocious deportment is a veneer; inside her, in her stream of (un)consciousness, she battles with TillyTilly who liberally morphs into the long-armed woman, who in turn becomes her dead twin Fern. These personalities interchange in her dreams, visions and nightmares – they intertransmute, including the "reality" of Jess intertransmuting with TillyTilly.

The more Jess opens up to friendship from Shivs and her cousin Dulcie, the more intense her own internal battles get. TillyTilly, who is now symbolic of the twinning and *abiku* childhood narrative, starts to become visible to her parents and her friends, and in moments of self-reflexivity, "Jess yet again felt herself slipping into the gap; that gap of perception between what is really happening to a person and what others think is happening" (222). She is caught in these lacunae of perception, imagination and reality. There is something conscious on her part that has to do with these realisations, and she catches herself realising when she is slipping in and out of these perceptions. This

[173] Indeed the frolicsome play with nomenclature, with personality, subjectivity, the magical and the real has an *Alison in Wonderland* tone to it – one of the influences of Oyeyemi's works.

internal conflict begins to manifest into a violent disposition, as TillyTilly increasingly assaults her, destroying and blurring further the line between her perceptions and imaginations, leading her to break her mother's computer, and shatter bathroom mirrors in a demented fashion (228-229).

TillyTilly represents a silenced, hidden and traumatic past, a heritage that haunts Jess from a life before birth – in fact, at the margin between birth and death of her fellow twin Fern. At the same time, she carries the burden of a racialised diaspora in Europe, the "Afrosporic" community that seeks to belong in Europe in general and in Britain in particular. The battle to belong, which in *abiku* mythology usually pits the child against multiple forces on earth, in the bush and in the spirit world, is transposed into the realities of Jess's diasporic space, which is pervaded by the feeling of not belonging. The idea of "diaspora space," explored by Brah (1996:178-208), makes these tensions salient, where histories and genealogies collide and compete for that elusive notion of "homing." As TillyTilly tells Jess: "There is no homeland – there is nowhere where there are people who will not *get* you" (236, emphasis retained). In furthering Jess's agony, she adds; "Stop looking to belong, half-and-half child. Stop" (236). The words capture Jess's condition. As an *abiku* and twin child, she is not only at war with her spiritual companion, in this case TillyTilly, but also with the imbalance in her soul, because her dead twin has not been appeased by the *ibeji* statue ritual. At the same time, the forces of modern psychology, which represent the worldview of her paternity in England are a cultural burden to bear, because she is perceived as "weird" in her actions and as also suffering from a schizophrenic multiple personality disorder. Jess therefore simultaneously experiences these worlds and "selves," but achieving cosmological balance is elusive – her spiritual world threatens the balance of her Yoruba cosmology whilst her unconscious threatens the balance of her English world.

She struggles with her multinational heritage, split between whether "to be" or "not to be" – she occupies a space of *potency*. The ontology of her childhood is potentially malleable, for she occupies a space of hybridity, which is defined by possibilities and resistances (Hron, 2008). Her "self" has been multiplied into genealogies and histories of

both English and Yoruba worlds. The space she occupies is fraught, fractured and defined by the disjuncture of postmodern selves: fragmentation and multiplication of the margins of identity. The notion of the rupture of senses of identity is captured in the multiplicity of choices, where margins have become centres and vice versa. The philosophy of *being*, ceases to be a principle, and for a moment the lines separating "being and nothingness" as Jean Paul Sartre (2003) would have it, become blurred. Jess finds herself in existential dilemma, facing worlds in contrast and opposition to each other and yet without realising her "self" in these worlds she is associated with: "Ashes and witnesses, homelands chopped into little pieces – she'd be English. No – she couldn't, though. She'd be Nigerian. No –" (243). Her "homing desire" (Brah, 1996) is destroyed, as she is caught in the middle of English and Nigerian genealogical antecedents and allegiances.

The ontology of Jess's childhood is therefore defined by this persistent struggle to reconcile her scattered and fragmented self. As a diasporic subject, her consciousness is not just double, as W.E.B Dubois (1903) or Paul Gilroy (1993) explains of the black diaspora, it is a multiple consciousness. Indeed, the idea of homeland in *The Icarus Girl*, as explored in the psychic struggles of Jess is fluid and mobile. Because the heritages that define Jess's identities are themselves peripatetic, moving from Nigeria to Europe and back, her consciousness is equally unrooted. She finds it impossible to root herself to any of her heritages because her racial identity is itself a "half-and-half." Rootedness becomes a mirage, and indeed, Gilroy's (1993) postulation about the homonym "route" in reference to the black diasporas in Europe and America is conceptually important in not only explaining this identity struggle, but in also defining what these diasporic identities entail. The fluid, shifting, mobile and transient consciousnesses are the foundation of these identities: they are always conscious of movement, mobility and worlds that follow and haunt them. Jess's psychosomatic struggles are symptomatic of this nagging consciousness; of belonging to different places, with different cosmologies and therefore different identity. This indeed is the plight of diasporic subjectivity: the "homing desire" (Brah, 1996), and the "disjuncture and difference" (Appadurai, 1995). The "routedness' examined by Gilroy (1993) is found in the metaphors of movement, exemplified in his idea of the ship in the "middle passage." This metaphor of travelling which is extended

into the idea of travelling identities and cultures is the ontology of diasporic childhoods like Jess's. In *The Icarus Girl*, there is the cartography of a journey, traced through the different sections of the book with Book One exploring the journey to Nigeria, Book Two exclusively set in the conflictual terrain of England and Book Three taking us back to Nigeria. However, there is the constant journeying, up and down spiritual worlds and "wildernesses" of the mind on the part of Jess, through her dreams, visions and imaginations. The constant blurring of perception, imagination and being exemplifies her psycho-spiritual journeys. The materiality of this psycho-spiritual journeying is portrayed in the inexorable morphing of images, statues and figures into each other. For example, the charcoal drawing of the long-armed woman becomes a figure in her dreams, which becomes TillyTilly and vice versa.

Jess's constant states of delirium, fits of screaming and flights of imagination provide a dizzying narrative pattern which is staccato-like, constantly refusing coherence and attempts to create an organic plot. She is destined to exist as a "half-and-half child" who lives in the three worlds ascribed to her *abiku* and twin childhood. While these worlds, like the worlds of the *abiku* child, for instance in Okri's works are in continuous conflict with each other, the task will be to find a cosmological balance. For Jess, it will involve the unfinished ritual of the *ibeji* statue, to appease her dead twin and therefore reconcile her Nigerian heritage. This will involve a journey, back to Bodija, Nigeria, the place of the birth of her soul and the context of her *abiku* childhood.

A second trip to Nigeria becomes a motif for a return to self-discovery for Jess. It signifies a cyclical pattern, perhaps dialectical, in the search for a synthesis of not only her diverse worlds, but also her fragmented subjectivity. This journey coincides with her ninth birthday, here symbolic of a re-birth in her land – of mythological conception, as an *abiku* child. Her grandfather, custodian of her maternal genealogy, presents to her, as a birthday present, an *ibeji* statue in honour of her dead twin Fern (282). Symbolically re-born in this context, she therefore assumes, as it were, her *abiku* personality, and surprises everyone by speaking fluent Yoruba (290-292). She has suddenly inhabited a world she has never experienced, leading to a major conflict between her parents and her

grandfather Gbenga Oyegbebi, who immediately feels she needs exorcism from a *babalawo*. The irony of course, is that while her grandfather urges her mother to pray and practice Christianity, he also performs the *ibeji* statue ritual to fulfil the cosmic balance of Jess's *abiku* and twinning childhood worlds. The final part of the book culminates in the conflict caused by Jess's *abiku* ability to speak fluent Yoruba. Her mother, in an effort to shield her from the conflict raging between her father and her husband, decides to travel with her to Lagos and they (Jess and her mother) are involved in an accident, leaving Jess in critical condition.

In her critical state, Jess inhabits "The Bush. A wilderness. A wilderness for the mind" (298). The cosmological forces that have defined her life, central of which is the myth of twinning and *abiku* childhood become the main focus. She is here engaged in a cosmological peregrination, finding her way out of this bush to a perceived "homeland." This homing desire, takes on the dimension of not only a physical place but also a psychic place, where her personalities can find a "home":

> It was a wilderness here and Jess had been getting lost
> and beginning to despair that she'd ever find her way
> out until someone came and bore her away on their back,
> away, but still not home. Not home, never home, no. (298-299)

This person turns out to be her double, her twin sister Fern as "Jess realised with a feeble, drowsy awe that she was looking at herself" (300). The symbols of birth and death are juxtaposed into each other: "eyes full of the dark that she'd found in the midst of the wilderness [...] the beautiful details of baby hair growing in as fuzz at the start of the forehead, away from the knotted hair" (300). In this "wilderness of the mind," in this bush, her soul finds the balance from her twin sister who literally carries her through the liana of "dried out, crackling vegetation" (298). Strong enough to finally face her fears, she confronts TillyTilly, who by now is the nemesis. This is a final struggle for the "self," the psychic, spiritual and physical self that will signal a reconciliation of the multiple worlds struggling within her. When she finally gets "back into herself," the final image

we are left with is of her Icarus-self, flying "up and up and up" (302). The image we are left with at the end of the text, does not signify any final conclusion to Jess's endless identity struggle. She confronts her mythical and genealogical antecedents, meeting the other half of her soul (her twin sister Fern), in the bush, symbolised by the "wilderness of her mind."

