UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Unwritten Spaces:

African Literature and Charismatic Spatiality

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Comfort Chioma Azubuko-Udah

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Unwritten Spaces:

African Literature and Charismatic Spatiality

by

Comfort Chioma Azubuko-Udah

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Yogita Goyal, Chair

African literature itself tends to be framed monolithically. This tradition of bunching together representational literature of such a large and diverse place is not only reflective of an underlying imperialist gaze, but it also sets the stage for certain stories, landscapes, and even authors, to emerge as synecdoches for the entire continent. The downside of this phenomenon is that many of the spaces and stories that do not prove exceptional suffer a dearth of representation, and their distinctness thus goes unacknowledged and unappreciated. This dissertation explores how the institutional authorities on African literature have historically shaped the field using a barometer of spectacle and charisma, and how this institutional backdrop constructs and reinforces a spectrum of African landscapes, spaces, and stories that favors only the most exceptional objects. This project attends to those places on the African continent which fall in the middle of this spectrum and as such are less likely to find literary or scholarly representation in African texts.

This project positions the medial territory between these poles to excavate the presence and function of an ever-present Western gaze in gatekeeping the field of African literature and scholarship. “Unwritten Spaces” intervenes first by narrowing the field a bit and focusing on a single and already richly diverse country, Nigeria.

The dissertation of Comfort Chioma Azubuko-Udah is approved.

Stephanie Frances Bosch

Allison Carruth

Ursula K. Heise

Cajetan Iheka

Yogita Goyal, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

For my parents, Ngozi and Azubuko. Unu Agbaḷịala. Nde!

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Vita	ix
Introduction	1
References	33
1 | Glocal Lagos: Charismatic Spatiality and its Implications	36
References	69
2 | Unwritten City: Abuja in The Nigerian Literary Imagination	71
References	109
3 | Warri No Dey Carry Last: Re-reading the Niger Delta as a Site of National Cultural Identity Production	110
References	164
4 | Borrowed Charisma: Narrating Piped and Domestic Water	167
References	197

Acknowledgments

I owe a debt of gratitude to my committee. Without their guidance and support, this dissertation would not have happened. I would like to thank Yogita Goyal, for driving me to consider the broader stakes and implications of this project, for setting a very high standard of intellectual rigor, and pushing me to reach beyond the potentials I could see in my work. Allison Carruth helped me to see the importance of compassion and collegiality in this profession. Thank you for modeling a balanced approach to academia, where rigor and kindness hold equal value. Ursula Heise, without fail, asked incisive questions that challenged the clarity and lucidity of my work. Thank you for your enthusiastic investment in this project, and for teaching the Biocities seminar alongside Jon Christensen, where the very first kernels of my research topic were born. I would like to thank Cajetan Iheka, my Igbo brother, for always encouraging me, providing specialized feedback on my work, and believing in my capacity to achieve goals that even I thought lofty. Thank you to Stephanie Bosch for your generosity and patience, and for serving as an important interlocutor when we discussed my work. You all always encouraged me to see intellectual challenges as opportunities. I am very grateful for your mentorship through graduate school and beyond. I would also like to thank the other faculty members, who were not on my committee, but still guided me throughout this doctoral program. I am grateful to Elizabeth DeLoughrey for her contributions and support in building up the ideas for this project in its earlier stages. I would like to thank Jessica Berman, Richard Yarborough, and Fred D'Aguiar for holding my hand through the difficult times in the program as I tried to balance scholarly pursuits with my general wellbeing.

I want to acknowledge the role played by the community at the Laboratory for Environmental Narrative Strategies (LENS), and the Environmental Humanities Reading Group (EHRG) for keeping me ever curious and providing an exemplary community of scholars. I am grateful for the feedback I have received through the reading group, and for the connections and opportunities LENS provided throughout my graduate studies.

My time at UCLA would not have been what it was without the friendship and camaraderie of my colleagues, and fellow students and scholars who kept me going. Thank you, Will Clark, for reading all those drafts without hesitation, and offering invaluable feedback while also cheering me on. I am particularly grateful to Gabriela Valenzuela, Lauren Dembowitz, and Madina Thiam for their friendship, and for coming to my aid when I needed it the most. I would like to thank the members of my cohort, for setting an atmosphere of support and encouragement, without any unhealthy competition. I would especially like to thank Chelsea Kern for being my sister in scholarship, and for being an inspiration to keep me progressing through the program at a sensible pace. I am thankful to Spencer Robins, Abraham Encinas, and Gregory Toy, who were often available to engage in conversation at the TA offices where we encouraged each other. I am grateful for Tosin, the Bookstagrammer, who I met at the Ake Literary Festival in Lagos. Thank you for always being ready to discuss everything with me, from African literature to the Nigerian government. I must also acknowledge the Zoom crew, Nicole Ramsey and Kristen Cardon, without you I could not have accomplished what I did during the pandemic and the lockdown. Thank you all very much.

Moving to Los Angeles alone was a bit worrying at first, so I would like to express my gratitude to the people who made it feel like home. Thank you to Tola and Jane for being my family in those first few years. Thank you to Nicholas Chow for fostering a community of

friends, and for feeding me all those times. I would like to thank the friends who made this sprawling city homier and more navigable; Seze, Alexis, Chichi and Lolade. I am grateful for your friendship, and I am sure we will continue to build on what we have established here. I must acknowledge the Oke Family and Pastors Toyin and Niran Fafawora for adopting me into their homes and giving me a foster family here in this city.

And finally, I may never find adequate expression for the debts I owe to my family. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for the financial, spiritual, and emotional support you unwaveringly provided throughout all of this. My sisters-friends, Mercy, Grace, and Condoleezza who have consistently held my hand and whose shoulders have soaked up lots of anxious tears over the course of this process. Esther and Elizabeth, the newer sisters for adding more love to the family that grounds me. My big brothers, Shedrack and Robert for showing such a high level of confidence in my abilities, and for their background support. And lastly, my nieces, Oluebubechukwu and Chizaramekpere, for inspiring and sustaining me with their cuteness and toddler antics. You all have been my rock, and the primary source of my motivation to make it through the past decade of studying abroad. I am forever grateful.

VITA

Education

2019 | C.Phil. University of California, Los Angeles. Department of English.

2017 | M.A. University of California, Los Angeles. Department of English.

2013 | B.A. with Honors. University of Maryland Baltimore County. Department of English.

Publications

Azubuko-Udah, Comfort. "Unwritten City: Abuja in the Nigerian Literary Imagination" *Journal of the African Literary Association*. (*Forthcoming*).

Azubuko, Comfort. "Edible City: Privileging Tree Aesthetics Misses Opportunity to Feed Our Urban Food Supply" KCET online. 2018

Azubuko, Comfort. "Portable Cultures, Food futures: How to Make Injera in Los Angeles" KCET online. 2018

Azubuko, Comfort Chioma. "Embouteillage" Bozalta. 2018

Azubuko-Udah, Comfort. "Inscribing the Postcolonial Subject: A Study on Nigerian Women." *UMBC Review*. Vol. 15. 2014.

Select Conference Presentations

2021 | "Censured Identities: Navigating Secular and Religious Censorship in Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater.*" African Literature Association Annual Conference. Virtual.

2018 | "Inter-Ethnic Histories and the African Environment." African Studies Association Annual Conference. Atlanta, Georgia.

2018 | "African literature and the Capitalocene." Africa and Capitalism Conference. UCLA.

2018 | "Family and the Environment in Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*." African Literature Association Annual Conference. Washington D.C.

2017 | "The Unwritten City: Abuja in the Nigerian Literary Imagination." African Studies Association Annual Conference. Chicago, Illinois.

HONORS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2021 | The Leslie Center for the Humanities Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship, Dartmouth College

2019/2020 | English Department Dissertation Support fellowship, UCLA

2019 | Mellon-EPIC Fellowship for Environmental Humanities

2018 | Mellon-EPIC Fellowship for Course Design and Assessment Techniques

2017 | Kurnitz Creative Writing Award

2017 | Graduate Division Summer Research Mentorship Award, UCLA

2016 | Graduate Division Summer Research Mentorship Award, UCLA

2014 | University First Year Fellowship, UCLA

2014 | Zyda/Shapiro Fund for English Fellowship, UCLA

2010-2013 | Dean's and President's Honors List, UMBC

2013 | Departmental Honors, UMBC Department of English

Introduction

Charisma

Max Weber is often credited with bringing the term “charisma” into secular use, from its religious origins. He uses the concept of charisma to make sense of the sociology of political power. He delineates a pure charisma—charisma that is unstable and exudes from the individual—from a routinized charisma which not only serves but is legitimized by an existing system of authority[1]. In his examination of political and religious leadership, he explains, “The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (48). In other words, the extraordinary artistic talents, charm, and expertise which an individual artist or writer possesses is the basis for their distinction from “ordinary men.” However, in discussion of cultural production and the making of symbolic goods, the validity of an authorial image or creative personae and the distinction that comes with it, is dependent on a recognition of the individual’s charisma by those who have the power to consecrate and thus create belief in the value of their work and their status as cultural producers. While individual charisma can serve as a catalyst for this kind of recognition, once the loci of institutions of consecration (academic, economic, and cultural institutions) come into

[1] Vincent Lloyd more recently argues for a stronger distinction between two kinds of charisma, as opposed to one that is ‘pure’ while the other is ostensibly adulterated. He proposes democratic and authoritarian charisma, explaining: “Authoritarian charisma gives an audience what that audience desires. In contrast, democratic charisma invites an audience to develop new desires. Democratic charisma uses the words, images, and performances characteristic of a community to underscore the contingency and limitations of those words, images, and performances" (Lloyd 5).

view, that charisma loses its stability, in order to serve the institutions of authority more properly[2].

The key factor of charismatic figures often inheres, as Vincent Lloyd points out, in an acknowledged but elusive inwardness that inspires devotion and exudes appeal. He explains that individual "democratic," or what Weber would call "pure," charisma is contagious because "by displaying humanity it calls witnesses to explore their own humanity, calls them to refuse to see themselves in the way that the world sees them—and calls them to become charismatic themselves." He distinguishes this from the charisma that has been in contact with institutions of routinization, such as that brand of charisma expected of the "celebrity." He explains, "celebrity usually brings with it a form of authoritarian charisma, fulfilling superficial desires but ultimately concealing the human in layer upon layer of mediation, each of which magnifies the next" (Lloyd 6). Charisma is thus observable at the intersection between the inwardness or interiority of the charismatic object or figure, and the element of devotion or fascination coming from the observing or affected subject.

In my reading of the field of African literary production, the "superficial desires" Lloyd points out, are made manifest in the ideologies of the postcolonial and anthropological exotic. This is because the institutions that are involved in this routinization are largely representative of the imagined metropolitan audience which is primarily reading through lenses that simultaneously domesticate and estrange the postcolonial Other. The current structure for producing what is billed as African literature involves a mining of potential authorial figures and

[2] Weber elaborates on this point: "It is the fate of charisma, whenever is comes into the permanent institutions of a community, to give way to powers of tradition or of rational socialization. this waning if charisma generally indicates the diminishing importance of individual action. And of all those powers that lessen the importance of individual action, the most irresistible is *rational discipline.* The force of discipline not only eradicates personal charisma but also ... one of its results is the rational transformation of status stratification" (28).

stories, on the basis of their potential for actualizing and embodying a particular charismatic ideology of creativity and usefulness. What this public perceives as the charisma or the appeal of the African literary figure seems to be tied directly to the degree to which the individual lends themselves to fulfilling the image of expert, spokesperson, model for aspiration, et cetera. This is because "Charisma requires not only knowing how one is perceived, including by one's self, but also an ability and willingness to manipulate that perception" (Lloyd 51). It is a characteristic that relies on a level of bidirectionality, because charisma per se is not inherent in any object, person, animal, or landscape. It is instead, dependent on context, object being discussed or perceived, and subject doing the discussing or perceiving. Therefore, because the perception of charisma is both subjective and discursive, once the perceiving subject identifies a certain degree of fascinating inwardness and elusiveness, the object is then imbued with this slippery quality of charisma that calls for further attention, devotion, and/or study[3]. For objects and sites, however, that same kind of appeal could be located in the degree to which they lend themselves to a narrative process of mythmaking that fits it into the expected tropes of globally relevant grand narratives. It follows, then, that the object of charisma (landscape or authorial image alike), imbued through mythmaking in popular discourse, must also lend itself to internationally recognizable, and therefore valid, tropes in global grand narratives.

I thus examine the field of cultural production of African literatures, in order to understand the construction, function, and nature of charisma as it shapes the field. This is not a project that seeks to explore or expose the supposed complicity of individual African authors in upholding a system that measures success and encourages readership through parameters set

[3] As Weber argues, "It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a 'sign' or proof" (Weber 49). This description of the emergence of charisma is useful for explaining what I mean by bidirectionality.

primarily by the West. This is an effort at the recuperation of the interest in differently useful and valuable texts, authors, and spaces that provide a wider view of African locales and cultures. These largely underrepresented or unrecognized spaces and texts tend not to be particularly relevant or pertinent to a metropolitan audience which often constitutes a large portion of the global readership. Just as more recent African literatures are looking towards courting multiple publics (local, intra-continental, and metropolitan audiences alike), the criticism of these texts should also shift to reflect the different modes of interest and value assignation represented by these audiences. The discursive nature of literary criticism often means that the assessment offered up in the process of legitimizing an artist or a work of art affects both the marketing, which shapes the audience reached, and the process of determining cultural value through awards and prizes.

Before diving into discussions of less charismatic authorial figures, spaces, or narratives, it is imperative to explore the field of cultural production, particularly to illuminate those features which make it easy for these authors, stories, and spaces to fall into obscurity within the field of what is known as African literature.[4] First, I introduce the term "charisma" to explain what it means and how it is constituted, particularly in the context of individual public figures such as authors and intellectuals. Then, I launch into an examination of the nature of the postcolonial exotic, in order to highlight the politics of exoticism and how those politics inform the parameters of what can be considered charismatic or exceptional to a largely metropolitan reading audience. In order to further elucidate the sociopolitical paratexts that make the production of African literature fraught with tensions for the power to legitimize, I examine the authorial image of Amos Tutuola. When it comes to Nigerian literature, Tutuola's image as a

[4] This is particularly incongruous when one considers the prevalence of Ekwensi's works in the educational materials for Nigerian students in the elementary and secondary stages.

naïve artist occupies a liminal space that is particularly useful for my examination of the history of anglophone literary production in the region. Tutuola is touted as an unconscious artist, while the comparison between writers like Chinua Achebe and Ekwensi is largely one of a difference in conscious writerly ideology. By juxtaposing the possibility of alternative modes of reading and valuing African literatures, with the cultivation of charismatic authorial figures in our contemporary moment, I argue that the powers of literary consecration and creation of belief in the charismatic ideology are not and should not be exclusive to the global cultural, political, and economic institutions that have traditionally confirmed what we regard as African literature. However, the spectacle of the charismatic and hyper-visible author, text, or space has served to disguise and obscure the value of the uncharismatic or less charismatic figures, spaces and texts, as well as distract from the sociopolitical machinery that keeps the field of African literary production operating along these parameters.

Power and Exoticism

Historically African creators have not been able to engage this machinery on equal ground because of a relationship where the producers of the works themselves are structurally disadvantaged. Once we account for the claim that in the field of literary production, "whether they are free entrepreneurs or state employees, intellectuals and artists occupy a dominated position in the field of power," it appears that the African artist, intellectual or writer is thus already doubly dominated (Bourdieu 125). As Africans positioned on a global stage, they must work against the imbalance of powers that underlies the industry of literary production. As writers—whose work is to produce symbolic goods—they must also contend with achieving a

routinized charismatic creative persona,[5] and the consecration of their work as proof. Since "pure" or "democratic" charisma is always unstable, it follows that charisma either remains ephemeral, or routinization is necessary. In order to achieve lasting success, the career artist or writer must pursue recognition. Due to this reality, the powers that legitimize and subsequently routinize must be interrogated and renegotiated periodically. This is important because in the context of African literary production, these powers often skew towards validating a narrow band of authorial images and literatures, helped along by a historical predisposition to exoticization and cultural imperialism. Weber asserts that,

> the routinization of charisma…takes the form of the appropriation of powers of control and of economic advantages...The original basis of recruitment is personal charisma. With routinization, the followers or disciples may set up norms for recruitment, in particular involving training or tests of eligibility. Charisma can only be 'awakened' or 'tested'; it cannot be 'learned' or 'taught'. (58)

In terms that make sense for my examination of the field of production of African literature, the "followers or disciples" are replaced with the consumers—publishers, critics and audience— and propagators of the image and creative products of the literary figures and settings or landscapes. These figures or landscapes must first exhibit what agents of legitimization would perceive as "personal charisma" or what Lloyd might call "democratic charisma." Weber reminds us that "Charisma...by its very nature it is not an 'institutional' and permanent structure, but rather, where its 'pure' type is at work, it is the very opposite of the institutionally permanent" (21). Pure

[5] This persona is granted through a recognition and legitimization, in any individual producer, of belief in the value of the work they do. This belief in capabilities of such an individual is characterized as "The 'charismatic' ideology which is the ultimate basis of belief in the value of a work of art and which is therefore the basis of functioning of the field of production and circulation of cultural commodities, [it] is undoubtedly the main obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural good" (Bourdieu 76).

or democratic charisma—that which is often the basis for recruitment into legitimization—is unstable, while authoritarian charisma, which comes about through routinization – can become permanent when what it stands for becomes a "chronic state of affairs" (Weber 26). Unlike Lloyd who argues in *In Defense of Charisma*, "that one type of charisma ought to be avoided and another ought to be appreciated," I am making an argument that is more concerned with the source of the recognition and routinization of authoritarian charisma, than with the fickle or ephemeral nature of "pure" charisma per se (5). In the context of African literary production, the institutional powers, and the monopoly of authority they wield is especially problematic, since the struggle for the monopoly of legitimization is always already made uneven by a long history of African subjugation.

The juxtaposition of institutions of consecration and media amplification, and the exoticizing reading practices that precede the circulation of postcolonial literature and authorial images, is mediated through a construction of authoritarian charisma when it comes to the field of African literary production. Since Lloyd views the fulfilment of public desire as a component of authoritarian charisma, I locate that authority at the loci of institutions that are primarily responsible for the consecration of belief in cultural value, and dissemination of African literature. They harvest the saleable authors and stories on the basis of fulfilling a desire in the widest audience or consumers of these literary products. In his seminal work, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins,* Graham Huggan writes,

> Postcolonial cultural production is profoundly affected, but not totally governed, by commodification; it is frequently, but not invariably, subject to the fetishisation of cultural difference; it is increasingly, but by no means irredeemably, institutionalised in

> Western commercial and educational systems; its value is certainly shaped, but not rigidly determined, by its contact with the global market. (27)

In this statement, he gestures towards what I have called a locus of institutions. First, in the word "commodification," we can locate those concerned with the markets and other economic aspects of literary production. Then, "the fetishization of cultural difference" points to the institutions that build cultural currency. Finally, there are the academic institutions, those concerned with creating knowledge and educating, as well as determining literary/artistic value. The system of belief necessary for a trade in cultural capital is propelled by the various functions of the charismatic as determined by these institutions. The role of the individual authorial image cannot be underestimated in examining the field of literary production, since "literary production is influenced by the development of authorship as a profession and by the process through which writers consume images of themselves and reinterpret those images in order to negotiate and circulate different ones" (Brouillette 2). After all, it is in the development of authorship as profession—in conjunction with the mediation and dissemination enabled by the institutional loci of cultural production—that the charisma of the individual creator can become co-opted and institutionalized. Huggan explains that the writer is one agent in a field that consists of 'various agents of legitimation,' which could include publishers, critics, reviewers, literary prizes and awards. All of these agents are constantly contending for the singular authority "to validate particular writers; and the writers themselves vie for the right to attain and, in turn, confer recognition and prestige" (Huggan 5). The loci of institutional authorities outlined above—with the self-conscious and often reluctant participation of individual authors and readers over whom it exercises its authority—is ultimately responsible for determining what kind of stories sell, and what kinds of texts and authors become canon.

By themselves, these powerful institutions, authoritatively discerning value, might not be much of a concern. However, they do rouse suspicion because they are predominantly comprised of organizations and people from the West. Given the continent's history of subjugation, a monopoly of power that lies primarily in Western institutions should be cause for immense concern. Cultural imperialism is a major factor in the production of African literature. The fact that exoticization is such an inescapable part of how African literature is valued and studied, is symptomatic of this state of affairs. To illustrate, the battle for the power to consecrate and legitimize has been a preeminent and persistent concern in the field of "African" literature. This battle is exemplified, for instance, in various efforts at defining the African literary canon. One such effort is the result of several debates at the 1962 Makerere conference on African literature. What we learn from these efforts, is that the canon is a structural articulation of power relations in the machinery of literary production throughout the continent. This is exemplified in the Makerere exclusion of Amos Tutuola, for instance. The struggle to take control of the canon by laying claim to the agency to decide and define it is something we see in action at the 1962 conference. The rhetoric that Tutuola's work was the genesis of African literature (language like Dylan Thomas' "young English" and "nascent African literature" for instance) seemed to be one of the major ideas that the Makerere consensus was determined to resist. The consensus at the conference contested Faber & Faber's interpretation of Tutuola's place in the field of African literature, and instead posed writers as intellectuals, in possession of socio-political as well as literary expertise, as a counter to the naïve image Tutuola had come to stand for. Not only were they to have the writing expertise that Tutuola lacked in his use of English, but they were also then posited as intellectuals who teach and explain African issues, who ventriloquize African culture in new languages, and who defend the history of African culture against the racist

predispositions of colonialism and the dismissive impulses of imperialism. We see this most explicitly in Achebe's later claim that the African novelist must also be a teacher. The stories that were celebrated in this consensus as ideal examples of African literature had to be nationalistic, or thinly veiled political allegories, dealing with timely African "issues" in order to be perceived and then received as valid candidates for the canon. The battle for the power to define the field of African literature, to move it away from the exoticizing impulse of a European publisher and redefine it with a yardstick that validates skill and expertise, demonstrates how an institution predominantly comprised of Africans could present alternatives to a problematic conceptualization of the field.

For an understanding of the power of these institutions, we can examine the publication and reception of Tutuola's works. Through Tutuola, we can begin to trace the history of publishing, particularly in West Africa, in order to highlight the establishment and consequent legacies of the dominance of foreign presses on the continent during the colonial era. In this history, we could also pick up the threads of literary analyses that can be woven into alternative avenues of legitimization. A significant portion of the earliest critical responses to Tutuola's work came from well-established Western literary and academic figures who held enormous powers to legitimize and define the benchmarks for consecration. At the start of his 1966 essay, "African Vernacular Styles in Nigerian Fiction," Bernth Lindfors quotes the first two paragraphs of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and follows with this statement: "So begins Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. So begins Nigerian fiction in English" (265). Lindfors is perhaps the longest-running critical voice on West African Anglophone Literature, and he wrote extensively on Tutuola and his contemporaries when these literary texts were being produced. An established scholar with immense authority in the field of African literature, Lindfors no

doubt became a significant voice in the early readership, international and critical reception of Tutuola. We could consider his writing on Tutuola to present an accurate portrait of the field of Western critical reception at the time *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was released.