Jess's childhood as portrayed in *The Icarus Girl* is a dialectical process. For Jess to find her "self," it means relentlessly flying in and out of imaginative landscapes, and battling with cosmological forces that date beyond her birth. Her psychic, spiritual and physical worlds are in conflict with each other. The silenced heritages of a different physical world haunt her present existence in London. Her *abiku* and twin childhood statuses present gulfs of conflict with her "half-and-half" racial status in London. Jess's childhood is therefore portrayed in the context of her identity conflict and defined by a struggle for self recovery, a journey away from self-immolation. She therefore has to live in that "Pandora's box" – an imaginative reality characterised by dreams, nightmares, visions, poetry and fiction to define her variant sensibilities. These different forms bear narrative and imaginative status.

Oyeyemi uses a syncretic meta-fictional structure that borrows from Greek, English and Yoruba myths and legends. Having outlined the autobiographical influences on *The Icarus Girl*, it is logical to point out that the meta-fictional aesthetics employed, together with the syncretism of mythologies through magical and animist realism, is part of an identity politics that informs diasporic subjectivity. Oyeyemi uses childhood to enact the internal struggles of diasporic identity. Childhood is portrayed as a space, place and time of experimentation. Its imaginations, fears, desires and expectations, are played out in *The Icarus Girl*, by foregrounding it as a site in which postmodernist attitudes and dynamics can be plotted with regards to diasporic subjectivity. Jess's biological and mythical heritages clash. The notion of race is complicated by the politics of heritage, myth and legend. The psychic dimension of diasporic subjectivity is portrayed as a site of vicious struggle, in Jess's childhood. But the power of imagination is also the navigational tool, in these postmodern childhoods.

Jess's brand of diasporicity is perhaps too stark in its differences – her mother is a first generation Nigerian immigrant and her father is English. While she might share Gilroy's (1993) notion of "routedness" with a larger Euro-American African diaspora, generational difference in settlement provides something distinctive about her sense of diasporicity. This idea of a differentiated diaspora is dealt with by both Gilroy (1987; 1993) and Brancato (2008) as something that is implicit in the intra-politics of the Euro-American diaspora.[174] Perhaps the polarities of Jess's heritage are more pronounced and their genealogies less mobile and more immediate. In the text however, her *abiku* status is foregrounded more, as a magnetic force, pulling her back to Nigeria, to tie up loose ends of the traditional Yoruba rituals. One could conclude that the history of her genealogy is more immediate as compared to the protagonist in Oyeyemi's second novel *The Opposite House*.

5.5 Childhoods of the "New Diaspora" in *The Opposite House*

The idea of diaspora in *The Opposite House* is portrayed through a more complex notion of genealogies. The characters in the text, who are Afro-Cubans living in London have a longer and protracted history – they, unlike Jess have substantial links with the larger Euro-American black diaspora. Their genealogies are complicated by a transnational movement of their culture(s) and histories. Their family histories have substantive connections with those of the "black Atlantic." Like Jess, they possess a multiple consciousness, informed by mobile histories and cultures. The idea of myths and legends is still significant in *The Opposite House*, in creating continuities with an "Afrosporic" history.

Oyeyemi constructs a more complex mythopoetic structure in the narrative of *The Opposite House*. The narrative structure and plot line is informed by the complicated

[174] See Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1998) Dominic Thomas (2007), in their examination of the black diaspora in France. See also Michelle M Wright's (2004) chapter titled "The Urban Diaspora: Black Subjectivities in Berlin, London and Paris," P. 18-228.

historical and mythical genealogy of this Afro-Cuban family. As a family that has a complex diasporic history, multiple myths inform their sense of identity. The multiple myths reflect the "melting pot" constitution of this family. Its members speak several European languages, apart from originating and having lived in various countries and continents. The Cuban *mestizo* constitution of this family also informs the syncretism in the form of religious worship that they identify with. Oyeyemi portrays the practice of Santeria as a point of interaction for the various histories, myths, legends and genealogies that constitute this family. The notion of "house" as the title suggests has symbolic importance because of its implication of a constitution of familial genealogy. It may well reflect the "homing desire" that underscores diasporic consciousness and subjectivity. We can also see the house as a *leitmotif* which is informed by the spatio-temporal mobility of childhood as this study has tried to trace. The house can be traced in childhood's marked attention to it (as explored in chapter 3), as a topography and as a space-time chronotope – within the contexts of a diasporic consciousness and subjectivity. The house is a metaphor and metonym in which diasporic anxieties about place, space, time and belonging are played out. It stands out in contrast to Gilroy's (1993) idea of the ship in his concept of the "black Atlantic". While the ship, according to Gilroy is metaphoric of his idea of "routedness," the house in this case stands for the other polemic – "rootedness." The house is portrayed as also a micro-cultural and micro-political unit that connects mobile histories, cultures and therefore identities. As a micro-cultural unit, it is the site for micro-relationships that make visible familial genealogies – related to what this study examines in chapter four. These are the micro-relationships that define the text of childhood, in relation to family fiction, but are also informed by the anxieties of diasporic mobility and "homing desires." The house is a chronotope, where the symbolic elements of space, place and time converge, through micro-cultural and micro-political activities in it – familial genealogies, rituals, customs, beliefs and practices that connect this familial space to collective histories and identities in continuity or discontinuity with an external socio-cultural, economic and political framework.

The notion of the house in *The Opposite House* is, however, caught in the contrast between mobility and rootedness. Again Oyeyemi juxtaposes reality and magic, through

the portrayal of an Afro-Cuban family living in London and another mythic family, in which an Afro-Cuban syncretic pantheon of gods live – in the "somewhere house" that has entrances from multiple continents. The notion of physical chronotopes of space and time are contrasted with those of a mythical space and time. Oyeyemi develops a dual narrative structure, with parallel chronotopes etched in reality, myth and magic related to the experiences of Maja's family in Habana and London, but also their mythical "roots" somewhere in Lagos Nigeria. Moreover, the notion of identity in *The Opposite House* is portrayed through the idea of travel. The identities of Maja's family are assembled in London through a literal journey. Maja, the protagonist moves to London from Cuba at the age of five, mirroring Oyeyemi's own migration to London at about the same age. Maja's parents Papi and Chabella are academics who have not only lived in Cuba, but have also lived and taught in Germany and France, Maja's boyfriend Aaron is Jewish and was born and raised in Ghana. Assembled here are therefore, in the literal sense, travelled and in the sense of identity, travelling. This admixture of identities reflects a *mestizo* texture of identity formation, brought together through fragments of different experiences that cut across three continents. It is reflected in the several languages spoken in this household – English, German, Spanish, French, Yoruba and Ewe. The transnational texture of culture is also reflected in the syncretism of Santeria religious practice. Santeria is symbolic of a long transnational history that dates back to religious Atlantic slave trade activities in the seventeenth, eighteenth up to late nineteenth centuries.

Santeria's historical development in Cuba brings together this family to Cuba as a place where their histories converge. Especially practiced by Maja's mother, it foregrounds a maternal genealogy in *The Opposite House* that draws spatio-temporal connections of the family to sugar plantation and slave history in Cuba (9). Santeria also has a strong connection to Yoruba religious practices that were syncretised with Catholic ones, drawn from the cartographies of slave history and activities in the "black Atlantic." Santeria can therefore can be what Gilroy (1993:3) has described as "bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that [Gilroy has] heuristically called the black Atlantic world." Gilroy's examination of England's black urbanscape

and its expressive cultures is informed by W.E.B Du Bois' (1903) notion of a "double consciousness". This consciousness according to Gilroy underpins black cultural forms in the diaspora, what he calls "counterculture to modernity's" claims of enlightenment – reason, civilisation, morality and legality. Gilroy's methodological approach to these black cultures is influenced by his theoretical conception of the black Atlantic as a "political and cultural formation" (1993:19), with a transcendental vision that ruptures ethnic, national and continental formations because of the transnational nature of slave history. This particular dynamic of "black Atlantic" culture's transnational outlook is especially significant in examining the socio-political history of Santeria in Cuba, in relation to the changing attitudes to national culture and politics – part of the historical contexts that inform the migration of Maja's family to London.

The Opposite House is therefore contextualised within transnational slave histories, the discourse of the "black Atlantic" and its diasporic peoples, as well as the specificities of Afro-Cuban experience, where the discourse of identity for the protagonist converges spatio-temporally. In light of the syncretic ontology of the histories and cultures we are dealing with here, Oyeyemi embarks on mythology, as she does in *The Icarus Girl*, to explore the identity struggles of the protagonist Maja, whose sense of diaspora is far more historically complex compared to Jess. This complex history is portrayed by the diversity of myths that inform the narrative structure of the novel, described by Cooper (2009:109) as "a mélange of travelling gods, slavery and an American poet, among other mingling myths and mutations." Oyeyemi draws once again from Greek and Yoruba Pantheons, giving them a conspicuous narrative structure where they co-exist in the "somewhere house." Apart from these mythological signifiers, her title is drawn from the poem by Emily Dickinson titled "There's been a Death in the Opposite House." This intertextuality informs the emptiness and eschatological outlook given to the text by the mythopoeia of the "somewhere house."[175] Perhaps this eschatological outlook itself reflects the "social death" (Patterson, 1982) ascription to slave identity that generations of black expressive countercultures have continuously dealt with, and which Maja's family

[175] Most of the titles that precede different sections of *The Opposite House* are also drawn from the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

can draw its inspiration from. The gothic house is used in Dickinson's poem, as symbol and metaphor that elicits eschatological imagery. We have examined the house in chapter three as a chronotope, as topography where meanings are mapped in Adichie's fiction. While in Adichie's fiction it represents a diasporic consciousness, its explicitly gothic nature in Oyeyemi's fiction, especially in her latest novel *White is for Witching*, makes it a distinct subject, characterised by the animism it is portrayed in – the appropriately haunted topography of its architecture. The emptiness and grotesque-ness of the house symbolises the silenced histories and heritages waiting to be excavated.

The narrative of the "somewhere house" in *The Opposite House*, runs parallel, and sometimes mythically opposite the one Maja the protagonist and her family live. Situated in a mythological spatio-temporality, it is anchored "somewhere" – as an ethereal chronotope of space and time. Yemaya Saragua (referred to subsequently as Aya), one of the occupants of this "somewhere house" is in fact a goddess, whose cultural value has had a highly mobile history, in the "new world" and the "new diaspora." Originating in the Yoruba pantheon, she is associated with the ocean, which in the context of *The Opposite House*, is a signifier of mobility in the context of slave history. Indeed the "somewhere house" is positioned between two continents and specifically two cities, London and Lagos: "One door takes Yemaya straight out into London and the ragged hum of a city after dark. The other door opens out into the stripped flag and cooking-smell cheer of that tattered jester, Lagos – always, this door leads to a place that is floridly day" (1). This mythic and magical architectural positioning begins to portray the transitional gulf that characterises not only childhood in *The Opposite House*, but also the diasporic consciousness of the Afro-Cuban family in the text. It is interesting that the protagonist's name, Maja, is a derivative of the goddess Yemaya, who in other cases is referred to as Yemaja. Yemaya, the goddess symbolised by the ocean is also the symbol of motherhood and is the protector of children. Having been carried to the shores of slavery, Yemaya is symbolic of a transnational religiosity that cuts across Cuba, Haiti and Brazil. Indeed her oceanic essence, dating back to her place of origin, has the appeal of a mythical symbol of travel, mobility, transition but also a gendered genealogy, by virtue of it being an embodiment of motherhood. Indeed one cannot fail to see her association with

motherhood in relation to the "mother Africa" pedestal that has been much of African postcolonial feminist criticism (Nnaemeka, 1997; 1998). In *The Opposite House*, the idea of genealogy is foregrounded in the mytho-symbolic importance of Yemaya, through Chabella's practice of Santeria religion and the protagonist's continued references to her maternal genealogy in Cuba.

The Opposite House follows a narrative structure that is informed by the scattered consciousnesses, histories and heritages of the protagonist Maja. The narrative structure is deliberately disjointed in texture and mobile in thoughts, references, hints and scattered historiographies. Maja's sense of disjuncture is captured in her scuttled thought process and stream of consciousness, which is portrayed in her own awareness of the tyranny of diasporic movement:

> I was seven years old when I came here. I have come to think that there's an age beyond which it is impossible to lift a child from the pervading marinade of an original country, pat them them down [sic] with a paper napkin and then deep-fry them in another country, another language like hot oil scalding the first language away. (12)

This fragmented moment occasioned by movement shows how diasporic identities are constructed as processes of becoming. Mobility occasions cultural dynamism and identity tensions and struggles. It is a culturally destructive but also constructive process. The diasporic subject is at an intercultural, multicultural and transcultural space defined by Bhabha's (1994) underscoring of this "third space" as a culturally potent yet disruptive space to national cultures and spatio-temporalities. However, Bhabha signals to the solidarities that can be fashioned out of this diasporic space of difference so that migrants, immigrants, colonials and postcolonials create a minority discourse at the frontiers of national boundaries and spaces, which always disrupt the homogenous empty time ascribed to the nation by Benedict Anderson (1991).

In Maja's skittered and disjointed consciousness, there is a collage of references and hints that portray the liminal cultural space she inhabits. References and hints are made to Catholic Saints (12), Cuban History (9), German philosophers (12), Ghanaian cuisine (20-21) and Afro-Cuban religious and slave histories (23-25) as defining the protagonist's liminal and hybrid epistemological, historical and cultural make up. Moreover, it is interesting the way language is portrayed as a synecdoche to continental topographies:

> Mami sat with me then and told me again, with long pauses as she moved the ideas she remembered from German to English. When she prays to the saints for intercession, her Spanish is damaged and slow because she is moving her Thoughts from Africa to Cuba and back again. (12)

The Opposite House is therefore underlined by a methodology of mobility, with the narrative style portraying highly mobile thoughts, memories and histories. Diasporic identities as portrayed here are constantly underlined by creativity, by "politics of aesthetics" to borrow Jacque Ranciere's (2006) words. The narrative draws for instance on religious slave histories as temporalities that are hidden, silenced and always defined by an aesthetic artifice of syncretism, adaptation and assimilation: in essence a politics of existential negotiation that portrays the aesthetic and narrative spirit of *The Opposite House*. I will quote at length, how Oyeyemi portrays these historiographies:

> The slaves in Cuba learnt to recognise their gods when they saw ripped white bed sheets, forked scraps of wood, overturned tin buckets. These things marked places where mass could be celebrated. If you still knew who you were, you had to keep it a secret. The gods hid among the saints and apostles and nobody perceived them unless they wanted to; it didn't take as much as people had thought for Catholicism and Yoruba to fuse together. The saints intercede for us with God, who must despise us with Olorun who, being a

> darker side of God, possibly despises us more. A painting of a saint welling holy tears and the story of an Orisha teach you the same thing – if you cry for someone, it counts as a prayer. (25)

Maja takes on this Afro-Cuban historiography as instructive of historical affirmation, foregrounding silenced heritages at the core of her fragmented sense of identity. The religious tenor of these histories is useful for navigating diasporic landscapes of identity: its visibility in the material cultures, practices and memories of Santeria religion, practiced by her mother, has been at the centre of scholarship on Afro-Cuban identities (George, 1993; Falola & Childs, 2004; Bial, 2004; Holloway, 2005). The "middle passage of the gods" as Brenda Cooper (2009) calls it, connects the worlds that Maja belongs to – Lagos, Habana and London, which are metonymic of the triangular slave trade – the "black Atlantic" – and therefore endowing Maja with a transnational historical genealogy. The mobile histories, genealogies and heritages are the reservoir that Oyeyemi draws on to construct a narrative structure that is as confounding as it is bewildering; a labyrinthine narrative structure that reflects the multiple consciousness of Oyeyemi as a diasporic subject. Brenda Cooper makes the point that the use of language in *The Opposite House* is important in portraying for us the "multiple cultures, histories and tongues" (2009:108) that Oyeyemi has inherited. One can also see a shift in the dimensions of diasporicity, portrayed in Oyeyemi's oeuvre: in *The Icarus Girl*, she explores the idea of Africa, from a migrant first generation genealogy of Jess's maternal parentage. *The Opposite House* takes us further, to a more historically complex notion of diasporicity with first generation Afro-Cuban migrants in London. *White is for Witching* takes on a white subjectivity as its organising consciousness.

The complexity of representing competing influences, histories and genealogies of this Afro-Cuban immigrant family, is reflected in the labyrinthine narrative structure of *The Opposite House*. It defies coherence, as it scurries along a mythopoetic pattern that is pervaded by the poetic consciousness of Emily Dickinson. Cooper delineates for us what she calls the "codes" for interpreting the novel from the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Indeed most of the sections in the book get their titles from the poetry of Emily

Dickinson, so that *The Opposite House* takes on the eccentricity of Dickinsonian poetry, which as Cooper demonstrates, is defined by the metamorphosis of reality, magic and allegory, and the razzmatazz of narrative structure. Oyeyemi uses mythopoetic language here, drawing from a reservoir of Afro-Cuban, European and Yoruba pantheons and the influence of Euro-American literary traditions, to come up with a narrative structure that defies interpretative regimes, destabilising aesthetic regimes that lay claim to specific spatio-temporal historiographies. The language used is metonymic of material cultures from variant cultural spheres, words are drawn from Yoruba, German, Spanish and Afro-Cuban Creole to describe literary influences, religious historiographies, cuisines, slang words of affection, myths, legends and philosophies. This reservoir reflects Maja's hybrid worldview and scurrying thought process. She has been brought up amidst variant cultural practices that range from the worship of Yoruba gods, to observing Catholic rituals. The Yoruba pantheon co-exists, in animist fashion, in her parents' house (35-37).