As a result, when Lindfors writes that Tutuola's first text represented "a new type of Afro-English literature," or "new 'mad' African writing," the work of "an untutored genius" featuring "vivid unsophisticated style," the language of critical engagement with Tutuola presents a clear image of what he stood for as an *African* writer, especially from an international viewpoint (265-66). According to this, Tutuola is a naïve artist, dabbling in storytelling in English. His works are a novel spectacle. Besides literary critics like Bernth Lindfors, we also get the famous literary reviews by figures like Dylan Thomas, whose much quoted and often patronizing review of *PWD* hammers in the sense of novelty tied to Amos Tutuola. This is particularly evident when he writes that the novel shows a "young" African English that characterizes "nascent" African literature (qtd. in Lindfors). Similarly, in his review of Tutuola's later work, *Life in the Bush of Ghosts,* Cecil T. Lewis writes:

> Take a modern Nigerian. Give him six years of formal education. Let him with rampant and febrile imagination enclose within a rudimentary fictional framework his tribal lore—a lore in which mythology and reality are often indistinguishable for those whose culture itself is a mélange. Result: a coupling of the predominantly primitive with outcroppings of sophistication in a book to delight the ethnologist, the psychologist, the theologist, the linguist. (qtd. in Ngugi 72)

This interpretation of Tutuola and his work is representative of the narrow way he was received at first. For the most part African critics dismissed him by viewing him as a source of "foreign enchantment and local embarrassment" (*Critical Perspectives* xi). Meanwhile, the Western

critics for the most part also engaged in a kind of dismissal that saw his works as the untutored product of a "rampant and febrile imagination," which thus lacks artistic or authorial intentionality.

Beyond the often paternalistic and racist ideas that inform them, what we get in these responses to Tutuola is that he is being perceived as a naive artist of sorts: he is the writer who is artless, and writes in an innocent or visceral, and unaffected way. This is because naivety in this context, is characterized by the lack of the formal education and training that a professional might undergo. As a result, he is paradoxically seen as being authentically African—unsullied by the influence of Western education. However, his decision to write in English[6] points to a contradiction in this argument. Tutuola's lack of extensive formal education is evident in the language of his texts, riddled with grammatical errors, sometimes to the point of incomprehensibility. It is this quality of the text that Dylan Thomas characterizes as the "young English" emerging from the African colonies. It is also this quality of Tutuola's English that forms the basis of his supposed authenticity as the African writer. Of the question of authenticity, Mukoma wa Ngugi writes that "Faber & Faber were approaching questions of authenticity using a paternalistic, if not racist, lens. They had an idea of what African culture was like—alien, terrifying, and superstitious—and they wanted *PWD* to confirm that. *PWD* was…not taken as a piece of fiction but rather as a cultural artifact clothed in the literary form of the novel" (73). As a result, it made sense for the publishers to present Tutuola's errors as "part of the aesthetic appeal" (75). Faber's representation[7] of Tutuola is at the intersection of the idea of naive art on one hand, and the politics of the African exotic on the other.

[6] Unlike Fagunwa who wrote in Yoruba.

[7] It is important to note that before critics had a chance to receive, react to Tutuola's work, there was already significant work done by the publishers to frame the artist and his art. There is a crucial through line from the dynamics of the relationship between the African writer and the metropolitan publisher, to the audience

In contest of this interpretation of the author's work, in 1969, literary critic Molara Ogundipe writes to defend what she sees as Tutuola writerly skill and style. She argues that his style and skills are often dismissed or plainly not acknowledged in the process of characterizing him as a naive artist. She asserts that "He has handled his material with all of the skill of the good storyteller and he has been able to inform his tale with the qualities of a « well-told tale ». His denigrators who think it devastating to name him a mere folktale-teller must realise that all folktale-tellers are not necessarily good" (102). She then goes on to clarify that she is not "simply praising him for verisimilitude. He is being praised for doing that which all good artists aim at doing—to record human experience in form and matter which do not ultimately falsify life" (108). The point that she makes in reading Tutuola is that even his choice of language liberated him in some ways. This is because, due to his relative lack of mastery of English, he had to depend on the structures of the Yoruba language with which he was most familiar. Ogundipe explains that "[in] using the habits of a language familiar to him, Tutuola overcomes the problem of linguistic alienation which plagues other Nigerian writers. Some Nigerian writers have at first to wrestle with the English language of which they are not master, before they to begin to try and say what they mean" (107). However, it is important to stress that Ogundipe is not championing mediocrity in skill, because the fact of the matter is that Tutuola's works were still riddled with

reception. In her 2006 article on "The Natural Artist," Gail Low explores Faber's staging of Tutuola as a naive artist. She goes through the ways in which Tutuola's image as a literary figure was both an experiment in branding, and a moment of ethnographical interest expressed in Faber & Faber's approach to curating Tutuola's oeuvre. Through this staging of Tutuola as a naive or natural artist, Low writes that "For a very brief period, his name signified a certain commodifiable vision of Africanness - a virtue to cultivate or a vice to veer from" (Low, 17). The emergence of Tutuola's image as an African literary figure had everything to do with the publisher's decision to leave Tutuola's work largely unedited.[7] It is important to acknowledge the significant role his publishers played in shaping not only the reception of the text, but the rampant misreading of the writer and his work. Mukoma wa Ngugi leans into a reading of Tutuola as a powerless postcolonial subject who was in an unbalanced relationship with Faber & Faber. He argues that this deliberate staging of Tutuola would have been unnecessary, if the goal had been to present a conscious writer, whose style and voice would be of some significance to his reading audience.

grammatical errors. She does concede to logic of what she might characterize as a misreading of Tutuola when she explains that the "rhetorical tricks, which succeed enormously in Fagunwa's Yoruba novels, do not come off in Tutuola's due to the difference in spirit of Yoruba from English. Tutuola's lack of adroitness in the handling of English is also partly responsible. Failure at points such as these is probably responsible for the unintended effects of quaintness and naivety he frequently achieves" (106). This acknowledgement of the factors which produce a misreading of Tutuola as a naïve artist, reinforce her alternative interpretation of the artist and his work. Ogundipe offers another way of approaching the artist: one that is grounded in the structures of his native language, and the narrative traditions of Yoruba culture.

These alternative approaches to African literature and literary figures are essential to decentering the mechanism of image creation and marketing (charisma routinization) that determines a large section of contemporary African literary culture. An important step for this decentering mission is to examine and attempt to understand the ways it is not only created but propagated in discourse. Alongside the publishing culture that constitutes the field of literary production, there is the propagation of authorial image that makes it possible to harness and amplify the figure of the charismatic creator and intellectual in the project of making/determining African literature. This propagation is another tributary in the field of cultural production in which creative charisma and the charismatic ideology of artistic production works as the activating element that keeps the system operating. For instance, Mukoma wa Ngugi examines the obsession early Tutuola critics had with his physical appearance and demeanor. Among other representations of Tutuola that shaped his public and literary image, he was constructed as "The Shy Yoruba" who seemed "much younger than his thirty-four years" (91). This often infantilizing and paternalistic representation of the writer then

informed the reception of his work. Through the construction of this image of a shy, diffident, and infantile figure, Tutuola was successfully staged as a "naive" artist, marketable to an audience in search of novelty. However, as Ogundipe's interpretation suggests, there is a largely untapped potential to approach and understand Tutuola as being much more than that.

While his role in the grounding of an African literary tradition is still up for debate, it is clear that the variegated critiques of Tutuola set the tone for what would begin to take shape as a canon of African literature, and the parameters of a literary tradition emerging from the continent. In Tutuola's authorial career we see most evidently that,

> The ideology of creation, which…conceals the fact that the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource. (Bourdieu 76)

Tutuola became a mine of natural resources for the publishers at Faber. He also becomes emblematic of the attempt to consecrate and legitimatize this image of the author and his work— a naive artist producing naive art— as a fundamental element of "African" literature. This is thankfully fiercely challenged by the mainly African literary producers and critics at the 1962 Makerere conference. By attempting to set a degree of critical expertise as an essential parameter for consecration of the 'African' writer, the Makerere consensus effectively contests Faber's own claim on the power of legitimation. They counter that expertise, and the demonstration of relevant knowledge, should make the canon rather than naivete or even more broadly, novelty. Tutuola's image is at once the grounds for that battle for a monopoly of legitimization, and a

prime example of the need to decenter the power to appraise and anoint the literatures of a vast continent.

The cultivated dominance of, and subsequent dependence on foreign publishing even in the earliest moments of Anglophone West African literature, highlights the politics of authorship and the commodification of African exoticism. Therefore, any attempt at dismantling the problematic aspects of the infrastructure of African literary production and valuation, must engage the subject of publishing—particularly the nature of local publishing across the continent. A key figure in Nigeria's literary publishing industry, Bakare-Yusuf of Cassava Publishers, declares that one of the underlying goals is to shift the focus from African issues to African aesthetics—to the love of story, of place, and of nuance. He explains, "We are looking for unusual or unconventional narratives that challenge stereotypes or are purely experimental in style. We focus on strong stories and characters rather than issues" (qtd in Ngugi 152-3). In other words, Cassava is trying to move away from the kind of writing that lends itself explicitly to cultural brokering. Bakare-Yusuf moves beyond the idea that the African writer produces, pseudo-ethnographic documents, or politically conscious didactic texts. He seeks instead to cultivate the writer who wanders through aesthetic exploration and crafts texts relatively unencumbered by the unspoken pressure to tell the valid stories as defined by the shape of the existing canon. Speaking in a way that is representative of the publishing houses emerging in Nigeria over the past two decades, Bakare-Yusuf appears to echo and seek fulfillment for a wish for African literatures. As early as the 1960s, literary critics like John Povey and Bernth Lindfors were already expressing the hope that Africans writing in English will write for themselves. This goal is one that the field is still pursuing.[8] The problems do not seem to have diminished; instead,

[8] Writing in 1966, Povey offers a soft critique of the trend of formal extroversion we can still see in the content of African literature, "A writer by this choice [of the English Language] is accepting a limitation in his local

one could say that some of them have reinvented themselves. African writers are still keenly aware of "the numerical significance" of making strategic decisions that account for Western tastes. For instance, Adaobi Nwaubani, a writer based in Abuja, writes of an encounter with a friend who congratulated her because she "had found out 'what the white people wanted to read and given it to them.'" Although she states that her book was independently inspired, Nwaubani does concede that "the approval of 'white people' was crucial" because "[success] for an African writer still depends on the West" (Nwaubani). Operating under an infrastructure of literary production that is so keenly outward facing for both economic and imperialist reasons (which are not unrelated), this wry acknowledgement is common among contemporary African writers. International recognition and engagement are revered, and this is evident in the fact that local writers who have not attracted some Western recognition and approval are often perceived as inferior, because their books are not mentioned in metropolitan conversations on African literature. It also then carries on a tradition of cultural extraction and brokering, whereby the producers of African literature reach back to the continent largely to harvest the most spectacular and exceptional stories.

A major avenue by which to diffuse the legitimizing power of a Western-dominated field of literary production is developing a network of African publishing that is also conscious of intra-African[9] literary exchange and readership. A more intra-African pattern of aesthetic exchange and readership would begin to illuminate the distinct textures of African cultural landscapes and narrative traditions, to move the continent further away from a monolithic view

audience, in exchange for an extension of international reading public" (253). However, he goes on to express hope for the future of African literatures: "While the English Language is becoming more African … the problems of the African writer will diminish and a truly African style for an African audience will be achieved" (253). On looking at contemporary discussions on African literature, there appears to be a consensus that this 1960s dream for Anglophone African literature has not yet been achieved.

[9] Not necessarily pan-African, but more so intra-continental as well as intra-national.

of what it could produce, mean, and stand for. A common critique of the African literary field—especially what has been termed "new African writing"— links literary aesthetics and the art of cultural ventriloquism with the financial facets of its publishing network. It therefore encourages a suspicious approach to the interpretation and/or acceptance of the literary production infrastructures as they exist now.[10] Ultimately, these structures result in a "perception of the market, manifesting itself in the conception and reception of these novels, [which] complicates the traditional distinction between market (the novel as a commodity) and audience (the novel as a cultural object) in literary production" (Adesokan 3)[11]. This observation on the "representational process" within the texts recognized as 'African' literature prompts a re-examination of the hope Lindfors and Povey express in the 1960s: that future African writers will develop a voice that is all their own, write for an audience that consists of themselves, publish for themselves, develop and speak in their own voice, et cetera.[12] The way to reach this somewhat idealized dream has to begin with decentralizing the powers of the field of African

[10] This is an important approach, considering the common structure of 'local' structures of literary production that are funded by individuals, corporations, and even governments of the global north. Ngugi writes: "Kwani remains more of a journal than a publishing house. And without a revenue base of its own, it relies on international donors and therefore cannot develop a full list of novels for a general readership. Going back to the journal Transition and its being funded by the CIA front, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the danger of donor-driven cultural production is obvious. But even when there are no insidious motives, donor priorities shift. Bgoya, in the same essay, argued that donor-funded publishing initiatives such as African Publishers Network died out as soon as donor funding dried up" (Ngugi 151). We see the same issue of financial support at play in the abrupt stop to the Adichie-run Farafina summer workshops or the Etisalat/9mobile prize, to name a few.

[11] Adesokan also argues that this process produces a second effect in which "the figure of the author as a public intellectual is intimately connected to this complication of the distinction between the market and the audience. This is because, in the larger context of political decolonization, the fictional voice (or perspective) also functions as a mode of testimony, bearing witness to issues thematized as political or humanitarian emergency"(Adesokan 3). This again suggests that the actual texts and the public image/figure of the author are in constant dialogue in the field of literary production.

[12] In his examination of vernacular language in Nigerian literatures, he observes: "The experiments of Okara, Achebe and Nwankwo have been successful, and in the future, I think we can expect to see many more African writers trying to develop African vernacular styles in English. As more writers learn to speak in their own voices instead of in borrowed accents, a new English and a new Afro-English literature will emerge" (Lindfors 272-3).

literary production. There is a need to shift the discourse of African literary production away from this tap-root-like image—of domination, monopoly of legitimization and routinization, etc.—to perhaps a more rhizomatic and diffused landscape that does not emphasize the hyper-visible and over-represented objects and figures to a point where it becomes detrimental for structure of the artistic field and the continent itself.

How to Make a Contemporary Charismatic Authorial Figure

In light of the contest over Tutuola's authorial image, one must then ask, how are contemporary writers being marketed? And how does this affect who gains and maintains wide readership? I contend that there is a kind of fascination that goes beyond the lures of commercialism and fetishization and borders on adoration of these routinized and propagated "charismatic" figures or objects, which stimulate consumers' personal or individual affect. By appealing to the affect in this manner, charisma functions to distract from the nature of the power dynamics in the field of cultural production. Through the authorial paratexts of image and personality, the dynamism of ordinary individuals in extraordinary positions is marketed. This juxtaposition of the ordinary achieving or representing the extraordinary is crucial to the constitution of charisma. One may ask, what qualities are we likely to find in a charismatic African writer who achieves global recognition and hypervisibility? In examining the mediated representation of the authorial image and texts of African writers, I posit that the charismatic African writers are experts at socio-political discourse, inspiring awe, devotion, and a media following. They are most likely to produce literature that engages with global and hegemonic discourses, even in non-transnational settings. They are simultaneously cosmopolitan (possessing a democratic global viewpoint) and Other, which allows them to inhabit this space of the exotic (domesticated otherness), always

simultaneously removed from and translated for the Western self. In these ways they are cultural brokers—often, reluctantly so—who self-consciously navigate and negotiate their own positioning and the reception of their work. With contemporary African literature, it appears success is not just measured in terms of "intrinsic" literary value, but in terms of recognition and recognizability. As a result, the factors listed above go back into determining the value of each work produced by the author. For the African author, in order to become recognizably "successful" there must be a combination of several factors: consecration of literary value and artistic talent, mediagenic biographical paratexts, valid claim to and continuous demonstration of expertise, and media amplification. Clearly, only a very small subset of writers can actually achieve this cocktail of conditions.

The cultivation of metropolitan hypervisibility, and the appeal of the charismatic marginalized literary figure highlight two key characteristics of contemporary African literary production culture. First, it emphasizes the pursuit of symbolic capital on the part of foreign publishers, who are noted to be "more interested in capturing 'hit' writers and texts here and there most likely to win foreign prizes" (Olaniyan 49). This pursuit of course often comes with powerful strings attached, which have already been explored in the discussion of exoticism. Second, the cultivation of metropolitan hypervisibility also captures the importance of digital media, with its viral capabilities in shaping and propagating literary culture and the economics of literary production. The narrativization of authorial image, propagated in the media, works as a paratext for literary production. Even in the digital age, the process of star-making and image cultivation is still closely tied to politically laden perceptions of the African voice. This perception has come to enjoy exponential magnification in an era when anyone can contribute to literary discourse as it exists in popular culture. Additionally, the quality of being

“mediagenic”—which means having a dynamic and compelling biographical narrative as paratext—can catapult the author into a space of hypervisibility helped along by the social, cultural, and news media (Moudileno 68).

In the context of a creative economy whose goal is always the market, authoritarian charisma controls the market, because it tells people what to like, reinforces itself, and determines what people would spend their resources on. At the same time, it sets the parameters by which writerly success and value is measured. Media is the vehicle through which this control on the market is exercised. Take this article published in the *New York Times*: "Salman Rushdie Reviews a Sweeping Debut About the Roots of Modern Zambia.” NYT’s coverage of the book review, written by a recognizably established author is an ideal representation of some of the pitfalls of institutional consecration of the African creative. The title of this piece alone is telling. It mentions the name of the reviewer, but not the author of the text being reviewed, which demonstrates the process of building authoritarian charisma, whereby an already anointed figure or institution welcomes and vouches for a newer artist and thus creates belief in them. What's more, this title resonates with the old impulse to approach African literature as historical and/or anthropological documents. The “sweeping debut” is first and foremost presented to the NYT reader as an exploration of Zambian national history, and therefore positions the text to be read as learning source, dealing with history and politics. However, this impulse has also worked to make “successful” African literary figures into expert and morally sound spokesperson articulating the heart of African issues in a modern world. Because, by presenting such texts as learning documents, the producers of those texts are implicitly posited as experts who have endeavored to artistically ventriloquize African cultures and issues for metropolitan digestion. In

the case of African authors, the ingredient of expertise—or the appearance of expertise—in fact, adds to the mediagenic quality that makes African literary cultures "cool".

The proliferation of this "cool" image, through a ubiquitous digital media also makes the authorial images accessible to people who may have never read a word of the writers' work but will now have some idea of what the author stands for, and what work they accomplish in their writing. The democratic nature of these media forms allows for a wider and more easily accessible literary discourse[13]. The other side of this nature is that it can also give a false sense of public consensus on certain ideas about significant cultural moments. In his discussion of new African writing, Adesokan states,

> [there] is also an uncanny aspect of the commodity form in the preference for the 'young,'…in which celebrity is crucial, and in which 'late blooming' is prized in specific cultural circumstances. Hand-in-hand with this shift is the increasing visibility of the

[13] The appeal to pop culture interest in African literature is captured all over digital and print media in the US. For an example, one could look at the representation of the authors in the 2018 "African Book-Lovers Guide" published on *Brittle Paper*. Yrsa Daley-Ward is described as "the Instapoet we love, the top model we admire, and the break out literary star that inspires us." Nnedi Okorafor is characterized as "undoubtedly the queen of uncharted territories when it comes to imagining future black worlds. But isn't that why her stories have become a global staple?" Tomi Adeyemi is said to have "made a splash online when she signed a million-dollar book deal," and Nuruddin Farah is "one of Africa's most beloved novelists" ("48 Notable African Books of 2018"). Privately run blogs in general, are not the only digital channels making these kinds of representational decisions. A writer for The New Yorker responding to the public image of Somali-Brit poet, Warsan Shire, states: "The simultaneous specificity and breadth of her appeal, across gender, race, and nationality based on her self-professed fans, is remarkable, and it took me by surprise the first time I started following her online. She tweeted 'my dj name is dj eldest immigrant daughter' not long ago. I favorited it immediately" (Okeowo). Here is a young millennial poet, with international acclaim: she is popular, relatable, producing viral poetry for a digitally active black diaspora, and she also happens to be an immigrant, invested in the politics of identity. This charismatic public figure, Warsan Shire, has been quoted by Beyoncé and is ripe for inspirational memes. Through the references to Instagram, the glamour of modeling, the viral trend of referring to accomplished women as queens, and even the direct mention of a staggering amount of money, these representations of the African literary figures appeal to the pop culture values that are on trend at the moment. In this way, the authors are presented as charismatic figures so as to harness the massive pull of democratic popular culture in the digital age and achieve the objective of making African literature "look and feel cool," and encouraging the public to go out and buy an African book. The writers are positioned as social media influencers, or some other similar breed public figures. On Brittle Paper, readers can read up on the fashions and feuds in the world of African literature, and at the end of the day, they might buy a text or three by African authors, so that they too may be in-the-know by partaking in this "cool" literary culture.

> figure of the intellectual, the previously marginalized individual—the writer, the artist, the academic, the member of the technocratic elite—in the emergent transnational culture. (15)

Here, Adesokan observes three side effects of the system that encourages "increasing visibility" for the image of the author and charismatic creator. Another obvious disadvantage of hypervisibility is that since expertise on sociopolitical matters is expected of the charismatic author and intellectual, s/he is not allowed much room to display any intellectual opinions less worthy than those expected of them. We see this consequence play out in the public outrage and collective disappointment that came after Adichie's controversial comments on transwomen. In this way the authoritarian charisma that imbues her creative persona conceals the human[14] (Lloyd). In the end, the charismatic authorial figure must continually demonstrate a degree of moral infallibility, socio-cultural expertise, artistic talent, and a mediagenic biography. The charismatic figure must continue to prove themselves, otherwise they risk dismissal, or worse, obscurity.

In the contemporary moment, Chimamanda Adichie is perhaps the ideal authorial figure to illustrate the highs and pitfalls of this reception machinery. In examining her image as "Chinua Achebe's Unruly Daughter," Daria Tunca explores Adichie's oscillatory battle with defining and balancing her duties and agency as a storyteller and cultural producer. What we learn, is that the development and propagation of a public literary image, as with Tutuola

[14] Lloyd elaborates on the concept of perfection by acknowledging that critics of charisma "rightly object to is the airbrushing that media entail," after which "the charismatic individual appears flawless, slick." He, however, explains, "This is, indeed, part of authoritarian charisma—but authoritarian charisma is not the only form of charisma. At its best, as democratic, charisma juxtaposes an ordinary, flawed individual with an extraordinary performance. Charisma comes about because of this dissonance. If charisma at its best, as democratic charisma, performs the failure of representation, the dissonance between clearly imperfect performer and nearly perfect performance is one way to do this" (Lloyd 63-64).

decades before, still rests heavily in the hands of institutions that include publishers, literary critics, reviewers, and mass media. For instance, although Adichie's first novel was first published by a small independent press, the snowball effect of her visibility was soon ignited when "*Purple Hibiscus* was bought by the British publisher Fourth Estate for a small sum from the tiny New York publisher Algonquin Press" (Reynolds). Once the novel and consequently, her public image is taken over by a more powerful company, capable of more visibility, things moved quickly: "Since then it has received ecstatic reviews in Britain and Adichie has been signed up by Andrew 'The Jackal' Wylie, one of the world's biggest literary agents" (Reynolds). Adichie's public image, elevated from the "tiny" press and placed in the hands of "The Jackal," is a testament to her perceived profitability—her marketable charisma—and ultimately enabled her eventual hypervisibility and the cultivation of her authoritarian charisma through an authorial image.

Notably, for Adichie, alongside the rhetorical connections reviewers and critics made between her and Achebe[15], there was also the impulse to outline her educational background, and her upbringing in a university environment.[16] This seemed to position her as a well-informed

[15] There was undeniable excitement at discovering any connection she shared with Chinua Achebe, which would create a neat line succession in the world of Anglophone African literature. She was then described as the "literary daughter of Achebe," a title that seem to legitimize her and garner respect for her writing. The link between Adichie and Achebe was not just a literary one, however. Introducing the author to the readership of *Baltimore Sun,* one reviewer states, "Adichie grew up in a house where the great, seminal Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe once lived. Readers of Achebe will recognize a homage to his novel *Things Fall Apart* in the first sentence of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. ...The writing is lush with the smells of jollof rice and the colors of frangipani flowers and the heat of the harmattan wind" (Schoettler). In this passage, the readers are made to recognize both the literary connection of the authors, through this attention to intertextuality, and the personal, albeit entirely coincidental connection they share. Although this personal connection seems irrelevant to the actual crafting of Adichie's work, it serves the purpose of shaping public perception of the author herself, which undoubtedly informs the way her work is received. In her case, a neat line of succession from Achebe does part of the work of creating a marketable authorial image for her work.