On the other hand, the "somewhere house," where Greco-Roman and African deities co-exist also implicitly connects with the real house where Maja stays, in slanted and oblique ways. Yemaya Saragua, the deity of the ocean, the essence of motherhood and protector of children, whose evolved versions exist in varied nomenclature across the Caribbean and America, is perhaps vaguely personified by Maja, whose name is a derivative of Yemaya. Yemaya stands as a symbol of a maternal genealogy, which is drawn from a long relationship of priesthood that runs through Maja's maternal genealogy:

> But then perhaps my mother's family is favoured. My great-grandmother, Bisabuela Carmen, was a female *babalawo*, a Santeria Priest. (37) [Emphasis retained]

As Maja's middle name is Carmen, she carries this maternal genealogy. It contains genealogical importance, supplemented by the oral tales that abound in her maternal ancestry. These tales are carried down through the female members of the family in a griot-like manner:

> Mami's *apataki* tales aren't only about the gods; they
> flow and cover her family too, her memories place
> a mantle around Bisabuela Carmen, whose namesake
> I am. (37-38)

The tales function in finding connections between the gods and humans, as with Maja's great-grandmother wrestling with the Yoruba god Chango, in a way similar to Jacob's wrestling with God in the Old Testament of the Bible:

> Chango broke both of Carmen's arms and a leg, sparing
> her her life because she surprised him – her boldness
> surpassed humanity. But Chango was wary ever afterwards
> of Carmen's sharp nails and deep bite. (37)

The practice of Santeria provides the connection between the terrestrial and celestial, whenever someone is possessed with a particular deity, like the incident above. But perhaps the most symbolic connection between Maja's family and the "somewhere house" is the portrayal of intra-deity co-existence in the "somewhere house" and the practice of Santeria by Maja's mother. The narrative of the "somewhere house" relates to the co-existence of Yoruba and Greco-Roman gods. The goddess Yemaya Saragua is made to co-exist with Proserpine (from Greco-Roman Patheon), in a tense metaphysical environment that symbolises maternal genealogies in variant mythologies of African and European origin. The juxtaposing of mythological beliefs and practices, allows for a discourse on differences and similarities as nodal points of identity-making. As observed in *The Icarus Girl*, Jess benefits from the experience and consciousness of seemingly contrastive discourses of subjectivity – she is caught, in her self-reflexive subjectivity at that "third space" between modern psychology and the Yoruba myth of *abiku* and twin childhood. In *The Opposite House*, Oyeyemi situates this discourse in a more complex space, in which the meta-fictional structure that she begins with in *The Icarus Girl* is

complicated by intra-deitic mythopoeia, something that is concomitant to the immigrant Afro-Cuban sense of identity represented by Maja's family in *The Opposite House*.

Familial genealogy in *The Opposite House* is historicised in the travelling mytho-religious practices, rituals and customs. What we have, in the form of the actual practices of Santeria and the narrative of the "somewhere house" is a historiographic processing of mythical and religious identities that are informed by transcontinental experiences and consciousnesses. In other words, genealogies, histories, customs, practices and rituals, which are the specifics of the process of identity-making, are defined by travelling myths and legends. The idea of travel, mobility and movement is an underlying analytic in the identity discourse going on in *The Opposite House*. The narrative takes on a complex subjectivity, as the voices of slave history, carried orally via Maja's maternal genealogy are tempered by the forces of the present – spatio-temporal locations (which carry their own sense of history). In other words, there is a spatio-temporal disjuncture occasioned by what Linda Hutcheon (1988), in examining postmodernism has referred to as the "present past," where the past is interrogated from the subjective positions of the present, because of the limiting access to the past. Maja finds herself in a position of disjuncture, having to be conscious of her scattered spatio-temporal experience – Cuba and London, genealogical slave history and her migrant present. At the same time, being an Afro-Cuban also means having to engage with a mythical and ideational experience of Africa, specifically Yoruba origins, which come with a different spatio-temporal status.

One could therefore trace three levels of discourses that Maja is trying to negotiate. The first and primary one is related to the chronotopes of her childhood, signified by the rupturing tyranny of movement – Cuba and London. The second and genealogically immediate one has to do with the Cuba of her parentage and grand-parentage. Portrayed in her maternal genealogy, this is found in the material cultures – in the rituals, customs and practices of Santeria religion and the maternal line of priesthood that she acknowledges. The third level of discourse goes back to the annals of diasporic history. Maja shares this sense of history with a "black Atlantic" diaspora across Europe and the Americas. This is the transcontinental history which traces its spatio-temporal co-

ordinates in the land of Africa and the mobile slave ship. Cutting across these levels of discourse is the notion of "Black" subjectivity that as Michelle Wright (2004) underlines can be examined as a signifier in the discourse of identity for people of African descent in Europe and America. As a signifier, the notion of "Blackness" according to Wright is self-conscious of essentialisms that bracket it with the notion of race or culture, an argument that Gilroy (1987; 1993) emphasises in relation to Black British identities. Maja in *The Opposite House* is struggling to reconcile the different notions of blackness, having grown up in the *mestizo* culture of *Afrocubanismo* and later migrating to London. Her childhood in Habana, characterised by creolised histories, cultures, customs and practices, was also defined by a mythic and ideational relationship to Africa, which was also mediated by the slave history known to her from her maternal genealogy. In contrast, London presents different senses of black subjectivity. As a less creolised cultural landscape, black subjectivity in London is defined along the continuum of essentialised Caribbean-ness (as Gilroy's *Aint no Black in the Union Jack* demonstrates) and a migrant Continental "African-ness." These categories collapse the notions of race, culture and nation together, something that Gilroy's (1987) project aims to (de)emphasise.

In London, Maja constructs her subjectivity, against a multitude of others with varied national significations. At her school, girls from Africa perform their varied nationalisms in various symbolic practices:

> girls with perfectly straightened hair and mellow gospel
> voices that changed the sound of the sung school Mass;
> girls who had (or pretended to have) Igbo, Ewe, Yoruba,
> Chiga, Ganda, Swahili. [sic] They built a kind of slang
> that was composed of slightly anglicised words borrowed
> from their pool of languages. (95)

These symbolic markers, variant allegiances to African nationalities are part of the performance of nationalism in this diasporic space. Despite their disparateness, they are creolised into an anglicised "slang" that while seemingly vogue, puts Maja at the cross-

roads of identification (96-97). Confronted by the diasporic reality of the ideational and mythical Africa via the African girls in her school who perform their nationalisms in various ways, she realises the essentiality of "Blackness" as a signifier of her identity:

> I strip to my underwear and study myself in the mirror; it
> is a bronzed sorrel woman with a net of curly hair who looks
> black, and she does not look Jamaican or Ghanaian or Kenyan
> or Sudanese – the only firm thing that is sure is that she is black.
> (98)

While this notion of blackness transcends its geographical signifier (Africa), it is ascribed a transcontinental and transnational ontology: "In my blood is a bright chain of transfusions; Spaniards, West Africans, indigenous Cubans, even the Turkos – the Cuban Lebanese" (98). Maja finds herself reflecting on the notion of blackness as an essential signifier of her identity in London. Yet her sense of being in London is disturbed by her childhood in Cuba, before migrating to London. The skittering narrative pattern and the uncoordinated thoughts skip from one spatio-temporality to another, transgressing the logic of coherence. Temporal patterns in *The Opposite House* follow a particularly disjointed trajectory. Maja speaks predominantly in the present perfect tense, describing events in present day London. There is however the constant interruption of narrative threads from the past. She picks up a particular thread, abandons it half way through while going into a historical detour.

The narrative therefore follows a disjointed trajectory, where the present is imbricated with the past. This kind of fiction, which Linda Hutcheon (1988) calls "Historiographic metafiction" is defined by a "present past," where self-reflection is complicated by historical events. The narrative of childhood as previous chapters have tried to underline, follows a present past. In chapter two, the notion of memory in the narrative of and about childhood is seen as influenced by the autobiographical self-reflection of a childhood past and the identity anxieties of an authorial present. Maja is therefore caught at this point of disjuncture, as a character that bears a vague semblance to Oyeyemi's own migration to

London at the age of four and also lays claim to the histories of Cuba which in turn trace back to a mythic and ideational relation to Africa, connected through slave history. Maja's childhood is therefore the past of her present, as she is constantly haunted by a particular blighted memory of Cuba – while under the table at her family's going away party, where she becomes amnesic. Cuba assaults her mental schema, like a traumatic memory, which she ascribes the metaphor of the scalding oil of a pan (12). These histories, of her blighted Cuban memory of childhood, of the slave genealogy she descends from become intrusive of her present. These become contents of intense self reflection, because present day London does not allow her to deal with where she comes from. And so there is the constant self-reflection. Up to that point, her narrative seems to be stagnantly stuck at a present that is still grappling with the past. The present seems depthless and incoherent. Maja's present day London is therefore stuck in the past of Habana, of her childhood.

The present is precarious and superficial, its emptiness is a void filled with Maja's constant self-reflection. Cuba and Habana are very much alive in the Santeria her mother practices, in the stories her father tells her about the illusions of Cuban revolution (206-7). In fact, the history of Santeria religion and its practice in Cuba has been at the heart of the evolution of the notions of race, culture and nation and their "-isms" – racism and nationalism. Christine Ayorinde (2004) traces the emergence and submergence of Santeria religion in Cuba's socio-cultural and political history as it was marginalised and then centralised at different points of political and cultural revolution in Cuba.[176] Cuba comes to Maja in disjointed pieces of memories, embodied in the constant sobbing of her mother and the sudden appearance of Magalys, a childhood friend who apparently witnesses Maja's hysterical moment under the table during her family's going away party (167-169). Maja therefore hankers for a childhood she does not remember coherently, it comes to her in fragments of memory. Therefore, she seems to live in the struggle against the amnesia of her Cuban memory and the reality of present day London. Yet her sense of self is also portrayed as anchored and scattered in black Atlantic slave history which

[176] For further details, see Christine Ayorinde (2004) Santeria in Cuba: Tradition and Transformation," pp. 209-230.

converges at Cuba, the country of her birth. Childhood for Maja becomes a stubborn and interrogative memory that invades her mental schema, wanting to be resolved. She hankers to get this memory back, "I need my Cuba memory back, or something just as small, just as rich, to replace it" (169). At the end of the text, Maja prepares to go back to Cuba, much to her father's exasperation.

While Maja is engaged in a process of self-discovery, her mother holds on to her practice of Santeria religion as a process of self-identification. Her father on the other hand detests this religiosity, preferring an intellectual secularism and a distance away from his experience of Cuba. For Maja, Cuba is a ghost that haunts her, in her re-defined senses of black subjectivity in a new country – in the practice of Santeria religion by her mother and the slave history that is suddenly foregrounded not only through the practice of Santeria religion, but also through a new sense of black subjectivity specific to her new home in London. Her sense of the self is fragmented as that of Jess in *The Icarus Girl*. Both Jess and Maja construct themselves through meta-fictional narratives that engage the constructed-ness of historical genealogies, with the ultimate aim of living simultaneously multiple lives and occupying multiple spaces and times.

These mythopoetics underline the multiple narratives at play, allowing Oyeyemi to draw from diverse cultural worlds – myths, legends, poetry, fiction and history. Mythopoetics, allow Oyeyemi's narrative to be self-reflective, to question the "meta-narratives' (Lyotard, 1984) of identity, by providing alternative narratives that displace, fragment and transgress boundaries of identification. These narratives parody the meta-narratives that essentialise identities. To understand Maja's fragmented self, we have to engage with the mythopoetics of the "somewhere house," in which an intra-deity mythological discourse is going on and which mirrors, as the term "opposite" implies, Maja's complex sense of genealogy and identity. Oyeyemi portrays diasporic childhoods as fragmented narratives of the figures (Jess), memories and images (Maja). These childhoods seem to take on postmodern attitudes, outlooks and experiences because they are self-conscious and self-reflective of the pluri-dimensionality of their genealogies and histories. Indeed, Oyeyemi's fiction questions coherence, linearity and teleology. It defies attempts at

classification as it borrows from Oyeyemi's own multi-dimensional, experiential, mythic, ideational and historical heritages.

5.6 Conclusion

The Icarus Girl and *The Opposite House* portray childhood as a site of diasporic discourse on identity. Childhood figures, images and memories are located at the centre of identity struggles, which are linked to Oyeyemi's childhood experiences, having migrated to London from Nigeria at the age of four. Oyeyemi goes back to her childhood as an imaginative recourse and resource for engaging her sense of identity. Childhood is positioned at the centre of multiple myths, legends and narratives of diasporic subjectivity. The relevance of childhood in this discourse lies in not only its presumed innocence and naivety, but in its nature as a space and time of experimentation. In this sense, childhood generates a particular aesthetics of experimentation – animist, magical realism and mythopoeia, which use postmodernist devices of pastiche, intertextuality, historiography and metafiction. Childhood is used to question the reality and magic of events, the linearity of history and the contiguity of space. Drawing from her own experience of dislocation, Oyeyemi constructs her childhood figures, images and memories at the points of disjuncture, difference and displacement. These childhoods are already in a *process* of psycho-physical flux, when we encounter them. She uses them to elaborate on the diasporic space as a processual one, defined by the mobility of both material and metaphysical cultures – food, customs, rituals, myths, legends and religious paraphernalia. Childhood is therefore at the centre of the imagination of diasporic identity. Indeed, Oyeyemi's childhood in Lewisham London, was defined by a free-wheeling imagination, which soared – Icarus-like – in an explicit attempt at dealing with the tyranny of dislocation and displacement.

To connect worlds sundered apart requires the experimental nature that childhood provides through imaginative narratives. Through the discourse of childhood, frontiers are extended, boundaries extended and broken. Childhood discourse is allowed exploration of the fantastic and fabulous. Gaylard's description of that "Pandora's box"

rife with "childhood fears, repressions, social taboos, secrets, neuroses, traumas and the repositories of wishes, dreams, the fantastic, the fabulous and the transcendent" (2005:3), is useful in summarising not only the thematic but also the poetics of Oyeyemi's works. While her texts reflect her own fears, anxieties, and traumas of diasporic displacement and dislocation, they imbibe a poetics of the fantastic and fabulous, for how does one deal with having to live simultaneously in multiple spaces, places and times? The world of childhood provides an imagination that can deal with this "Pandora's box."

Childhood therefore becomes itself a postmodern moment that constructs postmodern identities to deal with the tyranny of displacement and dislocation of cultures and therefore scattered senses of identity. Its nature as a process, as *becoming*, allows it to engage with postmodernist poetics of pastiche, hybridity, irony, the displacement of meta-narratives, the multiplicity of margins and the provisional nature of reality as a diametrically constructed anthropomorphic phenomenon. The notion of childhood as a *process*, allows this chapter to foreground a particular ontology of Oyeyemi's fiction – provisionality, paradox and problematic subjectivity that constantly scuttle the meaning-making process. Linda Hutcheon (1988) foregrounds these elements as definitive of "historiographic metafiction," which characterise what she calls "a poetics of postmodernism" and which another critic McHale (1987) attributes to "postmodern fiction."

6.0 CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

> The child who was born, grew up, lived, and died in the same village or hamlet was less able to distance his adult from his immature self than the child who, having passed his early years on some remote farm, estate, or sheep station unidentifiable from the atlas, came later to roam among the great cities and capitals of the world. (Richard Coe, 1984:17)

> The most recent writers of childhoods appear to be addressing a concern that a shift has taken place, that instead of living in a multi-cultural world made up of easily identifiable cultures, we are living in a more fluid transcultural or even transnational world. (Richard Priebe, 2006:50-51)

6.1 Identity and Childhood: Negotiating the Postcolonial and Postmodern

The epigraphs above capture the theoretical framework and thematic concerns that this study has grappled with, in relation to the discourse of childhood. The discourse, as Coe points out is contextualised in the idea of mobility – the movement in time and space of the material – bodies and cultural artefacts – and metaphysical – histories, memories, images, myths, legends, aspects that are elemental in the construction of identity. Coe foregrounds the centrality of childhood in defining the diasporic adult self and its sense of identity. The notion of distance between an adult and its childhood self is mediated by the process of mobility and is therefore related to the idea of diasporicity. Mobility is a crucial analytic in this discourse of childhood, which in contemporary Nigerian fiction is defined by mobile memories, images and figures of childhood. Childhood in

contemporary Nigerian fiction is therefore a site where identity is negotiated for the contemporary diasporic Nigerian writer.

The notion of identity, when influenced by mobility, has been referred to as "nomadic." Richard Priebe refers to the "shift" and "fluid" in relation to worlds of experience and cultures related to "recent writers of childhood." Therefore the nomadic, shifting and fluid world of childhood has the effect of redefining the notion of identity for the diasporic subject. While the idea of shifting, fluid and nomadic identities delineates diasporic subjectivity, it is also definitive of the ontology of childhood as a *process*. This ontology of childhood as a process points to it as a site for what Priebe refers to as the "multi-cultural," and "transcultural." This means that childhood is a site where culture in its multiple and transient dimensions is negotiated, and therefore always in a *process*. Priebe implies that recent writers of childhood are alive to the ways in which contemporary identities are constructed via shifting and fluid multicultural and transcultural worlds. It means also that these childhoods represented in fiction are at the pulse of recent and contemporary forms of identity. Therefore, they are part of the discourse that grapples with constructing contemporary identities. And thus childhood connects the diasporic to the ideas of the multi-cultural and transcultural, because it is mobile, shifting and fluid in its memories, images and figures.

This study, while alive to the concept of diaspora, is positioned at a methodological confluence of reading the postcolonial and the postmodern. In fact, to ascribe the fiction under study here as Nigerian, endows it with postcolonial frameworks of reference. I am aware of the problematic implications that this comes with, particularly with the danger of being labelled provincial, regional or even peddling the exotic (Huggan, 2001). Indeed the fiction itself, particularly Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which deals with the Nigerian civil war, seems to question the very entity called Nigeria. However, while the term is largely nominal and definitive, I use it whilst being aware of the anxieties of categorisation and the limitations that can arise out of it, while exploiting the notion of a particular *experience* related to a specific geography. The notion of experience is perhaps a prerequisite that specifies and particularises, without limiting interpretive frameworks

and the meanings that might come out of it. In specifying a Nigerian experience, the study invites postcolonial frameworks of reference and reading practices. This notion of experience refers firstly to the autobiographical, in relation to the authors of the fiction in this study living their childhoods in Nigeria before migrating abroad. This autobiographical element is reflected in the setting of their fiction in Nigeria. Chapters two and three focused on the autobiographical nature of memory, place and space in relation to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction. Nsukka stands out as a "country of the mind" in this fiction, as well as a memory-place of Adichie's childhood. Secondly, the notion of experience is explored in its ideational and mythical dimensions in the fiction of Oyeyemi, where Africa in general and Nigeria in particular form a mythic locus of Oyeyemi's narrative, foregrounding Africa as a space and place to negotiate diasporic identities.

In light of the foregoing, the ascription "Nigerian" in reference to these writers goes a little further than just being nominal, to carry some weight of specific experience. This regionally specific experience justifies the theoretical framework "postcolonial," in connecting this experience to a historical context of particular discursive practices. These discursive practices, traced back from the engagement with the notion of colonialism, are, in relation to this study, and in the words of Moore-Gilbert (1997:12) "a set of reading practices [...] preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination." This is the theoretical context, at a macro-level, of the experience of Nigeria. However, this experience and the history of its discourse, as chapter one delineates, follow not only the notion of colonialism, but also other macro-categories of class, race and gender. Moreover, these concepts have been mostly read in Nigerian fiction, in relation to the nation-state. Nevertheless, the nation-state produces what Richard Priebe reminds us – the multi-cultural and transcultural experience of other worlds occasioned by mobile childhoods. In other words, the specific experience of Nigeria is transcended, leading to a rupture of not only spatio-temporal boundaries but also of reading practices that go with it. In this way the postcolonial "set of reading practices" as discussed by Moore-Gilbert,

takes on the dimensions of the "creolised" or "hybrid," as Robert Young discusses (2001).