[16] Writing for *The Guardian,* John Ezard notes that "Adichie studied medicine at the University of Nigeria, where her father was deputy vice-chancellor. But she is at present a student attending writing seminars at Johns Hopkins University in the US."

intellectual, coming from a long line of intellectuals, including not only her literary father, Achebe, but also her biological parents who held notable posts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This process eventually comes to a point where a fashion magazine like *Elle* publishes an article titled, “Meet Beyoncé's Favorite Novelist.” In it, the author gushes in a manner that sells and thus propagates the author’s charisma to the readers:

> There's kind of no other way to say it: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of those women you feel good about fan-girling over. Whip smart and intimidatingly eloquent, she has the rare combination of It-factor *and* substance. At 36, she's received PEN, O. Henry, and Orange prizes, as well as a MacArthur 'genius' grant; when she accepts each award her flawless, often crimson smile is infectious, even in photos. She also unapologetically loves clothes. (Weir)

This passage demonstrates a similar kind of investment in presenting the author as a charismatic figure who is relatable and aspirational because they are young, beautiful, intelligent, and talented. The choice has a lot to do with creating pop culture appeal. It also has to do with building an image of expertise and competency, in order to prime an audience (and market, by extension) for the devotion inspired by this structure of charisma. Similarly, the work of *Brittle Paper*, to make African literature “look and feel cool” is essentially tied to capturing the pop culture imagination and interest and directing it towards the writers and texts coming out of Africa. The very language used on the blog is representative of this goal. The authors are discussed in terms that make them into intellectual and artistic legends, depending on a charismatic ideology of artistic creation. They are presented as aspirational figures ripe for emulation. Any discussion on the explosion and newfound proliferation of African literature in our contemporary moment must acknowledge the double-edged role of digital and social media.

In the end, the sense of a sweeping consensus on the consecration of authorial charisma exacerbates the elision of vast swaths of African stories, writers, and spaces.

Ultimately, all of these factors work together to create an image of a modern day, twenty-first century African writer whose educational background is well established, who is informed on global and national politics, and is fully confident in her ability to publicly articulate the heart of social and political concerns that plague both the content and the reception of her work. As early as 1999, a few years before the publication of her first novel, Adichie was already demonstrating a level of comfort with the political image that would come to be a large part of her hyper-visible public persona in the future. She does this, for instance, by answering questions about Nigeria's new democracy for a Baltimore newspaper. She was already being positioned as the smart and quick-witted spokesperson who is invested in social justice and is comfortably compelling in her role as a public intellectual. The definition of a public intellectual necessarily includes a social component of mediation, because on the one hand, intellectuals are "people whose chief concern is with ideas and thinking about, and usually writing about, ideas - that includes certain philosophers, certain literary people and historians, some social scientists, some political scientists, occasional scientists" (Chametzky 211). Public intellectuals, on the other hand are "those who attempt to influence social and political events and reality directly with their ideas" (211). It is in creating an image of Adichie as public intellectual that the author plays the most conscious and intentional role.

However, the problem is not the fact that a writer like Adichie is charismatic, quick witted or charming—consciously or not. Instead, it is a problem that she not only has to prove her charismatic creativity over and over again, but that proof is then implicitly held up as the standard for appraising and reading African authors and their work. In what is often termed New

African writing, the architecture of a "successful" writer's career arc is very firmly dependent on a network of workshops, sponsored publications, awards, and prizes. Adesokan argues that "certain kinds of novels have become so dominant as to be viewed as the gold standard, especially when that standard turns on the attractions of a big money prize or the bestseller list" (4). He then goes on to enumerate what he sees as the prevalent features across these texts:

> These novels share five features: they are mostly written by women; they are focalized from the perspectives of culturally innocent or marginal protagonists; they thematize the emotional consequences of familial or public upheavals; they are not too long, but if they are, they compensate for their length by being formally or linguistically nonexperimental; and they end happily, or at any rate, not too grimly. (4)

While all of these five features are not essential ingredients for the charisma that propels a text or author into hypervisibility, Adesokan makes an important observation that the nature of these globally successful texts has as much to do with the reading of their content, as with the interpretation and propagation of the authorial paratexts. The successful African author has to display her expertise, harness her charm, and showcase or market her creativity. The proof of value becomes the extent to which the author's image conforms to an idea of what a writer should look, sound, and write like when they are always already tasked with giving voice to the historically marginalized peoples from which they come, while also engaging the interest and admiration of a metropolitan audience. This singular way of valuing is reminiscent of the reception or dismissal of Tutuola as naïve artist. Therefore, the need for alternative modes of reading and appraising on one hand, and a decentered locus of legitimization on the other, is as urgent in the present as it was then.

I posit that there is hope in achieving this decentering mission, by engaging those narratives and spaces which are not yet routinized, consecrated, and imbued with authoritarian charisma by the powers located in academic, economic, and media institutions.

In the chapters that follow, I offer readings of Cyprian Ekwensi's popular fiction, the character of the planned capital city Abuja, Warri street culture, and the narrative—or lack thereof—of potable piped water, all through the primary lens of their local relevance, as against their relative global obscurity, lack of appeal and charisma. In these analyses, there is a chance for a better-valued tributary of narrative representation that is not dependent on making the African Other legible and relevant to the Western self in attempts to mediate through cultural translation or brokerage what would ultimately be understood and received as exotic—i.e. part of the Western self, domesticated, but still Other, however tamed and mediated. These spaces, stories, authors, or objects seem to display a kind of resistance to the narrative processes of myth making that prove most interesting, relevant, or useful in a global or metropolitan context. I argue that continuing to privilege a global context in the reading of these texts and spaces, precludes the intellectual and critical excavation of their locally relevant richness in value and interest.

The sites, stories, and even aesthetics that begin to harden into this perception of being unprofitable in the market of African literature, tend to remain that way unless a powerful publisher and charismatic author team comes along to recuperate its economic viability in the metropolitan market. However, when one redirects the focus to local markets and thus, local audiences, we should observe a shift in how certain spaces, stories, and even issues are valued differently. There are whole worlds of characters, spaces, and therefore stories, that do not bear significant cultural importance to a metropolitan audience and may never gain the pull of popular appeal. Nevertheless, the potential for a bright and robust African literary future that is not

primarily extroverted may very well lie in these worlds. Also, the conflation and calcification of charisma and canon on the metropolitan stage (at a global level) discourages intra-African literary exchange, development, and readership.

Chapters

In the first chapter, "Glocal Lagos: Charismatic Spatiality and its implications" I undertake an examination of how Lagos is depicted differently by an author who is often overlooked and can be understood as uncharismatic. Ekwensi does not possess the degree of institutional consecration and authoritarian charisma that makes Achebe such a key figure in the African Literature canon. Yet, hos investment in writing popular fiction for a local audience produces a depiction of Lagos that does not privilege the same global cosmopolitan ethos that tends to dominate Nigerian urban literature. Ekwensi also has a public image that is not generally interpreted as exemplary or worthy of emulation, and his works were received as anything but "exceptional" or genius in Western cultural and academic institutions. However, this lack charisma threatens to undermine the cultural value of his work, because it translates into a kind of dismissal of oeuvre—specifically, outside of the Nigerian elementary and secondary educational system where some of his works are still used in classrooms. In this first chapter, I undertake a recuperation of Ekwensi's authorial image, particularly by re-evaluating the importance of his mission to write popular fiction. His efforts, as demonstrated in the novel *Iska*, make room for a different reading of Lagos alongside other urban spaces across the country. Ekwensi's work proves to be distinct in the sense that it depicts Lagos as a locality, a space, within a network of other local, intra-national spaces. In this way, his work is different from

most other depictions of Lagos by other more widely read and more charismatic authors, because he does not privilege a cosmopolitan ethos.

The second chapter, “Unwritten City: Abuja in the Nigerian Literary Imagination,” expands on the idea of charismatic spatiality by highlighting the mechanism behind the constant misreadings of Abuja as a site of creative aridity. I analyze the city's master plan in tandem with depictions of Abuja in texts by Noo saro-Wiwa, Teju Cole, and Chimamanda Adichie in order to establish the narrative history of Abuja as an uncharismatic urban space. These texts reveal a prevalent tendency to envision Abuja as a city of near-sterile orderliness. When it's mentioned at all, Abuja is written as an arid landscape, often in contrast with the organic cosmopolitan bustle of Lagos. Then, I turn to Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms* to offer an alternative reading that situates the capital city within the cultures and histories of the Middlebelt and Northern regions of Nigeria. This chapter thus advocates for a mode of approaching relatively uncharismatic spaces that places them on a different scale of spatial relationality. This can mean moving from a scale of global relevance to an intra-national, local, or regional scale. Such a move allows for literary representations that acknowledge the value and distinctness of these spaces and their physical, sociocultural, political, and/or ecological characters. In the case of Abuja, it emerges as a crucial and distinct part of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, with major influence from the socio-cultural North of the nation. This new perspective unveils the richness of the city’s urban character beyond its status as an ill-guided project of the federal government worthy only of dismissal.

To further elucidate the role of genre in spectacularizing visions of modern Africa, the third chapter incorporates materials such as standup comedy acts as the primary texts to unearth the nature and significance of a less spectacular story of Warri, a city in the Niger Delta region of

Nigeria. In "Warri no Dey Carry Last: Re-reading the Niger Delta as a Site of National Cultural Identity Production," I examine a trend in Nigerian popular culture that revolves, not around oil extraction but around the comedic currency of the region's cultural contributions to the nation as a whole. The spectacle of crises and environmental degradation has long defined the imbalance of stories when it comes to a much-narrativized locale like the Niger-Delta region. This chapter destabilizes the prevalent view of the Niger-delta as a region synonymous with oil, exploitation, and environmental degradation. Instead, it highlights and explores the diversity of ethnic identities that coalesce to make distinct, recognizable, and economically lucrative urban identities in Nigeria.

Finally, I come back to the idea of borrowed charisma—this is a key reason why focalizing the charismatic megafauna has found success as a narrative technique in environmentalism. In the fourth chapter, I examine the tradition of harnessing celebrity charisma in stories about clean water in Africa to discuss what I contend might very well be the least charismatic form of water – the borehole and public tap water. I contrast the over-representation of potable water in celebrity activism discourse with a notable absence of these domesticated sources of potable water in many literary novels that would otherwise be considered "slice-of-life" narratives. This chapter juxtaposes the dearth of stories around this infrastructure in African literatures with the hyper-visible narratives of Western organizations and public figures who have harnessed their own charismatic public images to highlight the importance of clean water infrastructure. Without these other sources of charisma and spectacle, boreholes are arguably the least charismatic kind of water source. While they are prevalent in most urban areas, being both mundane and ubiquitous, they are hardly incorporated into African narratives on city life.

Overall, I analyze a variety of primary materials from novels and travelogues to urban planning documents and stand-up comedy. I use charisma as a framework to identify the implicit global and neoimperialist gaze underlying the spatial representations of African landscapes. The narrative rhetoric of exceptionality overlaid onto these hyper-visible spaces or stories does not account for the full range of locally-relevant stories being told in and about these charismatic and intermediary spaces. Using locales across Nigeria, such as Abuja and Warri as case studies, I distill spatial character and distinctness in order to undo erasure, without necessarily imbuing the same kind of exceptionality that breeds institutionalized charisma. This is a difficult but important balance to achieve when writing about African landscapes and even when appreciating African stories. *Unwritten Spaces* aspires to this by focusing on the narrative and expressive articulations of various landscapes in these interstitial spaces and recognizing instead, networks of spatial relationality. I thus begin by narrowing the field to focus on a single and already richly diverse country, Nigeria.

Works Cited

Adesokan, Akin. "New African Writing and the Question of Audience." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2012, pp. 1–20. JSTOR.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited by Randal Johnson, Columbia University Press, 1993.

Brouillette, Sarah. *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Chametzky, Jules. "Public Intellectuals: Now and Then." *MELUS*, vol. 29, no. 3/4, 2004, pp. 211–26. JSTOR.

Ezard, John, and arts correspondent. "Debut Novel from Nigeria Storms Orange Shortlist." *The Guardian*, 27 Apr. 2004. *www.theguardian.com*, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/apr/27/books.world.

Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.

Lindfors, Bernth. "African Vernacular Styles in Nigerian Fiction." *CLA Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1966, pp. 265–73. JSTOR.

-- *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*. Three Continents Press, 1975.

-- *Early West African Writers: Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi & Ayi Kwei Armah*. Africa World Press, 2010.

Lloyd, Vincent W. *In Defense of Charisma*. Columbia University Press, 2018.

Low, Gail. "The Natural Artist: Publishing Amos Tutuola's 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard' in Postwar Britain." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2006, pp. 15–33.

Moudileno, Lydie. “Fame, Celebrity, and the Conditions of Visibility of the Postcolonial Writer.” *Yale French Studies*, no. No. 120, Francophone Sub-Saharan African Literature in Global Contexts, 2011, pp. 62–74. JSTOR.

Ngugi, Mukoma Wa. “Amos Tutuola: Creating the African Literary Bogeyman.” *The Rise of the African Novel*, University of Michigan Press, 2018, pp. 71–102. JSTOR, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9724578.5.

---. “Manufacturing the African Literary Canon: Costs and Opportunities.” *The Rise of the African Novel*, University of Michigan Press, 2018, pp. 133–62. JSTOR, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9724578.7.

Nwaubani, Adaobi Tricia. “Opinion | African Books for Western Eyes.” *The New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2017. *NYTimes.com*, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/30/opinion/sunday/african-books-for-western-eyes.html.

Ogundipe, Molara. “The Palm Wine Drinkard: A Reassessment of Amos Tutuola.” *Présence Africaine*, no. 71, 1969, pp. 99–108. JSTOR.

Okeowo, Alexis. *The Writing Life of Warsan Shire, a Young, Prolific Poet*. Oct. 2015. *www.newyorker.com*, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-writing-life-of-a-young-prolific-poet-warsan-shire.

Olaniyan, Tejumola. “The Heroic Generals and Absent soldiers: Notes on Literature, development and Governance in Africa since the Nobel Prize.” *After the Nobel Prize: Reflections on African Literature, Governance and Development,* eds. Gbemisola Adeoti and Mabel Evwierhoma. Ibadan: kraft Books, 2006. 45–56. Print.

Povey, John F. “Contemporary West African Writing in English.” *Books Abroad*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1966, pp. 253–60. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/40120795.

Reynolds, Nigel. *Young Nigerian Writer Eyes Top Fiction Award*. 26 Apr. 2004. *www.telegraph.co.uk*, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1460361/Young-Nigerian-writer-eyes-top-fiction-award.html.

Rushdie, Salman. "Salman Rushdie Reviews a Sweeping Debut About the Roots of Modern Zambia." *The New York Times*, 29 Mar. 2019. *NYTimes.com*, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/28/books/review/old-drift-salman-rushdie.html.

Schoettler, Carl. "Nigerian Novelist Chimamanda Adichie Is a Story in Herself." *Baltimoresun.Com*, https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2004-10-04-0410040009-story.html. Accessed 3 May 2019.

Tunca, Daria. "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as Chinua Achebe's (Unruly) Literary Daughter: The Past, Present, and Future of 'Adichebean' Criticism." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2018, pp. 107–26.

Weber, Max. *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*. Edited by S. N. Eisenstadt, University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Weir, Keziah. "Meet Beyoncé's Favorite Novelist." *ELLE*, 15 Feb. 2014, https://www.elle.com/news/culture/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-interview.

Glocal Lagos: Charismatic Spatiality and its Implications

When it comes to the field of cultural production, it is less productive to critique either just the constitution (*who* makes up the field), or the operation (*how* literary value is imbued) of the field. It is far more useful instead, to examine the dubious way these two aspects of the field interact with each other in the context of Africa. In this case, the constitution and operation of the field are inevitably juxtaposed to function parallel to a historically persistent imperialist mission and the impulses of the power dynamics located within that history. For the purpose of this project, it would be unproductive to critique individual authors who have found success under this system. When one considers all the factors at work in shaping the system, it is more imperative to ask: where can we begin to recuperate the agency of African writing and African authorial figures beyond a global neoliberal marketplace? This more productive move, which I undertake here, is concerned with re-negotiating the value of those authors, texts, and spaces that have historically been dismissed or sidelined under this system, as well as those who run the risk of going unnoticed, unread, and unwritten even now. For instance, in order to understand the frequent dismissal of Cyprian Ekwensi from the African literary canon, it is important to observe how charisma and charismatic recognition is interwoven into the making of the canon. Illuminating what Ekwensi stood for as a literary figure is crucial to understanding how charisma can function to the detriment of the development of Nigerian or West African literature writ large. In reading Ekwensi's novel against Achebe's for instance, we also see a clear example of what can be lost when stories depicting African urban spaces mainly privilege a globalist or cosmopolitan ethos, while demoting the local to insignificance. Ekwensi's Lagos is a local space, located in a network with other built landscapes across the nation. It is distinct, in the sense that

most depictions of the city value it most highly for its cosmopolitan value, and the way it represents Nigeria on a global stage. This alternative interpretation of Lagos' urbanity represents some of the possible alternatives that can come to the fore in a re-envisioned future of the landscape of literary production in Africa.

Since the charismatic, the successful, the relevant, and thus the institutionally consecrated African author, and subsequently African literature, is decided and propagated within an authoritative system that runs parallel with the colonial/imperial and neoliberal/neocolonial systems that have historically worked to the disadvantage of the continent, there is an immense need to renegotiate the construction and operation of this system. This history of canon-building suggests that, on the global stage, where authoritarian charisma is imbued, consecrated and codified, the routinization and hypervisibility afforded by the institutions of legitimization and mass media respectively, reinforces the power imbalances which prevail in spite of any individual author's or critic's efforts to subvert that system. Africa has historically occupied the space of the dominated, while the global north has generally been dominant. This history persists and inevitably surfaces in any cultural exchanges that involve "Africa" and the world. Due to the power positions outlined above, the current system of consecration through the intersection of mostly metropolitan academic and cultural institutions and the global literary marketplace prompts suspicion. Olabode Ibironke charges that "most of the current theories of cultural production in Africa' miss 'the sense of how each writer in his or her own unique and self-conscious ways responds creatively to the multiple loci of material production'" (38). Consequently, locating a writer's 'primary' audience or market in one place or another may distract from the more fruitful task of probing the persistent structural "tensions between transnational production and a transformational agenda that is always local and immediate"

(Ibironke 40). Intercultural exchange and access to Africa is always already impacted by the imbalance of powers insofar as the narratives with global or metropolitan import are privileged. For instance, anthropological readings of African novels appear practically inevitable, whether it is in the Herskovitsian tradition, or the Jamesonian[17]. As far as these readings of African narratives place value on interpreting—the plight of the characters, their concerns, their environments, and the significance of these elements—from a globalized context, or through globally salient parameters, the imbalance and resultant exoticism will persist. If these are the values through which consecration and consumption of African literature is determined and propagated, the only room for a change/expansion of the field of literary production would be located in a balance between the readership and circulation of the anointed and thus hyper-visible on the one hand, and the relatively obscured African literatures on the other.

In this chapter, I engage in a recuperation of Cyprian Ekwensi's mission to write popular fiction and create an image of himself as the author who writes stories for the local masses in Nigeria. This will highlight the consequences of the legitimization of cultural value aligned with charisma. Through a close reading of his novel *Iska,* read alongside Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, I demonstrate the value of Ekwensi's popular fiction. Compared to Achebe's novel, *Iska* illuminates an alternative way to contextualize the new nation of Nigeria, and the challenges it faces. However, Ekwensi has often been sidelined in discussions of the canon of West African literature, particularly by influential literary critics who do not see the value of his efforts. This history of reception to his work has had aftereffects such as the fact that almost all of his works

[17] An anthropologist, Melville Herskovitz, was best known for helping to establish a tradition of ethnographic scholarship on African and African American culture, and he was often invested in tracing cultural continuities from Africa to the New World. Frederic Jameson famously positions what he called "third world literature" is a form of national allegory. Reading African literature in either of these traditions—ethnographically, or even as allegory—reduces these texts to artifacts from which Western critics and scholars can extract an interpretation of distant Africa.

are out of print in spite of his prolific career. The two novels by Achebe and Ekwensi, share important similarities in setting and plot. I offer a reading of *Iska* and *No Longer at Ease* that demonstrates how a particular mode of reading African literature, from the viewpoint of the global and cosmopolitan, plays a major role in determining how texts are then valued or sidelined. Thus, the reading advocates the value in cultivating alternative streams of legitimization and consecration – ones that can fairly and productively engage the function and value of popular fiction, for instance.

Exoticism, Extroversion, and Charisma

Discussing power imbalance for "Africa" in a global context, calls for an examination of the role of exoticism—in this case, the postcolonial and the anthropological exotic as a practice of reading/receiving and to an extent determining African literature. Huggan defines exoticism as

> a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places *strange even as it domesticates them*, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. The exoticist production of otherness is dialectical and contingent; at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of rapprochement and reconciliation, but legitimising just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest. Exoticism, in this context, might be described as a kind of *semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity*. Within this circuit, the strange and the familiar, as well as the relation between them, may be receded to serve different, even contradictory, political needs and ends. (*My emphasis* 13)

Huggan makes clear and explicit connections between exoticism and politics in ways that suggest that the ideology of exoticism has much to do with power. In particular, it deals with the neutralization of the threat of the Other. Similarly, in Brouillette's view the "definition of the exotic in its newly global guise [is] in essence, the foreign fitfully translated into the unthreatening and familiar" (16). Within this schema, the writer then becomes a translator, fashioned into a cultural broker. The awareness of this exoticizing impulse of the global reader, and anxious navigation of this reality forces the globally recognized postcolonial writer into an oscillatory space of self-consciousness. Here, the reality that the writer navigates is summarized succinctly: "Third World literature simply is that set of texts that is available for and has managed to make it beyond some more specific locality, while still having attached to it, always, the aura of its transcended origin" (Brouillette 72). The exoticist impulse of its audience is always already implicated in both the production and reception of these texts.

The self-conscious nature of postcolonial literature born from a condition of persistent exoticization, however, gives rise to a kind of strategic exoticism, through which the writers purportedly reclaim some agency, but which can in reality trap them into upholding the same systems.[18] The constant navigation of this marginalization and the expectation to perform a labor of translation is a vicious loop, because it often culminates in a superimposition or consolidation of hegemonic cultural ideologies.[19] Ultimately, strategic exoticism fails to liberate the African

[18] Huggan offers a definition of strategic exoticism as "the means by which postcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes ('inhabiting them to criticize them', Spivak 1990), or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power" (Huggan 32). One could see this response as an effect of the postcolonial writer as translator and subsequently, cultural broker. The impossible loop made manifest in the position of marginality reproduces an oscillation between resistance and strategic cooperation, because "Postcolonial studies, it could be argued, has capitalised on its perceived marginality while helping turn marginality itself into a valuable intellectual commodity. Meanwhile, postcolonial writers, and a handful of critics, have accumulated forms of cultural capital that have made them recognised—even celebrity—figures despite their openly oppositional stance" (Huggan viii).

[19] Huggan defines the cultural translation of the postcolonial writer as "not so much a process of convergence,

writer. According to Huggan, literary cosmopolitanism enables a view of postcolonial writers as simultaneously global migrants with a democratic world view, and native informants always already tied to their cultural or national origins. The duality of the writer's identity under this cosmopolitanism makes it so that the author's awareness of her positioning in this machinery is always present and has come to be understood as a necessity in the production of what we know as third world literature. Since exoticism has to do with a simultaneous domestication and estrangement of the Other, Huggan claims that "The anthropological exotic in which African literature is implicated is, in part, an attempt to convert this violence[20] [of western domination, both historical and present] into palatable aesthetic forms" (56). In many ways the strategy of "strategic exoticism" continues to operate under the hegemony that sees exoticism as its primary mode of enforcing domination. It disguises and thus continues a history of subjugation. This is the problem with strategic exoticism: it is a way in which the producers of African literature get further enclosed in a hegemonic loop, even and especially when they achieve success through global recognition.

These socio-political paratexts concerning the valuation of postcolonial literatures have inspired extensive scholarship, because the "Africa" in what has been constructed as African literature is historically positioned in a disadvantaged place of less power. In his delineation of the postcolonial exotic, Huggan observes that cultural exchange "at both literal and symbolic levels is always uneven, as are the structures of economic development that underpin the global

---

mutual intellection and cross-fertilisation—that moving between different linguistic/cultural registers that Walter Benjamin takes to be the task of the translator—but rather the superimposition of a dominant way of seeing, speaking and thinking onto marginalised peoples and the cultural artifacts they produce" (Huggan 24).

[20] He echoes Anthony Appiah to remind us "that Europe is, like it or not, a part of Africa; and that African literature is best regarded as neither celebratory self-expression nor reprehensible Western imposition, but rather as a hybrid amalgam of cross-fertilised aesthetic traditions that are the historical outcome of a series of - often violent - cultural collisions" (Huggan 56).

circulation of designated 'exotic' goods" (16). He notes that African literature finding a larger readership outside of the continent is not merely one more legacy of a colonial past, but more urgently, an effect of present systems of imperialism or neoimperialism. In line with this point, Eileen Julien hypothesizes about the production of "African" literature: "What African readers and readers beyond Africa think of typically as the African novel is, I submit, a particular type of narrative characterized above all by its intertextuality with hegemonic or global discourses and its appeal across borders" ("The Extroverted African Novel" 681). By calling attention to the practices of production and reception, Julien alludes to the powerful social and cultural institutions operating the machinery of hegemonic cultural imperialism. She goes on to remind us that the "limited diet" of African narratives implied by the prominence of the extroverted novel in the category of African literature, "is not simply dictated by novels themselves but the result of readerly expectations and the machinery of marketing and distribution." However, she goes on to "draw attention to the extroverted novel on its perch," in order to illuminate the "narrow novelistic diet" it supplied to the Global North. She concludes that the elisions, found in the boundaries between the category of the extroverted African novel and other literatures in Africa, "robbed readers of the diversity of African narratives, thereby simplifying Africa, locking this massive, heterogeneous and dynamic continent into a supposedly imitative literary, intellectual, political and economic modus operandi" ("African Novel, Revisited" 374). If the texts that get read are those that display "intertextuality with hegemonic or global discourses," the obvious disadvantage of the elision Julien observes is that the imperialist power imbalance that created it in the first place is reinforced. This narrow diet also flattens the potentials of the African literary canon, because this system, with its skewed axis, can only become more exclusionary and rigid: a rigidity which often makes it easy to perceive authors who are not

published or recognized by the West as inferior. In this way, the charisma of these celebrated authors and stories also possesses a capacity to disguise the unbalanced structure of the field of African literary production.

I have proposed the construction and function of "charisma" as a conceptual girdle that explains the positioning of the individual author in relation to the politics of exoticism. It also accounts for the multitude of factors which might produce the condition Eileen Julien describes as "extroversion." The term "extroversion" suggests that there are certain features intrinsic within a text, which makes it more amenable to the reading and interpretive impulses of a metropolitan audience. However, it does not fully account for the social, political, economic, and cultural structures surrounding the production, valuation, and circulation of these texts to a global audience. The concept of charisma, however, allows for a more robust view of African literatures that appraises the intersectional roles of authorial image and biographical paratexts, the self-conscious navigation of the postcolonial exotic, and the institutional loci at the helm of creating belief and consecration around this machinery of African literature—these would be the academic, the cultural and economic institutions, and the publishing industries all involved/implicated in the production of African literature, its texts and its figures. Ultimately, charisma makes room for that often-elusive quality of the text or authorial figure that helps it achieve hypervisibility or global recognition above its peers.

The bidirectional nature of charisma allows us to interrogate the hypervisibility of certain texts, authors, themes, and spaces in African literature, Here, I am using "hypervisibility" as a way to describe the condition that might be called extroversion, without passing any value judgements on texts/authors perceived as possessing that quality. Extroversion does seem to suggest that the construction of these texts is already dependent on an external locus of control.

However, this line of thought diminishes the agency of the texts' producers, by suggesting that they are always writing with the metropolitan consecrators in mind. The crux of the disagreement between Julien and Nathan Suhr-Sytsma has to do with which factor—form or reception—has a bigger role to play in making a text extroverted[21]. However, I contend that examining the institutionalized construction, courting, and consecration of the charismatic figure, and the charismatic ideology of literary production, allows us a more robust view of the elements at work in forging this phenomenon. This view allows us, for instance, to see the intersection between the powers of the publishing and marketing industry of African literature on the one hand, and the writers' navigation and negotiation of the exoticizing impulse around the reception of African literature in the West, on the other hand.

Recuperating "Popular" Fiction

For an examination of what might be a counter or alternative figure of the African writer, we could look to Ekwensi. It is important that his work does not appear to court a global audience but is instead created to entertain and to appeal first to a local audience. Even in the era

[21] In a 2018 article, Julien responds to readings of her acclaimed essay, "The Extroverted African Novel," to defend and rethink her ideas and hypotheses in that piece. One of the points of contention between her original article and the counter-argument she engages, by Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, has to do with what precipitates the condition of extroversion in the African novel. Her original essay suggests that the extroverted African novel was a genre onto itself - because extroversion had to do with the form and themes of the texts. Although she does account for the role of the practices of reading and reception of the text, she ultimately attributes the critical reception to the formal elements of the text in question. However, Suhr-Sytsma interrogates the categorization of the "extroverted" novel as a formal genre, observing that the risk of viewing African literature through this lens of extroversion/introversion fails to account fully for the complexities of literatures of the continent. He argues instead, that the condition of extroversion emerges more readily from the reception and readership of the text. This focus on the reception suggests that the condition of extroversion is somewhat imposed on the novels through already set reading practices. However, the OED definition of extroversion is, "The action of turning, or the condition of being turned, outwards" ("extroversion"). This definition suggests that the condition would be innate to the texts, and as Julien insists, would be located primarily within the form and themes of the text. It connotes a quality inherent in a text. Extroversion, per se, is not a condition likely to be imposed or imbued upon reception of an object or person. However, one cannot discount the immense role of critical reception, and the place of academic institutions and the publishing industry in creating the condition Julien names 'extroversion'.

of the Makerere consensus, the question of the political and cultural ventriloquism that dominated that conversation seemed to have a counter figure in a writer like him. In Gail Low's examination of the image of "natural artists," there is a lot of discussion about the impulse, in that era, to position Achebe as a contrast to Tutuola. The contrast between the two authors is often drawn through categories such as the naive vs. the learned, the authentic vs. the influenced. Low's discussion of these two writers presents a historical battle of sorts, to determine whose authorial image will stand as exemplary African writing or literature, and thus define the "brand" of African literature. Low explores, in passing, the question of who could translate the African mind and society (cultures) better into writing for the Western-educated reader to understand and access. However, in this conversation, she appears to gloss over the example of Cyprian Ekwensi and what he stands for. Ekwensi allows us to push against these binaries and open up the possibilities for what a valuable writerly mission can look like for an African author. He was, according to Low, known as a writer of popular fiction for the Nigerian market, which seemed to connote a status of lesser prestige than the more "academic" work of Achebe and Soyinka. Additionally, John Povey praises Ekwensi in a backhanded manner when he writes that although he is mainly influenced by "movies and cheap paperbacks from America," he is a highly professional popular writer (254). Even Bernth Lindfors hardly had any positive words for the value of Ekwensi's creative personae and literary work. He concludes that Ekwensi's problems as a writer are a result of his attempt to,

> write truly popular literature. Unlike other African writers who address themselves to Europe or to an educated African elite, Ekwensi prides himself on being a writer for the masses, a writer who can communicate with any African literate in English. He does not

> pretend to be profound, subtle or erudite; he would rather be considered entertaining, exciting, sensational. (*Early West African Writers* 163-164)

In this sense, Ekwensi is dismissed as a hardworking, but ultimately unsuccessful writer, and his supposed failure is mainly attributed to his objective to write for "the masses." Ekwensi's relative disregard in his work—compared to some other African writers of his time—for the audience in Europe, and the "educated African elite" produces the effect of him being designated unappealing and unqualified for consecration by institutions of meaningful recognition. We still see the effects of this refusal to recognize Ekwensi in the fact that almost all of his works are out of print.

In spite of this evaluation of Ekwensi, his figure as a writer deserves recuperation, as does the project of his work, and his approach to fulfilling this objective. I am interested in what Ekwensi stood for in the supposed battle for the literary canon, especially in regard to what an equivalent of his figure would be in the 21st century. Investments in Ekwensi-esque literary figures might very well be the way forward for African literature today. He is a professional writer, writing the kind of stories his local audience relates to and consumes en masse. One is moved to ask what authors who are working along the same vein, principles, and brand that he stood for would look like today? There is ample room in Ekwensi's work for recuperating a divergent trajectory for African literary tradition that would hopefully enrich what we perceive and understand as African literature today. His work has often been read as invested in the everyday events of urban life in Nigeria. In many ways, they neither revel in the exoticism that Tutuola's early works stood for, nor are they particularly invested in the intellectual translation and defense of the African "tribal" society as some of Achebe's early work were. He writes, for the most part, about city life in Lagos, the everyday topics and sites that his primarily Nigerian

(local) readership can identify with and understand. There is a sense that his audience share a common lexicon for articulating the feelings, phenomenon, and ultimately, the stories depicted in his work. Where might an Ekwensi-esque figure be located in 21st century African literary production? In his examination of texts that court multiple publics, Suhr-Sytsma claims,

> Rather than soyayya novellas, on the one hand, or the Booker Prize-winning fiction of Martel or Okri, on the other, Ekwensi's English-language fiction, poised between 'popular' and 'literary', pedagogical without being anxious about contemporary reading habits, published and read both locally and internationally, may be a more accurate double for the multifocal fiction of Ibrahim. (351)

Suhr-Sytsma essentially sees Abubakar Adam Ibrahim as a present-day model of what Ekwensi stood for. His work is neither exclusively extroverted nor introverted. It is not explicitly courting a global audience, but it is instead courting multiple publics, beginning with and grounded in the local. It does not achieve the same degree of global visibility as Adichie or Cole, or Achebe in the past. It is not claiming expertise, and read alongside with the authorial paratexts, it does not create a charismatic image, that relies both on the charismatic ideology of literary production, and the charismatic authority of the expert and public intellectual.

Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe

Compared to Tutuola and Achebe, Ekwensi's fiction emerges as a possible site for projecting a more formally diverse and recognizable future of African literatures. Tutuola lent himself to a particular (mis)reading of what the African writer should be: exotic, and often incomprehensible. Meanwhile, Achebe's works lean into a different idea of what the African writer should be—comprehensible, working to translate and defend African cultures. Ekwensi

operates on an entirely different plane. His personal image as a writer was not nearly as significant as the others'. In fact, the most frequently referenced aspect of his personal biography has to do with how many different careers he had over the course of his life. His works were produced for consumption by the Nigerian masses and school pupils. He was insistent on this audience. His image and his oeuvre are not in the running for consecration by the higher institutions of academia. He is not necessarily invested in making any grand statements on hegemonic concerns, or the state of globally relevant affairs. Instead, the concerns of his works have the textures of more locally relevant phenomena. Even in biographical accounts of Ekwensi's approach to his art, there are hardly any records of him attempting to establish his expertise on social matters, nor records of him engaging the institutions of higher education in any hermeneutic interventions into his work. He is almost always presented as a professional writer of popular fiction, somewhat akin to West African market literature but less ephemeral. The African Writers' Series comes closest to branding him with some measure of expertise, tagging his works with this pronouncement: "A novel by the outstanding chronicler of Nigerian City Life." He wrote a lot, according to what some critics have described as a formula. His works are not particularly vocal on emergent sociopolitical issues, he's not particularly exotic, he is not really laying claim to any kind of expertise, except that granted him by the AWS in their promotion of his work. Ekwensi's stories can be taken as just that – stories, "chronicles" if you will – because he does not seem interested in making them say or mean a whole host of things about Nigeria and the continent.

Using texts by Ekwensi and Achebe as the poles of my comparison, I am interested in elucidating those often-elusive factors that constitute charisma in the global economy of symbolic, political, and cultural capital. What features, in a text, make for proof of an author's

marketable charisma? I will offer an analysis of two novels by Ekwensi and Achebe, set in the same period of Nigeria's history, when the nation is coming to terms with the concept and subsequent condition of independence. Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) is the second text in what has been called his trilogy—after *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and before *Arrow of God* (1964). In it, Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Achebe's previous protagonist (Okonkwo) finds himself back in Nigeria after he completes his studies in England. As he is living and working in a nation on the cusp of independence, he finds himself inadequately prepared to deal with the new realities of the nation's social and political condition. Meanwhile Ekwensi's *Iska* (a Hausa word that means "wind"), follows a young woman, Filia Enu, from her last days as a secondary school student in Kaduna. It traces her movement across the country, while highlighting and exploring the relationships and desires that populate her life and pull her from the northern cities of Kaduna and Jos, to her eastern ancestral village, Ogabu, and eventually to the bustling city of Lagos in the west. Ekwensi's *Iska,* published in 1963 and Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* published in 1960 have a few similarities in plot, including a protagonist that moves to Lagos whose romantic relationship(s) serve as a major defining feature of the novel's plot. The similarities across these novels allow one to pay attention to the textures of each novel's approach to elaborating on the mood of the new nation—Nigeria—through the plight of the characters, and the interventions (or lack thereof) of a third person omniscient narrator.

In *No Longer at Ease*, the main characters often offer codes for understanding the larger implications and origins of people's beliefs and social behaviors. The narrator exposes the narrative processes of mythmaking at work in the way the people of the nation frame themselves as citizens of the world at large, and the ways in which their behaviors are impacted by this

framing. For instance, readers discover that Obi Okonkwo got his first and strongest impressions of Lagos from a former WWII soldier who says to him as a child,

> There is no darkness there, …because at night the electric shines like the sun, and people are always walking about, that is, those who want to walk. If you don't want to walk you only have to wave your hand and a pleasure car stops for you." The soldier then goes on, unsolicited, to add: "If you see a white man, take off your hat for him. The only thing he cannot do is mould a human being. (162)

In narrating this retrospective anecdote at a point in the novel where we are still getting to know the main character, the novel reveals several things about itself. It is important to note that these myths about Lagos come from someone who is not only an elder in his community, but also revered since his return from the white man's war. This draws attention to the fact that he is now a veteran of the colonizer's war, into which he was almost certainly conscripted involuntarily. The injustice of this reality is further heightened by the skewed myths he adapts and disseminates about both the colonial metropolis and the colonizers themselves. This anecdote and the choice of narrator uncover the process of narrative mythologization that has maintained certain parameters for the racial relations between the white colonizer and the black African. It also does the work of revealing how a city like Lagos comes to be mythologized and takes on an imagined identity larger and sharper than its hazy and disorienting reality. Tying the city's fantastical image, where "electric shines like the sun" and anyone can get a ride in a pleasure car if they so wish, to the myth of the white man's godlike abilities encodes the superiority of both the built city of Lagos and the white man who is responsible for that creation. However, this obvious exaggeration, which is shortly revealed to be false and misguided, works to show the reader a sort of genealogy of popular beliefs that in some ways perpetrate the locals' skewed

view of their nation and its conquerors. Throughout the novel, Achebe's narrator continues to do this work of both describing and translating the peoples and cities of Nigeria:

> Obi, newly returned from England, stood beside his car at night in one of the less formidable of Lagos slum areas waiting for Clara to take yards of material to her seamstress, his mind went over his earlier impressions of the city. He had not thought places like this stood side by side with the cars, electric lights, and brightly dressed girls. His car was parked close to a wide-open storm drain from which came a very strong smell of rotting flesh. It was the remains of a dog which had no doubt been run over by a taxi. …one day the driver he had engaged to teach him driving went out of his way to run over one. In shocked amazement Obi asked why he had done it. 'Na good luck,' said the man. 'Dog bring good luck for new car. But duck be different. If you kill duck you go get accident or kill man.' …Here was Lagos, thought Obi, the real Lagos he hadn't imagined existed until now. (164-165)

Here we see Obi confronted with the vast distinction between his mythological metropolis and the "reality" of Lagos. Obi marvels at the strangeness of certain juxtapositions; of wealth and poverty, collective imagination or mythical narratives of the city and the reality (i.e., the "real" and the "imagined" Lagos). In these passages, *No Longer at Ease* shows an awareness of the disjointed relationship between the real and the narrativized. The narrator also proffers the social histories of the city's and the people's present realities - their customs, beliefs, superstitions, and myths. Perhaps more importantly, the novel shows an investment in making that awareness apparent in a pattern of cultural brokering. It does not just represent the city, and the country at large, it both acknowledges the myths and narratives of the city, and highlights the narrative process of that mythologization, even as it ultimately engages in a similar project.

On the other hand, Ekwensi's narrator does not operate on these planes of conscious narration. The narrator takes these "strange" elements of the city for granted, and in fact does not display any marked distance from these beliefs as Obi Okonkwo does through his "shocked amazement." In fact, Ekwensi's narrator seems to play into the prevalent stereotypes and superstitions in ways that are often not directly critical of those beliefs or interested in the implications of how those beliefs came into being. The narration of Ekwensi's novel is more often working to make what would become a piece of popular fiction, to be read and enjoyed by a public located firmly on the outside of tertiary academic institutions and all their systems of consecration and belief in the literary. In this way, his stories do not have the ingredients for the construction of literary charisma. They are not concerned with appearing to possess intellectual curiosity or expertise. The narrator, for instance, takes for granted the idea that Igbo women are typically light skinned (*Iska* 11), a stereotype, which it shows no interest in interrogating. In the same vein, before he takes his own life by walking into the ocean, Piska Dabra, the leader of a cultish religious sect, exhorts his congregation to overcome the plot of the "evil ones" through prayer, in order to prosper. In the same final speech to his congregation, Piska Dabra, speaking in a kind of meditative trance says:

> Doom…awaits you…you all…until…until…you repent…shun greed…live together, not as tribes full of hatred for other tribes…give employment to the qualified…not to the mediocre…let all politicians think first of country…let no one be greater than the party that made him…until prayers return to Africa, until black imperialism becomes black harmonious living, there shall be no peace here in Africa. (*Iska* 153)

These claims about the power of prayer, and the simplistic solutions he offers, are never engaged in any critical manner. There is no indication that the narrator is letting the readers in on a joke.

The narrator does not, in the very least, draw attention to the fact that these moral instructions are coming from a man who was just caught in bed with a married member of his congregation a few pages before. In fact, the rest of the novel seems to confirm that his instructions, when followed, would actually be the key to building a more harmonious and prosperous nation. Filia loses her life as a result of her association with those who have refused to "shun greed" and maintain their integrity. The fall from grace of Filia's former suitor, Nafotim, comes as a result of his attempt to be "greater than the party that made him," and his failure to "think first of country." The politics that prevails throughout the novel and ultimately leads to its unhappy ending is consistently polluted by tribal hatred, mostly pushed forward by those characters who are depicted as lacking in virtue and integrity. Furthermore, Piska Dabra speaks of "evil ones" in a way that plays into the prevalent superstitious beliefs that there are neighbors and relatives out to get one because s/he is prospering and has thus become a threat. The novel seems to take this superstition at face value. For instance, Filia and her mother discuss at length about the death of her father, who loses his life shortly after he moves south to his hometown, Ogabu. Filia becomes convinced that "her father's death was not a natural one," and was in fact wrought through witchcraft. Mr. Enu had built his family and wealth in the north, and Filia "had heard him say jokingly that he would return home only when he was ready to get himself killed; and now it had actually been the case." There is no indication of any distance from these beliefs as the narrator adds: "With his nearness he had his success and independence which had awakened the fury of his enemies. His existence had become a threat" (*Iska* 56). With this statement, the chapter concludes. This structural feature puts a note of finality on the statement, as if to say, this is what it was, and there are no further questions about it. The cause of Mr. Enu's death is never raised again. In fact, when Piska Dabra speaks later in the text of "evil ones," his warning harkens back to this

moment in the story. This connection gives the impression that this idea of being wary of one's supernaturally powerful enemies must be taken at face value. There is no further interrogation of the matter. These characters, and the narrator in *Iska* hold onto and live by the everyday, everyman beliefs. There are no looming ivory towers here. Ekwensi's characters make confident statements, and non-critical value judgements that are more akin to the ordinary man's belief system. Ekwensi's characters, narrator, and *Iska* by extension are not invested in too much critical thinking or rhetorical and theoretical dissection. On the other hand, Achebe works with the kind of characters who "[theorize] about bribery in Nigeria's public life" (*No Longer at Ease* 167). Even when dealing with the everyman on the street, the tower of critical expertise looms: the narrator draws attention to their ignorance in a way that still illuminates the history of some element of social life in the nation. Thus, the interest of a global audience is retained.

No Longer at Ease continues in a pattern akin to a kind of cultural brokering, in which the narrator explains Nigeria's social history in the face of colonization. Within this pattern, there is a definite trend to not only recognize social histories, but also dissect them, and attribute certain present realities to the colonial history. The novel produces these explanations using little everyday behaviors and beliefs that its Nigerian audience might take for granted, such as how the characters eat pounded yam, and why: "They were eating pounded yams with their fingers. The second generation of educated Nigerians had gone back to eating pounded yams or garri with their fingers for the good reason that it tasted better that way. Also, for the even better reason that they were not as scared as the first generation of being called uncivilized" (168). In a similar vein, Achebe's narrator also offers a social translation of the Nigerian government and the public view of national politics: "In Nigeria the government was 'they'. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people's business was to get as much from it as they

could without getting into trouble" (*No Longer at Ease* 178). This culture of a lack of ownership, seeing the government as "they" passes into a similar kind of attitude once the nation gains independence. Since colonization operates in a tradition of domination whereby there is no accountability to the people being governed, that lack of accountability or responsibility to the people passes on to the newly independent nation ruled by indigenes. K. W. J. Post, in his 1967 introduction to Achebe's *Man of the People* says as much:

> Achebe shows how the Europeans, though no longer central to his story, are essential to it. They it was who, as former masters, controlled the political system and excluded Africans from it. It was this political and economic frustration which bred the nationalist movement and the demand for independence. Then, as political power did begin to be handed over to African political leaders… Politics became a sort of business, a way of remedying all the frustrations of the colonial period. (Post ix)

In *Man of the People*, a novel which precedes and predicts the first coup d'état in Nigeria, Achebe examines the conditions of the national politics of a fictional post-independence West African country, which greatly resembles Nigeria. As Post points out above, the story of a quickly deteriorating politics, fueled by greed, is not just a reality emerging from problems indigenous to the nation (inter-ethnic tensions, for example). It is, in fact, a direct legacy of the system instituted through colonization in which that form of domination took root and thrived. This same social course is one that Achebe also traces in *No Longer at Ease*. The central conflict of the novel—Obi Okonkwo's bribery case—is constructed to unveil the inevitable trajectory, once one takes the colonial system as the starting point. The novel begins with the judge handing down his verdict on Obi's case, and the rest of the text returns to tell the story of how he ended up in that present. Even the structure of the text does the same work Achebe's novels tend to

accomplish, which is to explain the Nigerian present by illuminating the colonial past. This mission, of telling the African's side of the story—of imperialism and colonization—is certainly important, and rightly has its place in postcolonial and African literary scholarship.