The childhoods represented in the works examined in this study become therefore *sites of hybridity*. They become grounds for experimentation and syncretism, mixing and rupturing boundaries by the movement both across and along markers and boundaries of identification. Transcending their familial, ethnic, national and continental zones of identification, these childhoods of contemporary Nigerian fiction are markers of the "contemporary." In ascribing to them the label "contemporary," this study is, first of all informed by their temporal coevality in relation to publication, but also in the spatio-temporal locations of the narratives themselves. Secondly, this study is informed by a problematic sense of the notion of "generation." As pointed out in chapter one, this study does not set out deliberately to characterise or substantiate the notion of a "generation." In fact, the activity of categorisation is an uneasy one, in light of how tracing the trajectories of continuities can displace basic assumptions of exclusivity. However, the examination of the notion of genealogies in chapter four is more important in drawing our attention to not only contemporary Nigerian fiction's role in the "family" of African literature but also to the specifics of identity formation through the micro-relationships of fathers and sons and fathers and daughters. In this way, the chapter delineates alternative androgynous genealogies by signaling connections in the fiction of Chimamanda Adichie to both "masculine" and "feminine" strands of Nigerian and African literature. In this sense, the notion of genealogies is a more substantive concept for defining contemporary childhoods' sense of identity as represented in the works studied here. It is the term preferred in this study to the more conventional yet controversial one: "generation." Indeed, Garuba (2005:51) warns us of the pitfalls of categorisation and periodizing.[177]

Thirdly, this study is also informed by the notion of the "contemporary" in the Bakhtinian (1981) sense, of the "novel" as something of "our time," but which as Bakhtin points out is defined by the notion of process, with the "novel," or the "new" as something related to

[177] For further details see Harry Garuba (2005) "The unbearable lightness of being: Re-figuring trends in recent Nigerian Poetry," pp. 51-72.

"becoming." In this case Bakhtin defines the novel as a "genre-in-the-making." In this study's context of the novel of childhood, Bakhtin's idea of the "contemporary" applies therefore to the processual nature of childhood, as a time of "becoming." Indeed, the experimental, the mobile, the shifting and nomadic, attributes defining not only childhood but also the diasporic Nigerian writer's portrayal of childhood images, figures and memories, is the ideational continuum within which we can plot our notion of the "contemporary."

The notion of the contemporary therefore, in referring to temporal coevality, to the tracing of genealogies through micro-relationships, and in signifying the ontology of childhood as experimental, mobile and shifting, points to complex identity-making processes reflected in the fiction studied here. The notion of the contemporary extends conceptual frameworks and reading practices in this study. While it might from the outset carry nominal significance, it signals to "the present," "this moment" or the "recent" and therefore raises questions about substantiating what is "novel" or "recent" about it. In pointing out diasporic contexts, consciousnesses and subjectivities as informing these works, this study foregrounds the postcolonial diasporic experience as definitive of this present, recent time of childhood as portrayed in contemporary Nigerian fiction. In this way, the postcolonial experience is extended into the framework of the postmodern.

In delineating conceptual frameworks for what they call a "new generation" of Nigerian writing, Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton (2005) aptly say:

> The first obvious theoretical implication is that we are dealing essentially with texts born into the scopic regime of the postcolonial and the postmodern, an order of knowledge in which questions of subjecthood and agency are not only massively overdetermined by the politics of identity in a multicultural and transitional frame but in which the tropes of Otherness and subalternity are being remapped by questioning erstwhile totalities such as history, nation, gender

and their respective symbologies. (15)

Adesanmi and Dunton point to a synergy of the postcolonial and postmodern as a regime that can conceptualise and foreground ideas on subjecthood and agency. Indeed, the discourse of identity continuously grapples with subjecthood and agency. In contemporary Nigerian fiction, the question of identity is grappled with through the subjectivity and agency of childhood. Childhood is portrayed in the micro-politics of images, memories and figures. It finds its agency in these elements, helping it define a discourse of its own, which questions what Dunton and Adesanmi call "totalities such as history, nation, gender and their respective symbologies." In this way, childhood is examined as a quest for agency and its subjectivity is foregrounded through the memories, images and figures found in the works studied here.

In this study, childhood is conceptualised as mediating the postcolonial and the postmodern. Located in between these two conceptual frameworks, it shares the discursive vision of postcolonial discourse by foregrounding regimes of totality and domination, and the attitude of postmodern aesthetics by remapping the totalities, collapsing boundaries of exclusivity and enacting what Appiah (1992:235) calls the "multiplications of distinctions." Therefore, childhood shares the marginality of postcolonial subjectivity in discursive practices and the subjective attitude of the postmodern – as the "ex-centric," in Linda Hutcheon's (1988) words. Linda Hutcheon puts it succinctly by pointing out postmodernism's vision of questioning "autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin" (57). The micro-politics of childhood as examined in this study therefore produce the "alternative," through a subversive logic of "dialogue" with spaces, places, memories, histories and times of growth which are defined by the normative micro-relationships with fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and extended family members. In engaging with the normative (read: "adultist"), childhood provides a subversive subjectivity, an interrogative memory, an alternative archive and creates alternative genealogies that therefore place it within the postmodern position of constructing identities.

In examining childhood in relation to the notions of time and history, this study realises that the time and space of childhood, as explored in the fiction of Adichie and Abani fulfils several goals. Firstly, going back to childhood times is conditioned by the diasporic locations and consciousnesses of the writers, who as this study examines in chapter three, reconstruct their "countries of the mind" as places, spaces and times of their own childhood. Going back to childhood times and histories – to geographical times, reflects the need for the postcolonial migrant writer to begin reconstructing their sense of dasporic identity. Indeed, the nostalgia for a geographical time of childhood is revealed in Adichie's experience of not being home for five years, and how *Purple Hibiscus* was crafted out of a sense of nostalgia.

Secondly, the memories, and images of childhood provide us with an alternative experiencing of time and history. The worldview of childhood, as portrayed in the lives of Kambili, Ugwu and Elvis bring us back to the mundane and the ordinary. In this way, and in the words of Njabulo Ndebele (1991), childhood "rediscovers the ordinary." The works of Adichie and Abani therefore depart from the overdetermination of nation-state time and history. This is especially interesting, considering that these works are set at a time of military governance and moments of intense political crisis in Nigeria. Child characters, figures, images and memories provide us with an alternative experience of this unsettled time. While, for instance in *Purple Hibiscus*, we get the undertones of the military regimes through the radio and the sight of soldiers in the street, the discourse of freedom, liberty and agency is personalised and localised in the everyday struggles of Kambili, who seeks to get out of the patriarchal and silenced familial spaces of her own household. Kambili's account presents alternative memories of this time, which defamiliarise the ordinary by making us experience decentred forms of psychosomatic violence while seeing the monotony, as Kambili says, of "the crowd waving green leaves chanted at government square after the coup" (16). Kambili's project of memory therefore presents "interrogative memory," connected to that of the child protagonist Ugwu, in Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Ugwu's houseboy status, presents an interesting parody and subjective consciousness in relation to that of the other voices of Richard and Olanna in the novel. Ugwu's childhood and houseboy status brings us

back to the domesticated experience of the Biafran war. More importantly, the meta-fictional and historiographic structure of the text, inscribes Ugwu into the bigger memory project, as he becomes an authorial voice, for reasons of expiation and healing borne of traumatic memory. In this meta-fictive and historiographic structure, Adichie problematises historical knowledge, while presenting alternative yet composite memories of the Biafran war through the houseboy Ugwu. Adichie's project of memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun* therefore cuts across the collective, cultural and traumatic, while at the same time presenting alternative spaces via that space of connection between the individual and the collective. On the other hand, Chris Abani's *Graceland*, through the teenage protagonist Elvis, presents an alternative experiencing of time and history through popular cultural memory. The popular cultural landscape of Lagos creates another landscape of desire for flight and escape, allowing the protagonist to live a fantastic and alternative existence mediated by television and video. This existence, defined by what Bhabha (1994) has called "vernacular cosmopolitanism" is a material culture of survival, on the margins of the city, but which problematises the "homogenous empty time" ascribed to nation-state temporality.

Thirdly, the narrative memory project, inscribed in the novel of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction, leads us to the notion of the archive. This study realises that the narrative memory form in the novel of childhood, while presenting alternative historical accounts through the world of childhood, also "refigures the archive" (Hamilton et al, 2002) in relation to its normative record-keeping processes. This argument is delineated at two levels. The first one is related to the role of the novel of childhood as a "self-archive" (Roberts, 2002), especially in relation to the "postcolonial migrant writer" (Cooper 2008b). As a self-archivist, the novelist explores history and time from his/her subjective experience, but which is imbricated in complex ways, in that of the societal and collective. In a sense then, the self-archive while connected to the orthodox archive by virtue of the novelist being a part of society, simultaneously problematises it. An example in this study is Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which, by reconstructing the narrative of the Biafran war at this point in time, complicates the literary historiography of the war. It does this by its temporal position of enunciation –

almost four decades since the event happened.[178] In this way, the text refigures this archive, by problematising spatio-temporal cartographies in not only the literary historiography of the war, but also of how Nigeria as a nation might want to map itself out at this point in time.