In Ekwensi's novels however, there seems to be greater value placed in enriching the plot, and much less emphasis on explaining and illuminating the social and political life of Nigeria. The central questions for the plot seem to be: is it riveting? Will it be engaging for his audience? These seems to be the primary preoccupations that would produce novels like *Iska* or *People of the City*. As a result of these considerations, we get the indulgence of prevalent stereotypes and superstitions, the novels feature several unearned plot twists and developments that seem to come out of nowhere. Whenever the story seems to stall, a new twist is introduced. For instance, Filia suddenly decides that her greatest ambition is to be a famous model and actress, and that drives the plot forward in a different direction. Also, although she had been reproachful towards her friend, Remi, for "sleeping around", Filia is suddenly seen attempting to seduce her boss, Gadson, and even getting upset when he wouldn't give in (*Iska* 122). We then suddenly find out that she happens to be an Ogbanje[22], and this supposedly explains both her earlier near-death illness and the swiftness of her impending death (*Iska* 136). These strategies of building a complicated and riveting plot seem to operate in the service of creating popular fiction for a local, everyman audience and it does not matter as much whether this is achieved with sophistication.

Whatever the perceived failings of Ekwensi's novel(s), there is an evident habit of zeroing in on the characters and spaces for what they are within the context of the plot diegesis. If there is anything unique or distinct about Lagos, for instance, it is that Lagos is vastly busy as

[22] In Igbo cosmology, an Ogbanje is an evil or trickster spirit that manifests as a child who is born over and over again, often dying in childhood each time.

contrasted with other inhabited landscapes in Nigeria. There is very little attempt to understand the uniqueness of a place like Lagos in the context of its global position as the former locus of a British imperial colony, or as a city which is simultaneously cosmopolitan, and located in a developing country. Ekwensi writes about Lagos as one would write about any other bustling city in the world. When Filia moves to Lagos unannounced, the narrator states: "To come to Lagos for the first time alone and by train, to arrive at the Lagos Terminus unmet by anyone … all these factors are not likely to endear anyone to the city. …Filia found the city large, confusing, pretentious, busy, impersonal" (*Iska* 83). Her sister, Jewel, also says of Lagos: "It's growing… Growing too fast - in every way. At first you hate it. But there are people who cannot leave Lagos for one night. They cannot leave the highlife, and the noise, the island club and the races, the ceremonial parades and the sirens, the business meetings and the pretty girls. It's a great place" (*Iska* 84). The features of the city that excite and depress, attract and repel people, are presented simultaneously. Later in the text, reflecting on Filia's state of disillusionment, the narrator elaborates: "This was a place as artificial as plastic dishes, as treacherous as the eroding hillsides of Milikan Hill. This was what they called Lagos: a circus, a cinema show put on by some ambitious ass simply to have pages of history written for him by clowns. A home of bastards…and phony characters all searching for their own identity" (*Iska* 125). It is important to note that Filia's first impression of a "pretentious" and "impersonal" city is not very far removed from this city of clowns and facades. However, for the most part, in *Iska*, Lagos is described in its position relative to the rest of the nation, not as a microcosm of Nigeria per se. Whereas Achebe's narrator seems to present Lagos as a space emblematic of the problems that plague Nigeria as a whole nation, Ekwensi's narrator does not engage the city in the same way. It is a city with a unique character, not because it occupies a space between nation and empire, local

and cosmopolitan, but because it is distinctly populated by a conglomeration of people from vastly differing regions of Nigeria.

In *Iska* particularly, Ekwensi's narrator sets up the city in comparison to other locations in the country whose landscapes have varying characters. The narrator describes Kaduna thus: "Kaduna was still the same capital city. Laid out like a garden, the modern buildings of steel, concrete and glass boasted domes and minarets inherited from the sollo buildings of mud and wood. The wedding of ancient and modern gave the city a specially appealing look" (*Iska* 71). Shortly after this straightforward description, one of the novel's northern characters notes that Lagos is "a terrible place," adding that "Life is more peaceful here in Kaduna. No rush" (76). This comparison of one city or town to the next is not limited to Lagos. When Filia travels to the eastern region for her father's burial, the narrator notes: "Ogabu was green, another world, so very different from Kaduna, Filia could hardly believe she was still in Nigeria. Where Jos was wide open with mountains for horizon and cactus for fencing and cattlemen grazing their herds, Ogabu was cool with a smell of humus and a damp crunch of fallen leaves under the feet" (*Iska* 49). The text shows a variety of landscapes across the country, in a way that mirrors the novel's centering of ethnic diversity. *Iska* further accomplishes this focus on the local through a geographical decentering of Lagos, as the protagonist, Filia, moves from one region to the next. Lagos is not singled out as being more special or more interesting. There is interest in Jos, in which the mountainous mineral-rich landscape is explored alongside the frequent religious riots and pogroms. There is interest in Ogabu, where the dense jungle landscape is explored in tandem with the subject of Igbo art and cultures, and the supernatural. There is also interest in Kaduna, the apparent capital of the northern region of Nigeria, where the atmosphere is calm but volatile. These spaces, alongside the south-western city of Lagos,

represent major regions of Nigeria and the corresponding major ethnic groups: the mixed Middlebelt region, the east of the Igbos, the north of the Hausas, and the west of the Yorubas.

Throughout *Iska*, "Africa" is presented as a vast conglomeration of tribes (Nigeria being a microcosm), with the tribe or ethnic group being the primary source of identity formation. The centering of this viewpoint does not play into the custom of presenting "Africa" as this entity, homogeneously disadvantaged and dominated by extracontinental powers. This is of course the prevalent view of Africa in narratives processed and produced on a global scale. Although there is very strong basis for this viewpoint, it is neither directly acknowledged nor credited for whatever struggles the characters perceive in their national politics and inter-ethnic relations. Whenever the narrators speak of "Africa," one gets the sense that they mean the ethnic groups and nations within that geographical space speaking for themselves and to each other, and not necessarily speaking to the world beyond the continent. For instance, the narrator notes of a newly founded news publication: "Africa could do with many more newspapers" (217). This statement comes about because of the betrayal, and subsequent fallout between three politicians, each from one of the three major ethnic groups, who failed to unite in forming a new strong political party. The context for this statement would suggest that the "Africa" mentioned here is the Africa of ethnic nations speaking to each other, negotiating for a common national vision.

Filia, the titular wind (translated into Hausa as "iska") blowing across the nation, further allows the novel to explore the condition of ethnic diversity, strife, and a tumultuous unity in the national context. Her character as the protagonist also allows the novel to foreground that exploration. Meanwhile, Dapo's European wife, Barbara, could be said to represent this other, global view. Crucially, Barbara's way of reading the nation is deliberately not centered in

the novel. At the very end of *Iska* we finally get a non-African viewpoint. The narrator describes Barbara:

> She was lovable but somehow never quite seemed able to adjust herself to the new morality of Africa. Everything had to be measured against the morality of the Western countries in which, according to her, there was no corruption, no political instability, no absence of a system; in short, a society in which things never went wrong as opposed to Africa where everything that was happening was historic, new and therefore unique. Because of her own inner failure, life in Africa had for her become more and more irksome. What anyone with the flexibility, the sense of adventure, would have regarded as a challenge, she regarded as unrelievedly boring. (*Iska* 221)

Barbara can be read as a foil, not only for Filia's character, but for the novels' own impulse. The fact that she only appears at the very end of the text, speaks to the simultaneous recognition and seeming preclusion of a foreign viewpoint in a novel that has concerned itself with apparently indigenous conflicts. The impulse to measure everything "against the morality of the Western countries" seem to be centrally avoided in *Iska*. Ekwensi instead writes a novel whose characters, conflicts, plots, arcs, and even settings, are portrayed in such a way as to represent national and "tribal" concerns that do not have to prove their relevance beyond the nation (to the global sphere of politics) in order to be valid and worthy of engagement.

In sharp contrast, Achebe's Mr. Green is the European voice and gaze centered: we hear from him within the first two pages of *No Longer at Ease*. In that first appearance, he offers his verdict directly after a judge finds Obi guilty of bribery, stating that "The African is corrupt through and through" (154). After a short scene in which Mr. Green discusses Obi and Africans in general, the novel then moves on to a narrative explanation of the conditions, both historical

and personal, that brought Obi Okonkwo to the court in the first place. However, one can glean a lot about the framing of "Africa" from the decision to structure the novel's plot in this way. The narrator describes Mr. Green thus:

> It was very clear he loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy. He must have come originally with an ideal - to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal headhunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St. George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr. Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear. (235)

Aside from offering a characterization of a minor actor in the actual plot of the novel, this passage does more than reveal Mr. Green's prejudices. More importantly for my reading, it shows Africa's history from the perspective of a European's position relative to the African society. In other words, there is the historical period of missionaries, the period of stern self-righteous educators, and the era of frustrated and heavily prejudiced civil servants[23]. The plot of *No Longer at Ease* is often framed in a way to identify the positioning of Europe and America (or the European and American) in the African society it purports to narrate and represent. Here, "Africa" is framed as being always already on the defense from external powers that threaten to dominate its history. A similar kind of framing takes place when Obi is struggling to manage the financial and personal frustrations that put him in the position to consider taking bribes. He is shown upbraiding the European Ms. Tomlinson after she complains that there are too many

[23] Interestingly, these three periods, align chronologically with the three novels in Achebe's African Trilogy.

public holidays and breaks: “It is not the fault of Nigerians… You devised these soft conditions for yourselves when every European was automatically in the senior service and every African automatically in the junior service. Now that a few of us have been admitted into the senior service, you turn around and blame us” (*No Longer at Ease* 272). Here, one sees not only an acknowledgement of the European presence and positioning in Nigerian history, but perhaps more strikingly, the continuity from historical action to present reality. The characters, and the novel at large, do the work of tracing historical causalities into the present, in a way that credits the foreigners for certain present local realities.

This work is significantly bolstered by Obi Okonkwo’s personal history in conjunction with his role as the novel’s protagonist. In a novel where the main character has the experience of thinking about “Nigeria” from outside the country (from England, no less), charting this historical course often happens from this internationally seasoned viewpoint. The narrator explains: “It was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name to him. That was the first great thing that England did for him” (162). It was from the geographical space of the colonizers that the nation became more than just a name. Given that he was also in England for his education, it follows that it was also from the intellectual and narrativizing viewpoint of these foreign powers that he first began to make sense of Nigeria as one political entity among many. Perhaps, one cog in the machine of the British empire, or one more commonwealth nation. One more society under colonization, and soon to tackle the condition of postcoloniality and “independence.” The elements of Nigerian society that might make its problems and national conflicts unique to that geographical space, such as inter-ethnic relations, are left on the periphery. *No Longer at Ease* frames national politics in a way that emphasizes the historical trajectory from colonial domination. The question of tribalism only comes up in minor

scenes that are not central to the novel's plot, and this reverses the trend in *Iska*. Obi Okonkwo recounts a confrontation with a policeman who assumed his fiancé was in fact a prostitute he had just picked up: "'Where you pick am?' I couldn't stand that, so I blew up. Clara told me in Igbo to call the driver and go away. The policeman immediately changed. He was Igbo, you see. He said he didn't know we were Igbos. He said many people these days were fond of taking other men's wives to the beach. Just think of that" (*No Longer at Ease* 210). Here, Obi expresses more of his frustrations with the public service systems in Nigeria, making a point about a custom of incompetency or a lack of professionalism. It is particularly important to note that this episode is recounted as a critique of the Nigerian police force, not as a critique of the police officer's tribalism per se.

The central obstacle in the main characters' romantic relationship from both *Iska* and *No Longer at Ease* is attributed to historical conflicts that have distinct origins. In *No Longer at Ease*, the reason Obi is not allowed to marry Clara finds its roots in the opposition between Western Christian beliefs on one hand, and traditional religious beliefs on the other. Obi's people do not want him to marry an osu, in spite of his insistence that such caste systems should have no value to his Christian family. He fails to understand how his parents can be devout Christians and still believe in the supposedly heathen animism of the traditional belief system. When recounting a standoff that occurs after Obi's newly Christian mother had brazenly killed a sacred goat, the narrator explains, "so successful had been the emasculation of the clan by the white man's religion and government that the matter soon [died] down" (*No Longer at Ease* 283). The plot conflict presented through Obi's relationship with Clara ultimately finds its roots in this historical conflict between Western cultures and indigenous ones. The cultural imperialism and

apparent domination of the peoples and their cultures is brought into the present to illuminate its lingering legacies.

Meanwhile, in *Iska* the primary conflict in the relationship between Filia Enu and Dan Kaybi is not directly attributed to any historical conflicts originating or catalyzed by foreign influence. Instead, it is their ethnic identities that fuel the opposition to their union. The primary conflict is again tribal or ethnic identity:

> She knew how it was. She was Ibo, he was Hausa. Between Ibo and Hausa at that particular time the gulf was wide. Normally the Ibo man worked like a steam engine, multiplied like the guineapig and effervesced with honesty. The Hausa man was tolerant, philosophical, accommodating, believing that whatever would be would be. Both had lived peacefully together for a hundred years. Then came politics - the vulture's foot that spoils the stew. Filia understood very well. (*Iska* 14)

Even the "vulture's foot" that sets off this inter-ethnic animosity is described simply as "politics." In the context of the rest of the novel, "politics" appears to be a particular strain of national politics in which different groups and regions negotiate with one another to navigate the distribution of power and build a unified identity in the process. It is notably not the kind of national politics in which the citizens consciously navigate a newfound "independence," or a new condition of postcoloniality in which the colonial agents and the dominated history loom large. This condition of independence or postcoloniality as a major element of national politics is peripheral in Ekwensi's novels and requires excavation in order to make them evident. Europe and America are so firmly on the periphery in Ekwensi's text that they practically become part of the landscape. We do get one mention of American tourists when the narrator mentions "Peace Corps youths carrying cameras" (*Iska* 37). However, they are present only as part of the

landscape of a busy northern city. We also get a mention of British engineers dying to build railroads on dangerous terrain, in a scene where the railroad trip takes on an ominous quality (*Iska* 49). These engineers take on a spectral dimension in a way that enriches the feeling of danger and suspense. Throughout *Iska*, white men are mentioned in passing at various points: as resource miners, railroad builders, capitalist business partners, educator, missionary, and tourist (*Iska* 53-54). The discourse of imperialism implied in these instances of foreign presence is entirely elided.

Even the title of Achebe's novel, *No Longer at Ease*, alludes to a national condition explored in the story and structure of the text. Being no longer at ease suggests a feeling of being unsettled in the aftermath of some event. In this way, the novel is already positioned to explore a condition in which there is a recent history of trauma. In contrast, *Iska* is about a girl like a wind blowing from one part of the nation to the other, trying to reconcile her ethnic identity with her national one, in an atmosphere that is very much invested in maintaining the divisions she seeks to traverse and transcend, even as the politicians maintain a facade of transcendence through national politics. Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* pits national politics and national identity against the condition of postcoloniality, and the legacies of Western occupation and domination. The explanation of the current state of national politics, for instance, traces the path—a seemingly inevitable, if immoral one—from Africans surviving at a disadvantage under British rulers, to near-independence Africans striving to maintain economic and political power in the new nation. These efforts to maintain economic and political power, apparently recreate the same elitist hierarchy that was established under colonial rule, except it now features Africans on all levels of the strata.

In reading Achebe and Ekwensi's depictions of Lagos alongside one another, it is clear that Achebe's approach lends itself more readily to the construction of an authoritarian charisma valued and affirmed by the Western academic and cultural institutions. It is not that one author is writing for a European audience and the other is writing for a local audience. One cannot make such a clear demarcation, and any suggestion to that effect just would not prove factual. They do, however, write stories that are framed in different ways, so as to make one mode more amenable to a foreign metropolitan audience via the institutions of consecration that sanction certain African literatures as worthy of engagement. In his novels, Achebe does not just say, "here are these people that make for a good story, here is this space in which things happen." Instead, the mode of narrativization in his novels is more akin to saying, "here is this place that exists in the world, here is how it has come to be as it is, and here is how it navigates its way through the world which it has affected and by which it has been affected in turn" – it is practically ethnographic at times. However, Ekwensi, with his dramatic plot twists, sentimental story arcs, and indulgence of superstitions, popular beliefs, and stereotypes appears to write for the story, to feel the demand of his local audience and supply literature that would satisfy in spite of what the global academic and economic institutions see as either commendable or condemnable.

Conclusion

Ekwensi's insistence on his role and status as writer of popular fiction prompts a return to the question, where can we begin to recuperate the agency of African writing and African authorial figures beyond the global neoliberal marketplace? Where can we begin to move the

African author beyond the knowing place of “strategic exoticism” which necessarily involves a self-critical and/or defensive self-awareness of their positioning relative to these loci of power?

The way around this is to invest in cultivating alternative streams of the powers of legitimization and consecration. These powers of consecration and belief in the charismatic ideology of the literary are not exclusive to the global cultural, political, and economic institutions that have traditionally anointed what we regard African literature. To illustrate, Suhr-Sytsma writes about Ibrahim Abubakar’s 2016 novel: "Awarded the lucrative Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2016 for the best novel published over a four-year period, *Season of Crimson Blossoms* is rapidly being consecrated as a novel of significance not only to Hausa society, but to the nation as a whole" (350). Here is a novel, produced (written, published, and marketed) in Nigeria, that has found its recognition and literary consecration largely within that localized context.

This project is not solely concerned with the matter of reconstituting the field of cultural production to narrow in on the locally relevant or indigenous, nor is it advocating for a complete upheaval of a system that rewards the charismatic author’s charm and expertise. Ultimately, the phenomenon of charisma per se is not the key problem in the production of African literature. It is in fact, that the construction and routinization of this authoritarian charisma has historically been determined by loci of power and control that reinforce the historical imbalance of powers created through cultural imperialism, and thus continue to make cultural exchange unequal. The marketing of charisma merely functions as a disguise for this system. Building and recuperating a culture of African publishing is only one way to address a system with many tributaries that envelope the production of literature in Africa. The whole field of cultural production as it relates to African literature must be revaluated. As I have shown, attending to the non-charismatic

author allows us to challenge and hopefully remedy the narrow diet of African stories that get circulated. This may be achieved by reconsidering the intersection of global reception and charismatic authorial paratexts, which work in the service of both the marketplace and the appraisal of literary value. In the next chapters, I will show how an alternative approach to Nigerian literary culture can widen our understanding of various spaces within the nation, when the charisma of a figure or space, or the spectacularity of a narrative is not so overwhelmingly emphasized. The non-charismatic, or less spectacular story, space, or object is often still an integral, and sometimes crucial, part of the cultural landscape of Nigeria.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2012.

-- *The African Trilogy*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.

Brouillette, Sarah. *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Ekwensi, Cyprian. *Iska*. Hutchinson of London, 1966.

Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.

Ibironke, Olabode. 2015. "African Writers Challenge Conventions of Postcolonial Literary History." In *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, edited by Frieda Ekotto, and Kenneth W. Harrow, 29–51. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Julien, Eileen. "The Extroverted African Novel." *The Novel*, edited by Franco Moretti, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 667–700.

-- "The Extroverted African Novel, Revisited: African Novels at Home, in the World." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3, Sept. 2018, pp. 371–81. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*.

Lindfors, Bernth. *Early West African Writers: Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi & Ayi Kwei Armah*. Africa World Press, 2010.

Low, Gail. "The Natural Artist: Publishing Amos Tutuola's 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard' in Postwar Britain." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2006, pp. 15–33.

Post, K.W.J. "Introduction," *A Man of the People: A Novel of Political Unrest in a New Nation.* Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967.

Povey, John F. "Contemporary West African Writing in English." *Books Abroad*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1966, pp. 253–60. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/40120795.

Suhr-Sytsma, Nathan. “The Extroverted African Novel and Literary Publishing in the Twenty-First Century.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3, Sept. 2018, pp. 339–55. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1080/13696815.2017.1400953.

Unwritten City: Abuja in The Nigerian Literary Imagination

When people write or think about Nigeria as a socio-cultural space existing on a global stage, Lagos is very often the synecdoche for discussing the nation's character. What is elided in this often-singular focus, however, is the nuance of local and regional particularities that define Nigerian identity from within an intra-national scale. Were we to take a local, rather than explicitly cosmopolitan and global frame to approach other lived spaces in the country, what might we learn? I propose, in response to this question, an examination of the city of Abuja in particular—Lagos' successor as the federal capital of Nigeria. It is already quite telling that I have begun an essay about Abuja by foregrounding Lagos. This in itself speaks volumes on the peripheral status of Abuja in literary conversations about urban landscapes in Nigeria. It is also a consequence of the seeming lack of interest in writing about Abuja. The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and the city of Abuja within it, are relatively unbuilt in the Nigerian literary imagination. I have named it the "unwritten city" as a way to capture this dearth of invested literary and scholarly studies of the city. Looking to Abuja will illustrate how a smaller scale of spatial relationality permits a viewpoint that recognizes distinct values in each city and town. I am thus taking on the task of demonstrating the distinct spatial and cultural value of an urban space, without creating a mythology of exceptionality that is the very basis for the spatial charisma of a city like Lagos.

To begin a detailed survey of the city's characterization, I offer a brief overview of its history. Abuja is a planned city created to become the new seat of federal government, after it was determined that Lagos had become overburdened with the double role of national and state capital, in addition to being the nation's primary port city. The new Federal Capital Territory was

carved in roughly the center of the country to offer a central and supposedly neutral location—in that it is not located within the territories of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba). In a 1979 master plan commissioned by the federal government, and produced by International Planning Associates (IPA), the city of Abuja was designed to occupy the northeast corner of the FCT, and to cater primarily to federal government administrative duties. In this chapter, I analyze the narrativizations of the city's character by close reading this planning document, alongside literary works that also offer representations of Abuja. Laying this groundwork enables my engagement with a literary geography of the city through the lenses of often brief depictions of Abuja in Teju Cole's *Every day is for the Thief*, Noo Saro-Wiwa's travelogue *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*, and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*. Finally, I will move onto a spatio-cultural analysis of Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*—a novel set entirely in and around the city—to delineate the possibilities for a more nuanced and well-rounded representation of Abuja. In the end, I argue that there is indeed room for a more complex narrativization of the city, when it is properly situated within a regional context. These complexities are difficult to elucidate when Abuja is compared, as it often is, to the hypervisible and charismatic city of Lagos in a broadly national or global cosmopolitan context.

In examining the city's characterization, it is helpful to consider models that have been applied in the study of other cities which share a proximity with Abuja either geographically or through the history of their planning. For instance, Chris Dunton traces a historical progression of the Lagos novel to suggest that there is a greater "emphasis on positive energy—as distinct from high entropy, or disorder" in Lagos novels of the past two decades, as compared to their earlier 1950s and 1960s counterparts. He notes that "what distinguishes the contemporary Lagos

novel from its precursors...is the emphasis placed in the possibilities for cognition and action, and in particular the possibilities inherent in the act of writing (or some other form of expressive activity) as a means to assert meaningful existence" (73). I want to suggest that Abuja too could lay claim to a "meaningful existence" when one writes about it from a perspective that allows for multiple possibilities in its discrete character and recognizes the evolution of this character as more people occupy and make the cityscape. I embolden the necessary "act of writing" by first foregrounding some of the rhetoric arising from the city's master plan in order to offer a rounded history of Abuja's perceived character as a city, as well as the nature and character of the geographical space it occupies. In the analyses that follow, I will demonstrate that reading Abuja in the way that Adichie, Cole, and Saro-Wiwa's depictions attempt to do—as a failed representation of Nigeria and her peoples, is a missed opportunity to tell more complete stories of the rapidly evolving cultural landscape. In contrast, I argue that a representation that accounts for the histories and present of the city accomplishes a much more fruitful engagement with the city's character. Ibrahim's novel, for instance, offers an understanding of Abuja as one locality in a network with other cities and towns, within a region of a nation—all of these discrete spatial entities and scales possessing distinct textures to their character and relative significance. Thus, I delve into the present and dynamic character of the city as it lives with both its histories and its expected future but materializes neither image in its entirety.

Notably, even when it is at all discussed in literary texts, Abuja is usually painted in bland colors. I contend that the city's master plan succeeds in shaping this perception of urban blandness. The 1979 planning document proposes "A New National Capital design as a viable urban environment for the seat of national Government and the full range of supporting and complementary activities" (4). According to this wording at the beginning of *The Master Plan*

for Abuja the New Federal Capital of Nigeria, all other aspects of the city are secondary to its administrative capacities. However, the reality of the city lives above and beyond the exacting design of its planning document. For instance, the master plan proposes "A City designed as an efficient and attractive environment at each stage of growth - both at Phase I, when it will accommodate 150,000 residents, as well as when it must accommodate 1.6 million around the year 2000 and beyond - to an ultimate limit of 3 million" (4). However, more current projections of the city's population and growth are set to far surpass this "limit" (*see table 1*). The city itself is fast overgrowing the allowances made in the master plan and is resisting the stilting power of the document's exactness. However, the document's rhetoric has already proliferated in what few literary representations of the city there are. It has largely infected the narrative traditions and myths associated with the city. The literary texts that deal with Abuja at all often focus on its broad cleanliness and conclude that the city is sentenced to a creative and narrative aridity resulting from the history of its fabrication. But how do literary narratives and other forms of storytelling account for the spillover of people and stories living in, and making the city of Abuja beyond *The Master Plan*? It is possible that in reconfiguring the scale of the city's spatial and cultural relationality, from a global and cosmopolitan scale to the level of intra-national regional identities, Abuja could emerge as a distinct urban space, not plagued with creative aridity, but presenting as narratively arable. This is not to say that Abuja can, or even has to, become a charismatic space like Lagos in order to be valued. It is far more useful to interrogate and destabilize the narrative of aridity that besots the city, and the converse phenomenon of equating a city's charms with its validity, or more precisely, interpreting spatial charisma as spatio-cultural authenticity. To this end, I analyze Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, to illustrate some of the interpretive and representational potential the city can possess when a

narrative of exceptionality is discarded, and it is instead properly situated within a spatial network, specifically the network of the Middle Belt region.

Establishing a Rhetoric: The Abuja Master Plan

To analyze the city's literary characterization, one must begin with the very first document to undertake narrativization of the space that is now Abuja—*The Master Plan for Abuja*. As one of the fastest growing cities in the world, Abuja already exists beyond the manufactured elegance and facade of progress often discerned in its planned infrastructure. However, this stilted view of the city is not without its basis. *The Master Plan,* which exists as a bound volume, was in fact crafted to establish a narrative about the landscape of the FCT as a whole, and Abuja in particular. The fact that this planning document has taken on an almost mythic quality in the social and political life of the city is in part a mark of its success in instilling a sense of orderliness both within the geographical space of the city itself, and in the narrativization of Abuja.

The Master Plan for Abuja precipitated a runaway narrative that saw the landscape of the FCT as a place of stilting plans and stalled national ambitions. At the root of the document's mission was the need to establish a story of accessibility, idealism, and neutrality fastened to the engine of the federal government, and then embodied by a physical landscape. The planning document took a geographical space and overlaid a new aspirational landscape. The afterlives of its narrativization live on in the mythology of the city, because this moment of imagining and proposing a new capital territory has played a major role in forging the discourse about Abuja and the space it occupies. The document is steeped in rhetoric about the symbolism the city must convey, from its geographical location and size to the structures that will populate the landscape.

Before Abuja could exist as a city, it already had a spatial dispersion of power plotted onto the land. The plan pointed out both its centrality to the nation, and the continent at large (*fig. 1*) to cement the fact that the Federal Capital City (FCC) was explicitly designed to "symbolize Nigeria to the world" (79). This map shows how Abuja was touted for its accessibility, in order to be "the new Capital City which is for all the people" (65). The city was always already saddled with the responsibility of representing Nigeria—the giant of Africa—to the continent and subsequently the world.

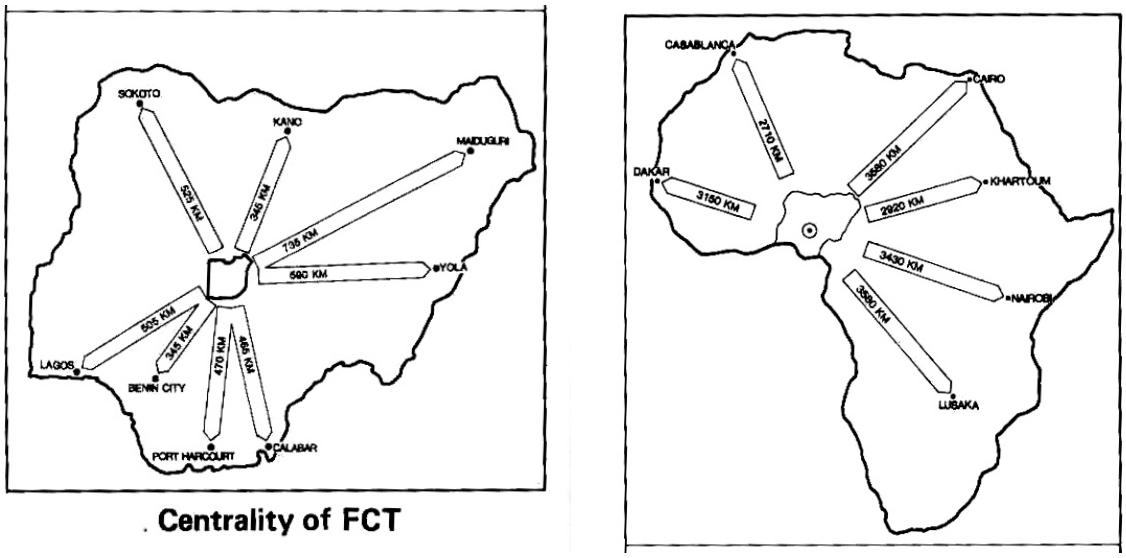

Figure 1: "Centrality of FCT"
(The Master Plan for Abuja: The New Federal Capital of Nigeria 30*).*

The master plan undertakes a number of narrative maneuvers to establish the story of what the city *ought* to be. For instance, in an attempt to embody this rhetoric of being for "all the people" of Nigeria, the planning document takes into account several national goals to be achieved through the city. It outlines ways to bring the ideas of unity, national identity, and the *prestige* of a federal government into materiality through the topography and land use plans. The writers say as much when they declare:

> The location of the Federal Capital Territory and the planned infrastructure improvements will create a context which is the physical embodiment of many of the national goals for unity. It signifies a commitment to equalize physical accessibility to government and provide a balanced development focus for the nation. (30)

To this point, they undertake analyses of the pre-existing features of Nigeria's urbanity by studying a sample of cities from all over the country in an effort to conceptualize an optimized primate city that consolidates traditions from various parts of the nation[24]. In the development guidelines for the Capital City, the planners also state that "The New Federal Capital Territory will be an administrative City and will not be oriented to developing a broad economic base characteristic of other large cities of Nigeria, or that would be typical of a primate city" (*Master Plan* 55). This language implies that the agency of non-governmental entities should be suppressed and managed within the FCT. However, this has not been an easy task in a country where high levels of unemployment drive a majority of the country into entrepreneurship, other modes of informality, and do-it-yourself urbanism. The overall mood in the language of the Master Plan is idealistic.

Therefore, even the choice of a site for the Federal Capital City (FCC) was determined to optimize these national goals and ideals. The initial action of the urban planning committee was to determine the site for the FCC. They used three major parameters to score various sites across the FCT: "Urban Suitability," which took into account to what extent each parcel of land was environmentally suitable for urban development and construction work; "Visual Amenity" then accounted for the general attractiveness of the landscape; and "Man-made Constraints" took

[24]. IPA theorizes that "Since the Federal Capital lies at the geographical confluence of the major zones in which each of the three prototypes occur, the patterns exhibited by each must be considered in the plan for the New Capital" (*Master Plan* 67).

regulatory procedures and infrastructure requirements into consideration. What followed was an intense analysis of the climate, geology, soil, topography, vegetation, and watercourses of the FCT which led to a decision to build the city over a portion of the Gwagwa Plains, and a few kilometers from the border between the FCT and Nasarawa state. At the end of these analyses and scorings, the final site of the FCC was chosen for its size, climate, vegetation, and beauty. The planners explain that "Lying above elevation 1,200 feet, the Gwagwa Plains have fewer days of rainfall, generally lower humidity, and temperatures more moderate than other sections of the Federal Territory. … [it also] offers satisfactory geological and soil conditions with good subsurface conditions for construction and landscaping" (41). This assessment allowed the site to score highly on both the "Urban Suitability" and "Man-made constraints" scales. Finally, in regard to the "Visual Amenity" criterion, the predominantly park savannah vegetations of the landscape produce a "pleasant open but partially shaded environment" (41). In fact, the planners go on to explain, "from an aesthetic point of view the site has exciting visual potential. Its gently rolling terrain penetrated by occasional rounded knolls and outcroppings presents minimum constraints but offers variety and features which can be exploited…the backdrop of low mountains to the north dominated by the Aso Hills presents a dramatic overall setting" (41). These early decisions illustrate that the plan for the FCT began with measured parameters and enumerated goals, which will go on to form the basis of the city's image as a space of mathematical orderliness often interpreted as creative sterility.

The geographical choice of territory was already predicated on equalizing "physical accessibility" to the federal government. It is thus located in a region which *The Master Plan* describes severally as being relatively underdeveloped. Abuja supposedly also brings the symbolic power of the federal government to the underdeveloped Middle Belt. The city's

planning was founded on the idea that "in addition to being the city belonging to all Nigerians, [it] must also provide an exemplary environment for its residents" (v). The word "exemplary" is key in understanding the pervasive and persistent language of *oughtness* that runs throughout the document. It captures the idealism of this city done right for the benefit of "all Nigerians," and from which the image of a prestigious Nigerian federal government can be projected onto the rest of the nation, and even the world. An image of exactitude, and the dreariness of enforced order, thus gets disseminated to the rest of the country from the 1980s, to when Abuja was officially declared the new capital city in 1991, and even today. While the implementation of the plan stalled, due to significant instability in the federal leadership of Nigeria, this story persisted in informing the view of Abuja in the Nigerian imagination.

In conducting a more spatial close reading of the planning document, it is clear that even the natural features of the FCT landscape are co-opted in making this ideal space. For instance, in *figures 2* and *3*, there is a clear effort to translate the topographical features of the Gwagwa plains into exemplary city spaces. The map, "Slopes and Rock Outcrops," illustrates an interpretation from the Nigerian Federal Surveys Topographic Maps depicting the actual terrain of the FCC site. This map shows how the city plan will be integrated with the natural landscape by featuring the lines of the city's axes, guided by natural slopes and rock outcrops. In fact, the planners make use of these topographical features in maintaining the social and political goals for the city's existence. The map in *figure 2* shows that not only does the city grow out from an epicenter at the foot of Aso Hills, but the transit spines are designed to be fenced in by rock outcrops and steep slopes. This would serve to discourage development adjacent to, but outside, the official city boundaries. It is important to note that the natural landscape is of course random, therefore it still features some steep slopes and inconvenient rock outcrops within the spaces

earmarked for the city. However, the way these slopes have been interpreted by the urban planners is more important for the purposes of my analyses. To illustrate, one sketch from *The Master Plan (figure 3)* further demonstrates that there is no coincidence in the decision to nestle the city against a network of topographical hindrances to unplanned development.

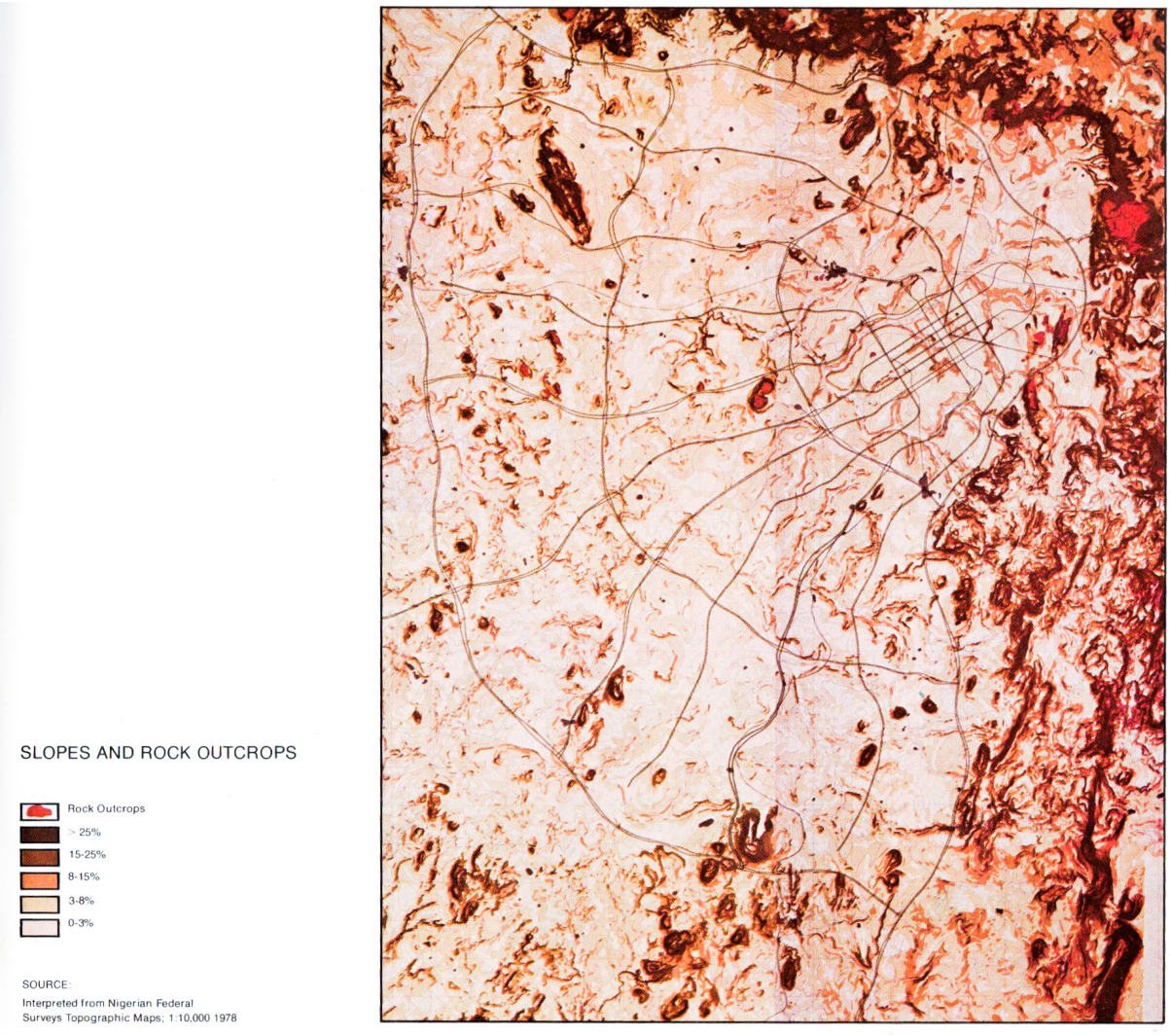

Figure 2: "Slopes and Rock Outcrops" (The Master Plan for Abuja 45).

In a diagram titled "Relation of Plan Form to Landform," it is clear the objective is to utilize the topography of the plains in maintaining the boundedness of the FCC. The diagram demonstrates

how these slopes have been conceptualized as thick and practically impenetrable boundaries to preserve the city's integrity. First, there is the solid-colored circle to represent the Aso Hills—a reference point for where the city begins. Then there are three layers of rough zig-zag lines that encase a much more delicate outline of the city's transit lines and neighborhoods/sectors.

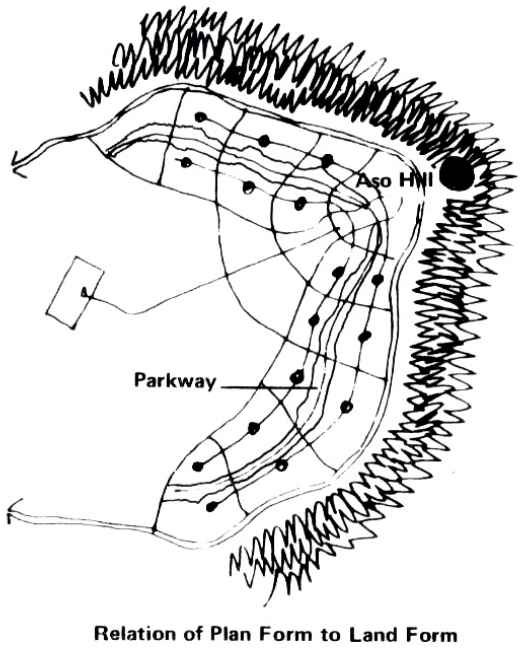

Figure 3: "Relation of Plan Form to Land form" (The Master Plan for Abuja 62).

In this way, the sketch demonstrates the intentionality behind incorporating the plan into the landscape, in part by making the land do some of the narrative work for this imagined Abuja. The naturally occurring slopes of the Gwagwa plains' terrain are absorbed into the plan's goals, to hinder the occurrence of urban development adjacent to the city's official boundaries.

Following years of discursive articulations of oughtness, when Abuja city life really begins to take shape in the 2000s, invoking the master plan becomes a key rhetorical maneuver to exercise power over the landscape, residents, and the very soil of the City. The phrase "in accordance with the Master Plan" becomes very powerful in itself (26). Conjuring the planning document in the process of wielding power also becomes just one more strategic tradition in

preserving the image of an uncorrupted, infallible ideal. The FCC has however had a couple of decades to develop a reputation as an unfinished grand project that stalled seemingly indefinitely.[25] As a result, it has battled with these simultaneous ideas of being an ideal and a failure long before it became a lived urban space. The personality of Abuja is ultimately characterized by this battle, as well as by pull between the government and its wide-reaching political powers on one hand, and the self-making energies of the landscape and the people whose lives populate the FCT on the other hand.[26] One must not discount the rapidly growing population of the city who are not affiliated with the federal government but insist on thriving in the same space, while contending with all the informalities and clashes that come with navigating what we might call a "powerscape" (Pikirayi). *The Master Plan* is a major figure in this powerscape, and perhaps nothing is more emblematic of Abuja's spatial drama than when the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) orders a spate of demolitions of so-called illegal structures in order to restore the will of The Plan. The energy and presence of governmental agents are heavily impressed upon the land and inhabitants of the Capital City. The FCDA's power comes from the planning document itself: "The implementation of the new Federal Capital City and the Federal Capital Territory Regional Plans is a complex, long-term process. To translate these planning documents into built space, FCDA must marshal the necessary financial, natural, technical and managerial resources and organize a carefully orchestrated program of sequential coordinated phases" (24). The afterlife of this exacting language is that the FCDA is empowered to "marshal" power over the capital city for decades to

[25] In spite of the IPA proposals being presented as an accelerated plan designed to meet a relatively short schedule, the capital city ended up being over a decade behind schedule.
[26] The spatial outline of the plan, for instance, is structured to feature the seat of the federal government at the foot of Aso hill, while the rest of the city's development corridors flow outward from that point.

come. It deploys the language of oughtness to its full effect[27]. In this way, it becomes a document used to wield power over the architectural as well as social landscape of the city.

These powerful agents will often purport to enforce *The Master Plan* without acknowledging or addressing some key elements of IPA's proposal that would make it work as it ought. These include, reasonable employment, a robust public transportation system, widespread mixed income neighborhoods, et cetera. In view of the city as it exists presently, it is striking to read descriptions of what it ought to be. For instance, in laying out the commercial sections of the City's central area, it says, "The commercial core of the New City flanks the axis west of the Municipal Administration Center. The axis itself in this commercial area is the primary shopping street of the City lined with elegant shops and commercial establishments. Only service traffic would be permitted on this street. Other convenience commercial is distributed within residential and employment areas"[28] (6). This sets out to limit traffic access to the major commercial street — a plan that might only work in a city with a robust public transportation system. However, in the actual city of Abuja, where hawkers and petty traders are naturally drawn to commercial areas such as this one, one may rightly ask about the mobility of this population of inhabitants. In fact, this elision begins with the language of the Master Plan itself. What about the people who work at these "elegant shops" and will almost certainly not be able to live or even eat in these undoubtedly high-end establishments? They will have to eat somewhere during work hours, and they will have to get transportation into the Central Area from elsewhere. These necessities

[27] The writers also offer this advice, which seems to have gone largely unheeded: "Development of the Federal capital territory is essentially a *federal* enterprise being carried out at the scale of *state and regional* policy… Until alternative administrative arrangements are made, FCDA should continue to exercise its authorized powers in the management, coordination, and regulation or development throughout the Federal Capital Territory" (280-281).

[28]. It is not entirely clear what "employment areas" is supposed to mean. It seems quite clear that anywhere there is an office or multiple residential structures, there will be employment.

already leave room for improvisation and informalities which will deviate from what is expressed in the planning document. On this matter, it explains, "While auto ownership levels are anticipated to be significantly higher in the new Federal Capital than is now observed in Nigerian urban areas, the sector is planned to serve pedestrian and transit travel as a highest priority. It is planned that a large portion of the sector will have low levels of private auto traffic" (14). Although the plan has assumed and proposed a low traffic commercial core, it is immensely dependent on a system of government-funded public transportation that does not have a high rate of success anywhere in Nigeria, as *The Master Plan* itself records. This is where the gaps begin to widen, because such a system still does not exist with any great success anywhere in the country. It is also just one example where the city's conflict with a rhetoric of ideal urbanity is not, and cannot fully be, reconciled with the present personality of the cityscape.

The personality of Abuja is characterized by the pull between the government and its wide-reaching political powers on one hand, and the entrepreneurial, self-making energies of the landscape and the people whose lives populate the FCT on the other hand. There is a federal government that demands to be centered and to dominate the cityscape through infrastructural symbols, and frequent and pervasive flexing of political and economic power. The spatial outline of the plan, for instance, is structured to feature the seat of the federal government at the foot of Aso hill, while the rest of the city's development corridors flow outward from that point.

In the above characteristics, and the overwhelming rhetoric of *ought*, the narrative representation of Abuja as a place of boring sequence and sterile order is somewhat validated. In this way, the language of *The Master Plan* did find some success shaping the narrative in the decades between the document's release in 1979 and the rapid growth of the city beginning in the mid-2000s. Even the idea of ethnic neutrality buried within the language of equal

accessibility, is a crucial narrative maneuver the document makes, and it seems to have taken root as illustrated by the impression visitors get from the city space. This rhetoric of ethnic neutrality, cultural blandness, and spatial exactness become a key aspect of how the city is understood and depicted in the texts I analyze in what follows.