This leads us to the second level, which realises the role of the novel in (re)narrating the nation-state by the power of reconstructed literary cartographies. Indeed, by reprising the theme of the Biafran war at this point in time Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* signals to a re-excavation of this traumatic memory and archive, while re-inscribing the memory as a "cicatrix," (Soyinka, 1996) in the contemporary Nigerian nation-state.[179] Adichie's novel signals to the "contemporaneousness" of this issue, which as we know in Nigeria today has a relatively residual presence in such civil society organisations as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Perhaps further studies could be done on the relationship between the literature of the Biafran war and social movements such as the ones mentioned above.[180] It would be interesting for instance to see the text's reception in relation to these social movements. In this way, interesting conclusions could be drawn about the contemporary Nigerian novel in relation to ethics, aesthetics and politics.

In talking about the aesthetic and the political, this study posits that childhood is a site of experimentation. Because of its processual nature – as "becoming," it is a site for aesthetic experimentation. Chapter three particularly looked at the notion of the literary chronotope, in examining, through the ideas of Bakhtin, the relevance of space and place as toponyms of meaning in the narrative of childhood. The narrative of childhood is examined as a "storyscape," as a "country of the mind" from which a dialogic activity, through the intersections of the axes of space, place and time is played out. Childhood

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[178] Adichie's work comes as a temporal disjuncture, since the subject of Biafra in Nigerian literary historiography has been largely confined to the 70s and 80s. See the bibliographies of Chidi Amuta (1982) and Craig McLuckie (1987)

[179] Soyinka uses this term to refer to the Nigerian Civil war as an unhealed "open sore" that problematises the temporal cartographies of the Nigerian nation-state.

[180] Some work that might lead to this direction has been done. See "Ken Saro-Wiwa's Art and the Aesthetics of non-silence," an unpublished dissertation by George Austin Tamuno-Opubo, University of the Witwatersrand 2006.

becomes a literary topography, where cartographies of meaning are mapped out, in the protagonists' quest for constructing their identities. Place and space are therefore significant markers that define childhood subjectivity, agency and sense of identification. Adichie's portrayal of Nsukka as a toponym, strategically plays out diasporic anxieties and nostalgias as well as in her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, reconstruct them as residual texts of traumatic memory for the Biafran war. At the same time specific places and spaces in the narrative of childhood can be seen as metonymic of a sense of belonging, as well as of collective and cultural memory, as in the case of Nsukka in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Such places as Nsukka are toponyms that use autobiographical detail to deal with diasporic anxieties and nostalgia, while connecting these to wider interrogations of history through the memory of the Biafran war. In this way, places and spaces of childhood serve as toponyms, even metonyms of meaning.

The figures, memories and images of childhood are plotted in places and spaces of growth as signifiers of meaning in the discourse of identity. The subjecthood and agency of childhood is negotiated around the *topoi* of houses, compounds, streets and cities – which are cartographies for the aesthetic in the "storyscape" of childhood. In a sense therefore, literary cartographies are influential in the process of identification in the representation of childhood. We see Adiche map out cartographies in Kambili's quest for freedom by juxtaposing the places Enugu and Nsukka, and contrasting the notions of silence for the latter to laughter for the former as what populates these places and spaces, and therefore what provides trajectories of identification, freedom and liberty for Kambili. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie remaps Biafran spatio-temporal cartographies, plotting Ugwu's epistemological story of growth within the larger problematic of the war's historiography. The novel's meta-fictive structure combines the aesthetic and the political, using postmodernist historiographic metafiction to inscribe the history of the Biafran war while contesting it, using the houseboy Ugwu as a composite consciousness. In this way, the aesthetic and the political, allow the discourse of childhood to be provisional, paradoxical and give a critique of authority and normativity. In this way the discourse of childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction is able to simultaneously portray postcolonial experience, while adopting a postmodernist aesthetic.

However, the spaces, places and times of childhood, are identified with the micro-relationships that child figures have with fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and extended family members. These relationships bring childhood to the basic notion of genealogies and traditions. Genealogies and traditions come with norms, customs and rituals that define normativity and authority. Childhood is therefore defined by these elements, which are the basic tenets of *identification* for the child figure. In contemporary Nigerian fiction, these relationships are portrayed as grounds of conflict, particularly with the patriarchal configurations of the family set ups in these works. In another sense, the father figure, portrayed as synonymous to the notion of genealogy and tradition becomes a significant antagonist to the already mobile, fluid, shifting, multi-cultural and transcultural texture of the childhood world. In this way, childhood is portrayed as problematising the notions of genealogy and tradition, signified and embodied in the figure of the father. In fact, the notion of identity in relation to memory as well as in relation to place, space, time and history, portrayed in patriarchal configurations is contested in the narrative of childhood. Specifically, the dyadic relationships between fathers and daughters in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good will Come* and fathers and sons in Chris Abani's *Graceland* and *The Virgin of Flames* are at the centre of childhood's contestation of normative genealogies and traditions. The figure of the father therefore embodies tradition, genealogy and identity. The father, in this particular discourse of childhood carries the symbolic importance that Lacan ascribes to the father figure – the law, letter, tradition, genealogy, identity, authority, certainty and legitimacy of and within the family and society.

In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come*, these relationships are portrayed through the sentimental disposition between the father and the daughter. The daughters, defined outside of a patriarchal and masculine genealogy exploit the sentiment that exists between them and their fathers to re-construct an alternative genealogy that is androgynous. For instance, Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* becomes a symbolic link between her severed paternal and grand-paternal genealogy. She is heir to both the patriarchal sentiment of her grandfather Papa Nnukwu and the liberty, freedom and independence of a maternal genealogy through Aunty Ifeoma. This notion of an androgynous genealogy is

also reflected in Adichie's own literary forebears – her work, as examined by Heather Hewett (2005) has the texture of a "transnational intertextuality" which is informed by both "masculine" and "feminine" literary traditions. Indeed, the historical connection between her and Achebe reflects the sentiment between them as father and daughter. In providing an androgynous genealogy, these micro-relationships between fathers and daughters problematise normative genealogical traditions and therefore the legitimacy, certainty and authority of patriarchal (read also adultist) frameworks of identity.

On the other hand, the sons, as portrayed in Chris Abani's *Graceland* and *The Virgin of Flames*, are expected to be *a priori* heirs of a patriarchal genealogy. They challenge this through their subversive performance of masculinity. Affected by childhood abuse and problematic father figures, the sons realise that masculinity and its biological signifiers can be exploited to experience and legitimise alternative senses of identities that displace father figures and the identitarian legitimacy they represent and embody. By (mis)performing masculinity through adornment, painting and transvestism, they consume transsexuality and therefore provide an androgynous sense of identity. In this way sonhood is endowed with a critique of patriarchal configurations and frameworks of identification. Sonhood, as portrayed in these works proffers, in the words of Stephen Frosh (1994) "a view from elsewhere," with regards to sexual difference and the constructed notions of masculinity and femininity.

Both sons and daughters therefore "multiply the distinctions" of identity, by destabilising the authority inscribed in the framework of patriarchy. The micro-relationships portrayed in the varied family settings become grounds for a micro-politics of resistance, parody, foregrounding illegitimacy and therefore empowering childhood with, in borrowing the words of Linda Hutcheon (1988) "a poetics of postmodernism." The challenge and complication of genealogies, provides alternative senses of identity for the protagonists in Adichie's and Abani's works. Kambili for instance breaks out of the psycho-physical oppression of her father by embracing what her father proscribes, her grandfather Papa Nnukwu's world view. She re-inscribes a patriarchal genealogy, albeit by exploiting the liberating topography of her aunt Ifeoma's house at University of Nigeria Nsukka.

However, at the end of *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie's vision of foregrounding a maternal genealogy is clear: Kambili's father is dead, killed by his own erstwhile submissive and problematically conformist wife, Kambili's brother Jaja is in jail vicariously suffering the would-be-fate of his mother, and Father Amadi the young and progressive Catholic priest is whisked off to Germany on a Christian mission. Adichie systematically eliminates all the men but leaves the clear impression that the new and liberating silence at the end of the novel draws from both paternal and maternal genealogies of Kambili. Moreover, Jaja's sacrificial incarceration at the end of the text draws similarities with Achebe's ending in *Arrow of God*, with Obika's death as a sacrificial gesture for the Ezeulu family and indeed with the coming of Christianity which embodies the power of sacrificial love and functions here is a metonym.

The sons, in Abani's works inscribe their own legitimacy and authority and therefore provide alternative and androgynous genealogies by their experience of the multicultural and transcultural cityscapes of Lagos and Los Angeles. They also destabilise a *prior* nature of their inheritance as heirs of patriarchal genealogies by the spaces for freedom that the city creates for them. For them, masculinity is a site where they subvert heteronormativity, masculine senses of genealogy and identity, while providing alternative forms of identity. Therefore, sons and daughters provide a new legitimacy to the discourse of childhood in relation to the notion of genealogies. Sonhood and daughterhood in this way multiply the distinctions and margins of identity-making, while destabilising patriarchal genealogies. The discourse of childhood, explored through the specific notions of sonhood and daughterhood, uncovers for us the micro-politics of identity formation in the intimate and filial familial relations that inform ways of identification for the child figure. Childhood therefore claims a stake in the macro-identity discourse of genealogies, through an anti-foundational poetics – creating alternative spaces to perform masculinities, in the case of Abani's protagonists, and to exploit sentiment, in Adichie's and Atta's protagonists. This world of childhood is empowered, in the case of the sons, by multicultural and transcultural cityscapes, where simulacrum extends spaces of performing identity and where forms of mass media destabilise the authority and legitimacy of monolithic ways of identification.