Abuja: The Dullest Place on Earth

The literary texts that deal with Abuja at all often focus on its broad cleanliness and conclude that the city is sentenced to a creative and narrative aridity resulting from the history of its fabrication. The planning document establishes a literary history to frame any depiction of the capital city as a place that is always elsewhere to the hub of culture, action, and creativity. In order to make a case for how Abuja is characterized in the broader national or even global literary scene, I begin with texts by writers who are widely read within and outside Nigeria.[29] The first is Teju Cole's *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007), a novella written almost as a photographic travelogue from the perspective of a fictional unnamed protagonist visiting family in Nigeria. The second is Noo Saro-Wiwa's 2012 travelogue *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria.* While both Teju Cole's narrator and Noo Saro-Wiwa offer insightful analysis of the city, one must be careful not to lean too heavily on the image of Abuja in their texts, in order to avoid falling into the danger of a singular story, particularly one that foregrounds the perspective of the tourist or visitor in the way that Saro-Wiwa and Cole's texts do. Fulfilling her role as a travel writer, Saro-Wiwa takes on the view of a surveyor as she profiles Nigerian cities in *Looking for Transwonderland.* Distinct from the more interiorized and contemplative narrator of Cole's novel, she makes a conscious effort to explore areas of possible interest in each city,

[29] A side effect of the warped metrics of success in the field of African literary production is that these happen to be texts produced by writers who have not lived in the city or even the region, even though their voices reach the widest audience.

always with her reader and potential tourist in mind. Cole's unnamed protagonist in *Everyday is for the Thief* is also in many ways a tourist in his country. One other thing these portraits have in common is that their depictions of Abuja take place largely from indoor spaces, or in moving vehicles in such a way as to affirm the notion of the city's fabrication.

In her travelogue, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*, Noo Saro-Wiwa narrates her earliest visit to the city in the late 1980s:

> I first visited Abuja in 1988. My father, in the city on business, deposited us in a hotel, and ordered us to write essays about Abuja while he was at work. Idle hands were the devil's hands, he said. But how could I describe emptiness? I managed 300 words of half-hearted gibberish about the numerous construction cranes and the mosque's shiny golden dome, which sparkled in the vista from our hotel window. But that was it. I couldn't articulate the sense of inauthenticity and fabrication, the 1970s architecture, the blandness of the street names plucked by town planners from an encyclopaedia and inspired by every African leader, capital city or river in the world. (110)

Almost two decades after her first visit to Abuja, while visiting the city, a friend of hers declares that "the city had no soul, no organic flavour." Saro-Wiwa agrees, writing, "I could see what she meant. Abuja's fundamental character hadn't changed in the eighteen years since I was last here, when it was nothing but a network of empty highways and big hotels pleading for humanity to breathe life into them" (111). However, perhaps most importantly is the through line she draws from the act of the city's inception as a center of unity and ethnic neutrality to the sense of falseness and fabrication she infers from the space. She writes,

> In the late 1970s, the government anointed it as the new capital city, stripping this status from the incorrigible, Yoruba-dominated Lagos, and moving it to a central region not

> overrun by any of our three biggest ethnic groups. And so today the local cars' number plates carry the motto 'Centre of Unity', which describes Abuja perfectly, since the city seems to have united Nigerians in the view that it's the dullest place on earth. (111)

Striking as her description is, this portrait of the city seems too heavily invested in the image of the space as a planned city, not possessing its own organic character, and simultaneously masquerading barely veiled political motivations.

The geo-spatial reading of *The Master Plan* highlights the rhetorical environment in which Teju Cole and Noo Saro-Wiwa's texts were produced. These texts are primarily concerned with the creative energy of the cities, or lack thereof. When Cole writes about Lagos for instance, there is a clear celebration of the city's distinct character and the density of narratives available throughout the space. Throughout the novella, Cole's protagonist expresses fascination with innumerable narratives, and lingering stories floating around in Lagos along with the chaos and *pungency* of its brand of urbanity. This density of narratives is attributed in part to the human population density, but also more crucially, to the longer history of Lagos as a city which has witnessed the nation's history—pre-amalgamation, under colonial rule, post-colonization, during the civil war, and under military regimes—from its unique positioning as both port city and national capital. Cole writes, "It [Lagos] is pandemonium, but a completely normal kind... It is an appalling way to conduct a society, yes, but I suddenly feel a vague pity for all those writers who have to ply their trade from sleepy American suburbs, writing divorce scenes symbolized by the very slow washing of dishes…No such aridity here" (65-6). The narrator admits that what he observes to be "appalling" about Lagos is also a key element that makes it a space of intense creative energy. It is important to note that this comment on the city of Lagos comes after the protagonist observes a number of street fights and road accidents. Already, the excitement that

defines Lagos' charm, from this metropolitan perspective, requires a certain degree of chaos and cacophony expected of specifically postcolonial urbanity. The city is extolled for its richness in the natural resources from which fascinating stories can be harvested. Lagos also has "sleepy suburbs," but those are not featured here. They do not possess this much celebrated texture of charismatic urbanity. It is the exoticism of its cultural pungency and the visible, even intrusive, pandemonium that imbues Lagos with its particularly postcolonial urban charm.

In sharp contrast however, the same aridity Cole assigns to American suburbs could be said to exist in the Abuja he describes. At the time *Every day is for the Thief* was first published in 2007, Abuja did not have a population density even remotely similar to Lagos'. It is also, in view of Nigeria's national history, a very young city. However, as evident in Noo Saro-Wiwa's 2012 travelogue and even a snapshot of the city in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel, *Americanah*, this portrayal largely endures.

Taking a brief look at Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah,* allows us the opportunity to see not only how Abuja is compared with Lagos, but how the parameters for a favorable city character shift when a postcolonial African nation is involved. When we compare Adichie's portrait of Abuja to her depiction of several American cities, we can observe that the very qualities for which the narrator admires certain American cities are similar to the qualities the novel derides in its portrayal of Abuja. *Americanah* begins with an olfactory portrait of several American cities, and in fact throughout the book, there is a persistent suggestion that each city possesses a unique scent. In the very first lines of the novel, the narrator lays this groundwork:

> Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops, and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of a smell that most

> appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had all smelled distinctly. Philadelphia had the musty scent of history. New Haven smelled of neglect. Baltimore smelled of brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell. She liked taking deep breaths here. (Adichie 3)

The clean odorless streets of Princeton, the nothingness of its olfactory portrait, compare favorably to the musty, briney, and garbage smell of other American cities. "Overpriced shops" in Princeton are qualified as "delicate," and the grace of its quiet cleanliness is "earned." There is a sense that Princeton is the yardstick for a well-mannered American city. The show of wealth Ifemelu likes to watch in "the locals [in Princeton] who drove with pointed courtesy and parked their latest-model cars outside the organic grocery store on Nassau street," somehow does not generate the same sentiments on encountering similar shows of wealth in Nigeria (Adichie 3). In Nigeria, showiness of this kind is interpreted as unearned pretensions. This suggests that to be a Nigerian City, is to be something other than well-mannered, or orderly.

In the same tradition as both Cole and Saro-Wiwa's depiction of Lagos, Adichie presents a city alive in the chaos of its spontaneity, made to stand as an essentialized portrait of Nigeria and in contrast with Abuja. In *Americanah*, the protagonist's appreciation for Lagos lies mainly in its scattered and intimidating intricacies. The narrator declares that on her return to the country, Lagos "assaulted" Ifemelu. In Lagos "Commerce thrummed too defiantly. And the air is dense with exaggeration, conversations full of overprotestations"; in Lagos, Ifemelu "felt anything could happen...and so she had the dizzying sensation of falling" (385). The city's character is clear in its "defiance" and loudness, as it thrives both in spite and because of its excesses. The narrator continues to capture Ifemelu's impression of Lagos as she looks out the window on her way from the airport, "thinking how unpretty Lagos was, roads infested with

potholes, houses springing up unplanned like weeds. Of her jumble of feelings, she recognized only confusion" (386). Yet, she comes to appreciate this "unplanned" confusion as she parses out the merits of the city's character in a new blog titled "The Small Redemptions of Lagos." In one blog post, she writes "Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Lagos has always been undisputably itself" (421). Lagos' character of self-assurance and even defiance is thus well established across all three texts. In comparison to this robust recognition of what the city Lagos has been and currently is, there is a disproportionate lack of appreciation for Abuja's potential to possess a unique and interesting character. Lagos is made exceptional in narrative, so cities like Abuja fade away in comparison.

These narratives share a number of similarities in the way they characterize Abuja. They all feature noticeably brief sections in the city. These sections are all overshadowed by the profusion of meditations on other cities, against which Abuja's already brief allotment dims. The Abuja scenes also often take place indoors. There are the bowling alley and Thai restaurant in *Everyday is for the Thief,* a hotel lobby and bar in *Americanah* and the home and office of Ken Wiwa in *Looking for Transwonderland.* Although Noo Saro-Wiwa takes a trip to an outdoor amusement park, it is not until she decides to respond to classified ads in the newspaper, that she begins to have fun that she does not feel is fabricated, or more fitting of a different kind of city.[30] Without the potential for spontaneity that could result from an outdoor space populated by people, the point these episodes seem to make is that Abuja is very often a city of inorganic

[30] Even though Saro-Wiwa finds some outdoor excitement among a group of people gathered at the base of Zuma rock, it is important to point out that this notable monolith is technically located in Suleja, a town in Niger State. In the IPA *Master Plan for Abuja,* the planners clarify that "the name of the existing town of Abuja in Niger State will be changed to Suleja in order to avoid confusion with the name of the new Federal Capital City" (v). Instead, when describing the present city of Abuja, Saro-Wiwa writes that "The government had also introduced zero-tolerance planning laws, which it exercised ruthlessly, demolishing any buildings that fell foul of the Land Use Act. This…bestowed Abuja's uncluttered streets with an eerie and thoroughly un-Nigerian serenity. Pleasant as the effect was, it seemed a shame that the city could only achieve its orderliness by stripping itself of everyday Nigerian life" (Saro-Wiwa 126).

excitements—fun and creativity has to be consciously manufactured here. These depictions of Abuja engage in a narrative tradition of equating a city's charms with its validity, or more precisely, interpreting spatial charisma as spatio-cultural authenticity. In fact, Saro-Wiwa even writes that Abuja possesses a "thoroughly un-Nigerian serenity" (126). Abuja is thus labelled in terms that imply cultural and creative sterility while reinforcing the exceptionality of Lagos' urban charisma. Lagos then continues to be a synecdoche for Nigeria itself, erasing so much else.

This indictment of the city has its roots in the history of the city as a project conceptualized by the Nigerian federal government to build an image of economic progress and inter-ethnic unity. This is made abundantly clear in both Cole's novella and Saro-Wiwa's travelogue*,* both of which suggest that Abuja represents a premature materialization of an ideological future Nigeria is yet to achieve. Their summations of the city's character are encapsulated in Saro-Wiwa's concept of a "transwonderland" which starts out merely as the name of an amusement park in Ibadan but takes on a more ideological meaning throughout the book. Transwonderland Amusement Park was commissioned by Maryam Babangida, the wife of one of Nigeria's most brazenly corrupt heads of state. Rather than provide solutions to end rampant hunger and poverty in the country, the office of the first lady invested in this (now rundown) theme park as an image-driven response to the complex troubles of suffering children—*to make a show of prosperity*. Noo Saro-Wiwa cleverly invokes this history and makes "Transwonderland" a shorthand for those infrastructures put in place by the government as a facade of progress. She goes on to present Abuja, the relatively new capital city with its sense of "inauthenticity and fabrication" (110), as a Transwonderland: an aspirational facade aiming materially at an idea that Nigeria may never attain politically or ideologically.[31] The government

[31] Similarly, Cole's protagonist explores an often-heard phrase—"*idea l'a need*." He explains, "it means 'all we need is the general idea or concept'" (137). One of the protagonist's experiences with *idea l'a need* is

is accused of being content with pretense rather than actually embracing accountability and progress. While this appraisal of the government is legitimate, it also illustrates a limited view of Abuja. Being largely a critique of the Nigerian federal government and its motives, this judgement of the city's urbanity is not fully attentive to the emergent character of the cityscape, especially when it is considered as a social and historical space that exists both within and beyond the influence of the federal government machinery. Likely an effect of being visitors to the city, characters in these texts seem to conflate the city's urban character with the character of the federal government. Taken together, the brief portraits of Abuja in the literary texts I have mentioned so far, engage most vividly with the political motivations behind its conception and fabrication as the seat of the federal government. However, Abuja needs to be recuperated from this enduring narrative which seems to have sidelined the non-neutral imbrication of the FCT in Nigeria's middle-belt regional and Northern cultural identities, for instance.

A major problem with the verdict of creative aridity Cole and Saro-Wiwa's texts pass on Abuja is that it does not properly account for the fact that such a young city is still actively being made. There is also very little recognition that the landscape, before it became the Federal Capital City, had some specifically regional qualities and populations that would evolve to shape the character of the city in their own way. Beneath Teju Cole and Noo Saro-Wiwa's critiques of Abuja, is an assumption that seems to equate a cosmopolitan ethos with spatial charisma. In *Africa's Narrative Geographies,* Dustin Crowley charts the intersections of geocriticism and postcolonial studies, and one of the key observations he makes is that there is

---

expressed here: "once, driving in town with one of the school drivers, I discover that the latch for the seat belt is broken. Oh, pull it across your chest and seat on the buckle, he says, *idea l'a need.* Safety is not the point. The semblance of safety is what we were after" (137). Both of these concepts show the crux of the critique of Nigeria in general, and the planned capital city in particular. In Cole's terms, the city of Abuja can be said to represent the general idea of progress and national unity without any actual work towards achieving these goals.

> [a] predilection among contemporary critics of African literature to focus on urbanization and cities as spaces enabling more indeterminate and productive identities, free from the strictures of ethnicity and, to an extent, nationality. That certainly has been the take on writers like Farah and Abani, who develop in their urban-based literature a cosmopolitan ethos that questions essentialisms according to clan bloodlines or rigid ethnic tradition. (Crowley 10)

In this trend of assessing narrativized urbanisms through the lens of their cosmopolitan ethos, what gets left behind are the spaces which emphasize other, perhaps more essentializing, aspects of national, ethnic, or regional identity that are nonetheless essential in creating a balance of stories. The overwhelming impulse in discussing Abuja thus seems to either lean into the supposed emptiness or perhaps purposeful elisions of its past before *The Master Plan* or emphasize the failure of the city to achieve the ideal future rhetorically inscribed into the landscape through the planning document.

The most useful way to emerge from the critical rut surrounding the city is threefold. In their discussion of the need to bring together ecocritical and geocritical methods, Robert Tally and Christine Battista argue that "The places of the planet, along with their literary and cultural representations and interpretations, remain within the force-field of a profoundly material production of space, as well as a more-or-less cognizable consumption and distribution of space, for which a criticism—focused on the present, attentive to the past, and attuned to a possible future—is necessary" (Tally and Battista 7). First, one must be attentive to the past. In Abuja's case this will include both those histories that are inscribed and those that are erased in the narrative of ethnic and thus political neutrality that was overlaid onto the space, in spite of the fact that "Like anywhere else in the world, landscape in sub-Saharan Africa is a place of

memory—a place for the inscription of culturally and politically valuable narratives" (Beardsley 5). Second, a critical engagement with the city should be attuned to as many of its possible futures as can be foreseen. Even before it was physically built, *The Master Plan* made certain allowances for the city to deviate from the plans laid out for its future, as the implementation of the project would be grand and ongoing for decades. It is thus necessary to pay attention to those slippages between past projections and possible future realities. Finally, and perhaps most urgently, is the need to emphasize the emergent currents running throughout the space itself. It is crucial to pay special attention, as Ibrahim's novel does, to characters and stories that populate the city space, and make up the varied demographics actively forging the city's character on a daily basis.

Aside from the need to engage Abuja more critically, it is also important to revisit the character of the city which has grown rapidly since Cole's novel was first released in 2007. In his analysis of what he calls "performative streetscapes," Ato Quayson declares:

> the social idea of space does not remain static but…while propounding and appropriating its local instantiations it also gets progressively transformed first by the communicative character of the local instantiations themselves, and second by the alterations in the overall technology of human interactions enabled by changes in the network of roads, motorways, and other means for the traversal of geographic space. (271)

Abuja is undoubtedly a living and active space, making itself and being made constantly whether through active urban architectural or infrastructural development, or through the inevitable communications between its social, cultural, and political strata and the daily traversal of socio-politically determined geographical borders. There has to be a move away from conducting merely visual analyses of the city, and into more dynamic engagements of its landscapes as both

ecological and social systems teeming with life and space-defining activities. This necessary move saves Abuja from falling into the same dangerously limiting mode of reading African landscapes which Michael Sheridan terms "relic theory" (Sheridan 238). He explains that relic theory involves viewing certain natural and/or cultural sites as being relatively intact remnants of bygone patterns of social organization and cultural meaning. This mode of engaging African landscapes is however based on "static models of both ecology and society" (238). Just as "relic theory" has its essentializing problems, so does the aridity discourse that surrounds Abuja. Both of these ideations imply stasis projected onto a landscape. They do not fully recognize that the value and importance [of a landscape] is not inherent so much as it is relational, and actively lived or cultural, because landscapes are not merely things or backdrops for human interactions; instead, they actively acquire character and evolve in interactive relations with social lives of their inhabitants.

The representation of Abuja in Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms* offers a novelistic example of what Abuja can be when the cityscape is interpreted from within its regional context, as part of a pre-existing spatio-temporal network, rather than as a formally clean slate on which the federal government's dubious ambitions have been inscribed. Before moving on to the implications of *Crimson Blossoms'* representation of the area, it is important to understand the geographical context of the Middle Belt region.

The fact that Abuja is located in the cultural and geographical middle of Nigeria plays a major role in the narrative mythologization of the city as an ethnically neutral, and eventually a narratively arid space. The narratives and ideology surrounding the inception of Nigeria's capital city depended very heavily on a rhetoric whereby the landscape of the FCT is treated as a clean slate on which Nigeria can get things right. But this idea discounts the longer history of this

geographical space, as a part of Nigeria's imagined socio-cultural North on one hand, and a geophysical part of the Middle Belt region on the other. Besides its population demographics, a topographical space like the FCT, with its wide plains, sparse forests and abundant rock outcrops already represents something of the Northern and Middle Belt regions to the average Nigerian. It is located at the "geographical confluence" of the Northern and Southern regions of the country (*Master Plan* 67). The document describes this geographical area in context:

> The geography of Nigeria is characterized by three large plateau areas divided from one another by the troughs of the Niger and Benue Rivers. …The characteristic vegetation of the coastal plain is a dense tropical rainforest. This is replaced by various types of savanna vegetation as the plateau uplands rise from the coastal plain. Moving north, the climate becomes drier until at the north boundary of the country it becomes nearly desert. (*Master Plan* 27)

The physical landscape characteristics overlap with regional identities and cultures. The national terrain begins from swamp lands and rainforests in the Southern parts of the country to varying forms of savannah vegetation, and eventually tapers out into near-desert landscape at the Northern boundaries. In a similar progression, the primarily Christian South meets with a mainly Muslim North in the mixed Middle Belt. Abuja was selected because it lies between the North and South, between Christian and Muslim, and in the ideal climate between rainforest and Desert. The city of Jos in nearby Plateau state is a prime example of the fact that this mixing in the middle is anything but neutral, because the city's history of sporadic and deadly ethno-religious violence demonstrates how this mixing can go swimmingly well at times and catastrophically wrong at other times. However, the mythology of Abuja enabled by *The Master Plan* erroneously interprets this spatial and cultural middling of the FCT landscape as neutrality,

and the emptiness this neutrality implies is in turn interpreted as creative aridity in texts such as Cole's novella and Saro-Wiwa's travelogue, leading to unfair accusations of dullness.

Abuja in its Regional and Intra-national Context

Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms* tells the story of a clandestine affair between a middle-aged Muslim widow, Binta Zubairu and Reza, a drug-dealing gang leader in his twenties. Binta and her nieces have moved to Mararaba, in Nasarawa state, after surviving spates of ethno-religious violence that claimed several family members in the city of Jos. The two characters meet when Reza robs her home, and later regrets the action as they find themselves inexplicably drawn to each other during the robbery. He goes out of his way to make up for the violence of their first meeting. In the course of their encounters, they develop a pseudo-incestual relationship whereby Reza serves as a salve for Binta's pain of losing her first son, and also finds the kind of motherly comfort he was largely denied as a child. This novel was published by Cassava Republic, based in Nigeria, and it won the 2016 Nigeria Prize for Literature shortly after. It also possesses the distinction of being one of very few African novel in English to feature Hausa characters and the Hausa language.

In telling the story of Binta's affair with Reza, the novel presents scenarios that explore the cultural, political and spatial particularities of Abuja. It presents the FCT in its regional context, by showing the ways individual stories can be mapped across the entire Middle Belt region of Nigeria, from Jos to Lafia, to Karu Local Government Area (LGA) in Nasarawa state. Binta's familial relationships provide insight into the traumas and hopes long woven into that region of the country. The character gives us a portrait of life as a middle-aged Muslim widow fleeing the violence of her past both physically and psychologically. At the start of the novel, she

has already physically moved from Jos to Mararaba at the behest of her surviving son who has found success in nearby Abuja. She is also able to attain psychological distance by allowing her affair with Reza to help her recover from the violent loss of her son and the crushing abuses of her late husband. Therefore, in this novel, Abuja is made to signify something beyond the urban articulation of a federal government project. While the novel recognizes the political dramas embedded in the land through the presence and authority of the federal government, there is also a dedicated exploration of the spatio-cultural implications of Abuja as a city for Nigerians of diverse social classes and distinct ethnic groups. We are thus able to witness simultaneously, the domestic scandal erupting in a conservative Muslim community, adjacent to the quiet dissolution of a thriving criminal empire, and then a larger scale political scandal that is much better veiled by the structured spaces of the capital city.

The narrative of Binta's family enables further examination of how this regional identity could permeate the landscapes of Abuja in spite of the neutrality narrative embedded in the master plan and enacted on representational traditions of the space. In examining the events that led to her eventual encounter with Reza—how she came to live in Mararaba, and how Reza came to settle near Abuja as well—we can paint a better picture of Abuja's rich cultural histories as part of the Middle Belt region, but with a particularly Northern flair. The story of how Binta and her family escaped the violence in Jos and found refuge in and around Abuja serves as a symbol of the Middle Belt and Northern regional cultures and identities literally crisscrossing the city. Binta's household in Mararaba is suffused with histories of loss and trauma resulting from the frictions that characterized life in Jos in the new millennium.[32] She lost her husband and first son

[32] In 2001, the city of Jos saw the first of many violent riots motivated by ethno-religious differences. These riots will continue to erupt periodically over the rest of the decade. Binta recounts how she lost her husband on September 7, 2001*:* "Later in the day, they said oh, they've started fighting in town, Muslims and Christians. And I was like, oh *maganan banza!* Such a thing had never happened in Jos, how can people start fighting just

in the city, her daughter lost a husband, and her niece, Faiza, watched her father and brother get slashed down during one of the riots. For her family, different locales within the Middle Belt region work together as a network. Thus, Mararaba became a place of refuge, where they could live calmer lives removed from the unpredictable violence of Jos, and closer to the conducive orderliness of Abuja and the prosperity of Binta's surviving son, Munkaila. Similarly, for Reza, specifically because of its closeness to Abuja, Mararaba serves as a site of refuge and prosperity, where he can build his criminal fortress. By running to this suburb of Abuja, he is able to escape a troubled relationship with his mother and his father's co-wives and exercise his agency freely. The geographical and narrative connectedness of Abuja and surrounding suburbs with the north, or northern cultural identity is undeniable[33]. In spite of the narrative strategies and political motives of the master plan, Abuja is still imagined as part of a distinct regional culture.

Due to the prevalence of Islam and the Hausa language—two hallmarks of Northern Nigerian culture—in the Middle Belt region, the fact that Abuja is not politically categorized as the North does very little to diffuse this ideation of the geographical space[34]. Most people adopt

---

like that? But then it was true, it was the first of many riots. They found his corpse two days later at the Central Mosque among hundreds of others. You know, they collected all the corpses and took them there. He was butchered and his corpse was…torched" (161).