The notion of genealogies in the discourse of childhood is made complex, by the transcontinental childhoods portrayed in Oyeyemi's works. Ways of identification are complicated by myths and legends related to the genealogies of a "black Atlantic" diaspora. This new experience of childhood pushes the boundaries of childhood discourse to newer levels. Childhood becomes a multi-national, trans-national and multi-continental literary discourse. In this case, we talk about "diasporic childhoods." Here, Africa and specifically Nigeria, become part of a larger diaspora space, with networks that cut across different continents and go back to the annals of "black Atlantic" history. Representing this kind of childhood as Oyeyemi does, means collapsing the gulfs of space and time, and therefore having to construct childhood as a site for the strategic and simultaneous. Oyeyemi exploits the experimental character of childhood, by using mythopoetic narrative structures, which connect myths and legends from various continents in the construction of diasporic childhoods. This is the apotheosis of the notion of mobility – of myths, legends and cultures across continental boundaries, therefore portraying childhood as a space for consuming diasporic subjectivity and constructing postmodern identities. Childhood becomes a space for "transruption," borrowing the word coined by Barnor Hesse (2000). Hesse uses the term to refer to the entanglements of diaspora as "un/settled multiculturalisms," defined by discontinuities and disjunctures of history, time, space and place. This indeed is the nature of the childhood(s) portrayed in Oyeyemi's works: it is a site for the entanglement of the transcultural and multicultural via a (dis)junctural and (dis)continuous sense of spatio-temporality. In this way, childhood is transruptive.

The notion of childhood in Oyeyemi's works is caught in the centre of a practico-sensory experience of Europe and a mythic and ideational experience and consciousness of Africa. These childhoods are highly imaginative, and caught in the struggle between an African genealogy and a European or Caribbean birth. In this way, for instance, Jess in *The Icarus Girl* is caught at the syncretic juncture of myths, legends and narratives from Africa and Europe. Her childhood is defined at a point of conflict between an *abiku* and twin childhood as conceptualiszed in Yoruba Cosmology and a schizophrenic *alter ego* in contemporary Western world of psychoanalysis. These are competing narratives of identity for Jess that make her straddle multiple worlds, spaces and places

simultaneously. Her childhood is defined by an imaginative subjectivity characterised by myths, legends and otherworldly narratives of belonging. Jess's identity is negotiated around that diasporic space of imagination, where competing genealogies struggle to assert themselves. This space is one of traveling myths, legends and cosmologies. In this sense then chapter five explores the notion of a racialised *abiku* – a notion that has always been read in a specifically Nigerian and Yoruba locality in the works of Ben Okri. The racialised *abiku* is in this case a metaphor of the transcultural and multicultural childhood(s), having travelled from one continent to the other. Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* takes on a deeper and complex "black Atlantic" historiography through the memories of Maja's childhood. It is a highly meta-fictional text, which explores the historiography of slave history through a mythopoetic narrative where deities from varied pantheons and cosmologies live in the "somewhere house." Oyeyemi experiments with the form of her novel, by informing it with varied languages, myths and legends, through the Afro-Cuban identity of the protagonist's family, who have migrated their memories, beliefs, customs and rituals to a cosmopolitan cultural landscape in London.

Childhood in Oyeyemi's works therefore extends the frameworks of reference in this study – needing us to disabuse ourselves of the idea of a specific spatio-temporal experience as we have done in previous chapters. In fact, Oyeyemi's works present classification and categorical challenges – should we refer to her as Black British or Nigerian? Having migrated to London at the age of four, her African experience is more mythic than practico-sensory. Perhaps the ambivalence that we can see in her interviews – not wanting to be called a Nigerian writer, but again opting for the collective pronouns "us" in reference to Nigerians, informs the nature of her fiction.[181] Her protagonists claim simultaneous genealogies – Jess in *The Icarus Girl* is a mixed-race eight-year old girl, born to Nigerian and English parents, while Maja in *The Opposite House* is an Afro-Cuban who categorically asserts that "In my blood is a bright chain of transfusion; Spaniards, West Africans, indigenous Cubans, even the Turkos – the Cuban Lebanese" (98).

[181] See Brenda Cooper's (2009) article "The middle Passage of the Gods and the New Diaspora: Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*."

The authors in this study revert to childhood, as an archive of imagination. In its various forms as figures, memories and images, childhood provides an imaginative recourse. This return to the narrative of childhood does two things. Firstly, it helps to grapple with the authors' diasporic lives at the present, having migrated from their various lands of childhood to Europe and America. Their connection to Nigeria means that that is where negotiations of the notion of "home" begin – manifested in desires, nostalgia, trauma and amnesia. In this way childhood for these writers is an affective landscape populated by emotive memories of loss and gain, but a significant point of departure for their own senses of identity. Childhood becomes a site for negotiating their present diasporic selves. Secondly, a return to the narrative of childhood allows this study to plot a shift in the narrative of identity. While realising the increasing importance of diasporicity in the contemporary postcolonial discourse of identity, this study underscores the narrative of childhood as increasingly defining diasporic identity as reflected in contemporary Nigerian fiction.

The return of the narrative of childhood signals the increasing senses of diasporicity between authorial (read adult) and childhood selves. It signals to the increasing mobility of the spatio-temporal elements of identity. Moreover, contemporary experience is defined by nomadic experiences of families, which translates to the movement of cultures. This kind of mobility is not only spatial but temporal, in this case, aided by forms of mass media. Material cultures can, for instance, find their way to any part of the world via "technoscapes" (Appadurai, 1995). Music, fashion and other expressive cultures are engaged in a "disjunctural" flow across the globe. In this case, there is the contemporary creation of transcultural identities. The narrative of childhood seems to be the product of this contemporary moment.

While childhood has in the past been used for the purposes of cultural retrieval and romantic imagination, it now claims a stake in the contemporary identity set-up. Indeed, as the notion of identity has shifted from that of civilizations, to empires and to nation-states, the postmodern moment has taken us further to the micro-politics of the self, what Foucault (1988) calls "technologies of the self." Foucault's focus on the history of the

"subject" brings us back to the micro-level of identity discourse that constitutes "subjectivity" on its own terms, before its inscription to the rest of the society. Anthony Appiah's *Ethics of Identity* also foregrounds micro-aspects, what he calls "unscripted" accounts of identity-making – tools of self-making, through a deontological framework. Therefore, the micro-relationship between the "self" and other "selves," becomes the focus of the discourse of identity. In this way the world of childhood offers insights as this study has engaged with, in terms of memory, time, history, genealogies, space and place as the sites for the alternative, for the re-figuring of the politics of identity. Childhood constructs ground for interrogation of the macro and micro aspects within various frameworks of identity.

As this study privileges, the imagination in contemporary Nigerian fiction foregrounds childhood as a set of ideas used to negotiate the multi-faceted nature of identity. The return to childhood aids this imagination in reconciling the disjunctural planes of diasporic identities, by exploiting the experimental and processual nature of the world of childhood. In this way childhood, as a set of ideas, is portrayed as amenable to the diasporic condition and consciousness of mobility and its disjunctural spatio-temporality. Childhood actually extends spaces for engaging contemporary forms of identity portrayed in contemporary Nigerian fiction. Its figures, images and memories take us to the alternative experiences of postcolonial Nigeria, away from the determination of collective and macro identities to the unscripted and unlimited vistas of identity formation. The aesthetics of childhood, as portrayed in the works studied here engage in the fantastic, the fabulous and magical realist and therefore allows us to deal with that "Pandora's box" of fears and repressions that define contemporary identities. The rapid mobility of cultures and the movement of information in this new technological age require a fresh set of ideas to discourse emerging identities. These emerging identities are negotiating much larger grounds that range from the familial, ethnic, national and the continental. In this way, these are multicultural yet transcultural identities, involved in a continuous process of formation.

Childhood provides discourse for continuous interrogation of identity formation. The novel, a genre which is predominant in contemporary Nigerian imagination is itself amenable to this multi-voiced discourse. Indeed, Bakhtin's (1981) reference to the novel as a "genre-in-the-making" makes it appropriate for the imagination and portrayal of childhood.[182] So, childhood as a set of ideas is located, between the generic, stylistic and thematic. It's shifting, mobile and experimental nature as this study has portrayed, allows for it to construct identities that cut across the familial, ethnic, national and continental frameworks of reference. In this way it becomes a category of discourse that is beginning to influence how we talk about identity and identity formation. The author reflects on notions of time, history, memory, space, place, familial relationships and ultimately their own diasporic senses of identity. Can we perhaps draw a conclusion, like Richard Priebe (2006) about the transcultural identity formation in the narrative of childhood? Such a conclusion definitely elicits questions about the inevitable tensions between the particular and the transcendental, for indeed the notion of the transcultural can be accused of glossing over tensions between the local and the global. But perhaps, in partial agreement with Priebe, this study has foregrounded childhood as an emerging category of discourse, whether we want to call it a genre, a style, or a theme is left for another debate, but this study foregrounds it as a set of ideas that allows it to initiate a discourse on contemporary postcolonial and postmodern forms of identity and identity making. Perhaps, therefore, we can conclude somewhat prophetically, by quoting Richard Priebe:

> The genre [of childhood] continues to be written by writers
> who come from almost every geographical area in Africa,
> a fact that likely reflects an increasing presence of the transcultural
> theme and the likelihood that we will see an increasing number
> of works in this genre well into our new century. (2006:50)

[182] In fact, Adesanmi and Dunton (2005) trace trajectories of Nigerian literature through a generic dimension, foregrounding the "re-emergence" of the novel in contemporary Nigerian imagination.

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