[33] Although Abuja is not technically a part of Northern Nigeria, especially in regard to the nation's geopolitical zones, it is important to note that it serves as a sort of gateway into the north. Noo Saro-Wiwa writes of her preparations to travel to Kano: a part of the country much more firmly located in the North, culturally and geographically. She observes, "I spent my last day in Abuja plotting my journey around Northern Nigeria. I knew little about the Islamic, northern half of the country. Ketiwe had helped me buy a long, flowing djellaba gown that I would wear out there. In Wuse Market we had consulted with some stall owners, five old Muslim men, about whether I needed to wear one. They said I didn't have to wear a djellaba, but if I respected myself and I wanted respect from others, then I should wear one. The north was a very different place, foreign enough to make me feel like a true tourist" (Saro-Wiwa 138). As evident in this passage, the entire region of the Middlebelt works on the whole, as a sort of cultural gradient whereby one can still find Igbos in Benue state, and Yorubas in Kwara and Kogi states, all of which are located in southern ends of the middle region, but as one moves up towards Nasarawa and Plateau states, the populations of minority ethnic groups grow more densely Muslim and the prevalence of Hausa/Fulani as an informal lingua franca proportionately increases.

[34] The six zones are the Northeast, Northwest, Southeast (Igbo), Southwest (Yoruba), South-south (sharing similar boundaries as the Niger-Delta cultural region), and the Middle Belt. It is important to note that these zones were not carved out based entirely on geographic location. Instead states with similar ethnic groups, or common history were grouped into the same zone. This history of the zones is crucial to understanding the

Hausa as the language of trade and communication due largely to the overabundant ethnic diversity and multiplicity that exists in the Middle Belt. In fact, one northern scholar goes as far as defining the "Northern Nigerian Literature" as encoding a "unique ontology—of the cultural and geographical landscape known as northern Nigeria," within which he identifies the Tiv, Igala, and Gbagyi whose ancestral lands are located even further south than the FCT (Nasidi 196). It is necessary to note, however, that the populations of these smaller ethnic groups he bundles into the category of "the North" are often fluent in at least one of the three major Nigerian languages. Although they may adopt some Igbo due to the prevalence of Igbos in commerce all over the nation, a large portion of the population speaks Hausa on a day-to-day basis. As a result, the "geographic imaginary" that envisions the capital city as a part of the North is repeatedly reinforced (Crowley 19). The kind of declaration of cultural reach and dominance—such as the one made by Nasidi—is precisely emblematic of the cultural undercurrents of the region, where mosques and churches alike rapidly sprout up next to each other. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the inevitable and crucial cultural and linguistic crisscrossing that takes place in actively shaping the Middle Belt, and the FCT landscape in particular. Ultimately, in spite of the narrative strategies and political motives of the master plan, Abuja is still imagined as part of a regional culture in which mixing, or middling is inherent. It is envisioned as a part of the Middle Belt region and the geographical as well as cultural entryway into the Northern regions of the nation.

In *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, although the lives of Reza and Binta's family symbolize these cultural and linguistic traversals of the city's landscape, in their stories we find the muted

way in which each of these zones can come to possess a distinct cultural character founded in ethnic and religious identities. They are not the result of an arbitrary organizational instinct for the sake of national politics.

evidence of histories that have lived longer than *The Master Plan*. There is still a strong sense that the Master Plan's forceful narrative of order and image of an urban exemplar permeating the cityscape works to override some of the social peculiarities of the space. Notably, the quiet traumas of Binta's family and the invisible agency of Reza's illicit lifestyle continue to bubble up under Abuja's facade of calm and order as the novel progresses, until they unobtrusively erupt in a climax that still manages to be hushed. Thus, we see a dampening of divergent narratives in the denouement. *Season of Crimson Blossoms* reaches its critical climax when Binta's son, Munkaila, and the rest of her family walk into her compound unannounced, to find Binta in a state of undress and Reza on his way out. Once the narrator describes this scene, the chapter ends and the next one begins three days later. The action of the climax—in which Binta's affair is revealed, and Munkaila gets murdered by Reza who then flees the scene—is narrated in retrospect after Munkaila's burial.[35]

The natural landscape of the FCT has a similarly powerful ordering and quieting force as the structure engendered by *The Master Plan*, and then even mirrored in the telling of this Abuja story. The physical landscape of the FCT area was already predisposed to serenity and sequence

[35] "On the third night, [Binta] got up, picked her way through the sleeping figures in the living room and went out into the night. The yard was doused in moonlight and a pale breeze played with her hijab as she wandered in the yard" (276). She goes ahead to recount to her daughters how Reza had tried to escape, while her son gave chase around the compound:"In the days that followed, the defining moment looped in her head with cinematic precision. The expressions on Munkaila's face played out so vividly, the wild chaotic chase, the sight of Reza speeding away, his footfalls now echoing in the labyrinth of reminiscences, her chaotic screams for them to stop. And the last word her had son uttered, the way he had addressed her: a half growl that had conveyed all the contempt he felt for her" (Abubakar Ibrahim, *Season of Crimson Blossoms* 275). "She remembered the sound of Munkaila falling, a sound befitting a man of his bulk. She could not, however, bring herself to describe how he had looked at her as she and Fa'iza tried to help him up. ... How his last conscious movement had been to push her hands away from him. She had never seen anyone die with so much anger. ... And she wept, there in the silvered night, right where her son had died" (Abubakar Ibrahim, *Season of Crimson Blossoms 277*). All of this action is told in the actual cooling down of the story. Therefore, the climax is tempered by this storytelling structure, and the reader only sees the action in the context of a calm atmosphere and an unperturbed landscape. The exploding chaos of the climax unfurls in the sleepy, quiet night of a mourning household, where the physical location of the murder is a yard that is now "doused in moonlight."

because the area was made up of alluvial plains. The Gwandara plains in nearby Nasarawa state, depicted in Ibrahim's novel, show us a bit of what the Abuja landscape was before the FCC was overlaid onto it. These plains are primarily a space of grazing livestock and shifting cultivation. However, the distance and serenity they provide in their apparent emptiness can also be co-opted to disguise illicit actions. After Reza commits murder, the narrator states that he had "slunk away" to hide out in a shack located in the plains of Gwandara. It is in this serene physical landscape, where a herd of cows were "grazing in the field of wilted grass," and "the sun was setting, casting a reddish glow on the plains" that a friend then recounts the police raid on his home and criminal fortress (279). It is significant that this is the setting in which we get the first account of how the police had stormed his home and killed one member of his crew as a warning. The serene atmosphere of the plains not only helps to conceal a fugitive, but also works to subdue the visibility of violence committed in and around the city.

Ultimately, this illustrates that in order to access some of the most spectacular narratives ongoing in this landscape, one must be plugged into the social and spatial networks in and around the city. It is important to observe that although the Gwagwa plains go on to become a different kind of landscape when Abuja is built over it, it often manages to maintain a serene and smoothly sequential character with the help of *The Master Plan*. For instance, in the wealthier residential neighborhoods of Abuja such as Jabi and Maitama, the seclusion, order and spaciousness of the housing units mimics the sprawl and spaciousness of the alluvial plains, and in fact enables a similar kind of shield. As a direct consequence of its spatial structure and concurrent "emptiness," Jabi becomes a space for Abuja's unsightly dramas to play out unconfronted. The built space of Jabi proves to be as good for hiding as the empty plains of Gwandara. In both Jabi and Gwandara Plains, the sterile look of the landscape (built or not)

belies action and is in fact integral to hiding the undesirable narratives of kidnapping and fugitivity respectively. Well-manicured and sparsely populated spaces like Jabi and Maitama also succeed in distracting from the roaring stream of objectionable stories that diverge from the capital city's narrative of classist idealism and spatial oughtness.

Although Mararaba is not technically a part of the FCT, both the social lives populating the landscape, and physical space of the town have crossed the borders to become one urban aggregate. This is happening in spite of the planners' effort to maintain the boundedness of the city and limit adjacent unplanned settlements. *Season of Crimson Blossoms* accounts for these spatial realities by showing how the lives of characters living in unregulated areas like Mararaba simultaneously manifest the culture of the Middle Belt and Northern regions, and crucially, permeates life in the capital city itself. The novel thus provides a much wider set of references for representations of the cultural idiosyncrasies of Abuja. Its narrative of the city creates a rich portrait that goes beyond its status as a federal government project, a "transwonderland," or a facade to mask executive failures. The depiction of Abuja in the novel provides an understanding of how both the physical terrain of this region, and the cultural context of the Middle Belt, enrich the life and character of the city, and thus challenges the interpretation of creative aridity and sterility it has often been assigned on the basis of its planning.

Conclusion

I return now to one of the central questions of this chapter: how can we make room for cities like Abuja to maintain a distinct character in narrative representations, without being invalidated or entirely eclipsed in comparisons to more charismatic spaces? I have proffered one answer to that question, which is to scale down the frame of spatial relationality, in this instance

from the global, to the intra-national and the regional. Abuja might be an uncharismatic space, doomed to always live in the shadow of more easily loved cities. However, it is not useful to dismiss the cityscape and attribute its relative lack of charisma to the history of its planning. This undercuts the possibilities inherent in the history of the landscape before *The Master Plan,* as well as the present and future of the city as it continues to exist alongside and beyond the consequences of its planning. Acknowledging distinctness without the imbuing exceptionality is a difficult but important balance to achieve when writing about African landscapes and even when appreciating African stories.

The other answer to this central question of how we can make room for less charismatic stories and spaces like Abuja perhaps lies in the need to look beyond the novel for literary representations. The infrastructure of the realist novel traditionally works to capture the politics of a cultural moment of phenomenon through intimate moments. This capturing often involves narrating, mythologizing, dissecting and understanding the significations of this moment to the future of human culture, often at a national scale. However, as long narrative forms that present detailed and often extended ruminations on a moment or phenomenon, the realist novel may not be ideal for capturing the rapid and often ephemeral movement of cultural phenomena. This is particularly important to acknowledge when discussing a city like Abuja which is rapidly growing and transforming in a highly digital age where information and stories are consumed and exchanged at lightning pace. Therefore, there is still more work to be done. It is possible that the novel as a form of narrative is too rigid to effectively capture representations of a city that is growing and changing too rapidly. Perhaps this work is more easily accomplished in looking at other modes of narrative representation that can be topical, owing to their being more adaptable to the accelerated pace of changes to the city's character. These alternative sources of narrative

representations might also work for recuperating the stories and spatial characters of those places that are too obscure or elided outside of their specific regional or local contexts. Films, digital media, and other more fast-paced modes of narrative dissemination and consumption might be better tools for capturing the emergent and locally salient regional attributes that make an unexceptional urban space still discrete and important.

This approach to reading the literature will prove exceptionally useful in attending to those spaces on the African continent which fall towards the middle of a landscape spectrum that sees hyper urban built spaces (such as megacities) on one end, and supposedly untouched or remote wildernesses (deserts, rainforests, savannahs) on the other. The goal of bringing attention to this middle is not to collapse the spectrum through invested narrative mythologization but rather to acknowledge and appreciate the spectrum itself. I have undertaken this challenge by drawing attention instead to a spatial network exemplified by the Middle Belt region, with its peculiar positioning as a geographical and cultural middle. Attending to counternarratives to *The Master Plan*'s politically motivated one, is a fundamental step in liberating the image of the capital city from this enduring narrativization. Attending to the distinctness of the FCT, especially as it is imbricated in its regional context, widens the possibilities for representing Nigeria's vast heterogeneity in literature, and thus producing a balance of stories. I made an outline of the degrees of built landscapes (see *table 2*) in order to conceptualize this spectrum of landscapes. Interestingly, since it is a primate city, I struggled to place Abuja comfortably on one end of this spectrum and to simultaneously explain the rampant dismissal of Abuja's urban personality in literary representations of the city based on this placement. It was here that I realized that there has to be a narrative process of mythologization which will calcify overtime to form the character of a landscape in the literary imagination. This process of mythologization is

essential for a space to fall towards either end of the spectrum. However, the element that is perhaps most crucial is that the narrative mythology must insist that there is something exceptional about the character of the landscape. This exceptionality is what builds spatial charisma. However, when distinct values can be acknowledged and the exceptionality of the charismatic is not always privileged, a more robust image of the co-existing multitudes of national and regional identities can emerge: the regional and local particularities that actually make up a national imaginary can be more fully represented in narrative.

Table 1: FCT and Abuja Population

Year	Abuja City	FCT Urban Conglomeration	Source (C = census, P = projection)
1991	107,069	378,671	National Population Commission, Nigeria (C)
2000	---	833,000	UN Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision (P)
2005	---	1,316,000	UN Urbanization Prospects: 2014 Revision (P)
2006	776,298	1,406,239	National Population Commission, Nigeria (C)
2010	---	1,814,000	UN Urbanization Prospects: 2014 Revision (P)
	---	1,995,000	*Cities of the World* (P)
2025	---	4,043,000	UN Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision (P)
	---	3,361,000	*Cities of the World* (P)
2030	---	4,913,000	UN Urbanization Prospects: 2014 Revision (P)
	---	5,119,000	UN Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision (P)

It is practically impossible to obtain accurate population numbers for Nigeria, especially since all censuses so far have been strongly contested for valid reasons. As a result, even the United Nations (UN) Population Division works mostly with estimates, in addition to the 1991 and 2006 censuses. These projections must always be considered with care, but in spite of that, these numbers suggest that the population of the FCT is increasing at a rapid rate. It is in fact still one of the world's top ten fasted growing cities, and had the highest rate of growth in 2014, according to the United Nations.

Table 2: Taxonomy of Landscapes

Metropolis	The *chief town or city* of a country (occasionally of a province or district), esp. the one which is the seat of government; a capital. In extended use: any large, bustling city. The capital or chief city of a country or region. A large city or conurbation which is a significant economic, political, and cultural center for a country or region, and an important hub for regional or international connections, commerce, and communications. The term is Ancient Greek and means the *"mother city"* of a colony (in the ancient sense), that is, the city which sent out settlers.
Megacity	A *very large city*, typically one with a population of over ten million people.
City	A *large town*. An inhabited place of greater size, population, or importance than a town or village
Town	An urban area that has a name, defined boundaries, and local government, and that is generally *larger than a village and smaller than a city*.
Village	A group of houses and associated buildings, *larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town*, situated in a rural area. A self-contained district or community within a town or city, regarded as having features characteristic of village life.
Hamlet	A small settlement, generally one *smaller than a village*. A group of houses or small village in the country; esp. a village without a church, included in the parish belonging to another village or a town.
Farmland	*Cultivated* land. Land used for farming. Originally, a tract of land held on lease for the purpose of cultivation; in modern use often applied without respect to the nature of the tenure.
Wilderness	A tract or region *uncultivated and uninhabited* by human beings. Wild or uncultivated land

Works Cited

Beardsley, John, editor. *Cultural Landscape Heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016.

Cole, Teju. *Every Day Is for The Thief*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2015.

Crowley, Dustin. *Africa's Narrative Geographies: Charting the Intersections of Geocriticism and Postcolonial Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Ibrahim, Abubakar Adam. *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. Cassava Republic Press, 2017.

Nasidi, Yakubu A. "Literature and Identity in Northern Nigeria." *Literature, History and Identity in Northern Nigeria*, edited by Ismaila A. Tsiga and M. O. Bhadmus, Safari Books Ltd., 2015, pp. 193-206.

Pikirayi, Innocent. "Great Zimbabwe as Power-Scape: How the Past Locates Itself in Contemporary Southern Africa." *Cultural Landscape Heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by John Beardsley, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016, pp. 89-117.

Saro-Wiwa, Noo. *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*. Soft Skull Press, 2012.

Tally, Robert T., and Christine M. Battista, editors. *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism: Overlapping Territories in Environmental and Spatial Literary Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

The Masterplan for Abuja, the New Federal Capital of Nigeria. Federal Capital Development Authority, 1979.

Warri No Dey Carry Last:

Re-reading the Niger Delta as a Site of National Cultural Identity Production

---

The city of Warri, in Delta state Nigeria, has a robust urban identity that is often recognized in Nigerian popular culture for how much it insists on itself. In fact, the saying "Warri no dey carry last" has risen out of that city as an emblem and epitome of this identity and the accompanying attitudes. This pidgin English phrase indicates that the city of Warri and its people can never become pushovers who are left behind while others move forward. The saying captures a belief in the resourcefulness of the Warri urbanite, who will improvise and hustle to ensure that they come out on top. However, a newer version of this same phrase has grown to make it representative of the attitude of the Nigerian population writ large, and the attitudes valued in the informal/enterprising culture of the nation. To examine the implications of this transition, I will consider two moments in 2018 that lay bare some of the power dynamics at play in this act of co-opting a token of Warri identity into a broader national context.

In a statement acknowledging her new post as the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Catriona Laing praised the country by using a nationalized version of this phrase from Warri. In November 2018, the UK in Nigeria twitter account, which shares news and updates from the British High Commission in Nigeria, posted the following: "From the British High Commissioner to Nigeria Catriona Laing: 'I was thrilled when I heard the news of my posting to Nigeria. My predecessor, @PaulArkwright, has told me how fantastic the country is. I can't wait to get started. I know there's a lot to learn, but I'll catch up fast as Naija no dey carry last' @CatrionaLaing1 #WelcomeToNaija" (@UKinNigeria). This use of Nigerian Pidgin English as an entryway into the culture of the Nigerian population, and the concurrent co-opting and

utilization of a token of Niger Delta identity, has become quite commonplace. In her statement, Laing echoes Prince Charles, who only a few weeks before had also used "Naija no dey carry last" at the end of one of his speeches during his visit to Nigeria on a West Africa tour. In fact, he peppered his several speeches with pidgin English in order to appeal to the gathered audience, and the nation at large. Both the Commissioner's statement and the Prince's speeches demonstrate that in order to tap into the informal cultural sphere of the Nigerian population—which I will refer to as Naija—the instinct is to take something that has been grown from this resource-rich region of the nation as a tool for access. This is not to say that the informal national (Naija) culture owes its existence to the Niger Delta. However, it only exemplifies how pervasive it is to borrow and co-opt from the Delta region into the Naija space, without proper acknowledgment of the source/origins of the specific cultural elements or artifacts in question.

During his 2018 West Africa tour, Prince Charles gave several speeches throughout his stay in Nigeria, and the ones that have made the most headlines tend to be the informal ones, in which he made it a point to pepper his speech with Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) phrases. This decision signifies his effort to step briefly away from a formal address from one nation's sovereign government to another, to walk into an informal cultural space from which the country's most admirable qualities seem to germinate. In one of his speeches, he recognized the "challenges regarding youth employment [and]of self-employment," as he discussed the work of his non-profit organization, The Prince's Trust. He then went on to sing praises of "the imaginative and innovative ingenuity demonstrated by young people…who have set up enterprises designed to tackle so many of the environmental challenges we face, whether in terms of all kinds of waste, renewable energy or sustainability in general" (The Prince of Wales). In this particular speech, he made several gestures towards recognizing the strength, tenacity, and

relentless creative fecundity in Nigeria, which are primarily associated with individual enterprise rather than the government's progressiveness. Further along in the speech, he expressed the hope that his Trust can intervene to help the youth in Lagos and "elsewhere in Nigeria" to realize their immense potential, because "As they say out here, if life dey show you pepper my guy, make peppersoup" (The Prince of Wales). Here he is using Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) to speak explicitly about individual enterprise and resourcefulness. He speaks unironically about these topics in this cosmopolitan and charismatic Lagos space, without acknowledging the havoc wreaked in the Niger Delta[36]. Moreover, what is interesting is that in this elision of the Niger Delta narrative, his speech still engaged with the creole born of the region as a bartering tool to enter the space of private enterprise and the country's popular culture.

Both the High Commissioner's statement, and the Prince's Speeches demonstrate how the saying "Naija no dey carry last" has become a shorthand for people to move into the Naija space, and place emphasis is on the popular culture, and the private and informal sectors of Nigeria. It has become a way to recognize the tenacious individual, and cultural agency of the Nigerian populace outside of the often-disappointing government. However, more pertinent to my objective in this chapter is the fact that this particular saying alludes to the original saying "Warri no dey carry last," without recognition of that origin. In fact, the use of NPE in general often has that undercurrent of a Niger Delta context. Coming from a place of authority, such as the podium on which the Prince and former colonial sovereign stands, this lack of recognition thus contributes tremendously to the erasure of Warri's contribution to the richness of the

[36] It is important to note, that even in this speech, Prince Charles speaks of Lagos as an extraordinary city, thus affirming the work of imbuing charisma through the narrative of exceptionality: "In the meantime, I shall remember with such fondness, the warmth of the welcome I have received here, and in particular, the remarkable vibrancy and energy of this extraordinary city." In fact, later on in the speech, he employs Lagos and London as synecdoche for Nigeria and Britain respectively.

nation's popular culture. This is not the fault of the Prince, however, because the fact remains that this shorthand was likely handed to him as an entry into this informal Naija space, precisely because it was already in existence as a shorthand for this kind of recognition. The response he then gets from the audience cements the correctness of this instinct in whoever prepared him for the speech because the audience approves of his effort and basks in his recognition.

The fact that this saying already existed as a shorthand into the informal Naija cultural space means that the erasure of its Niger Delta origins had already begun in intranational discourse surrounding what it means to be Nigerian in this particular way, that is to say, what it means to be a Naija citizen. However, I will endeavor to begin undoing such erasures, and excavate the seeds of informal cultural identity that have been planted by and through the Delta region. In order to do this, I have chosen to engage with the standup comedy industry in Nigeria. This is a space in which these transactions, appropriations, or co-options are most easily traceable. I shall argue that we must recognize the pipeline of comedic and cultural currency from cities in the Delta region (Warri in particular) to Naija, in order to avoid recreating a parallel of the disempowering relationship between the Niger Delta region and Nigeria, in the context of the global oil market. It is true that oil is a far more charismatic subject, the dangers it poses are—in spite of the fact that it still results in what Rob Nixon calls slow violence—more immediate than what's at stake in the standup comedy industry. However, in keeping with Nixon's charge to "engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence," I will be exploring what the enduring trends in Nigeria's stand-up comedy industry can tell us about the Delta region and the agency of its people within a national context (2). I will also interrogate how this other perspective may interact with the prevailing narrative of the Delta region on the global stage.

Narrative Context

The Niger Delta region tends to be narrativized in the context of environmental degradation, oil exploitation, and eco-activism, especially given the enduring global legacy of figures like Ken Saro-Wiwa, who became a martyr for the cause. This is the context that creates the issues this chapter aims to address. What gets lost in this tradition of spatial narrativization is the regional cultural identities that have developed and evolved from these delta spaces. In her 2020 documentary film, *Worrying the Mask: The Politics of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in the Worlds of African Art*, Zina Saro-Wiwa remarks in exasperation:

> But also, I don't want our works reduced to being emblems of political strife. And, I'm tired and depressed at the way cultists and militants hijack the Niger Delta's multifaceted and unique identity. I also note with disappointment when our masks in museums are there as representatives of oil pollution or the oil industry—a well-meaning and important gesture I know, but a reductive one, nonetheless. These masks mean so much more, and there are other far less harrowing and expansive stories to tell. (39:24-39:59)

In keeping with the objective to engage some of these "less harrowing" and more "expansive" stories, the goal in this chapter is to focus on one major urban space in the Niger Delta Region—Warri—and by paying attention to a different mode of narrativization, begin the work of presenting a much better-rounded image of the regional identities and spatial character borne out of the Niger Delta as a cultural region of the nation, not just a geopolitical or ecological zone. Where can we acknowledge and recuperate the idiosyncratic urban cultural identities peculiar to the Delta region? Narrating the cultures of the delta region beyond the stories of crises surrounding militancy, environmental degradation and activism is certainly a good place to start.

Within Nigeria, people from the cultural region are believed to have a strong street-smart identity, characterized by resourcefulness, or at the very least a confident belief in their resourcefulness and skill for self-advocating. The public figures and fictional characters from Warri or Port Harcourt tend to fit different variations of an archetype that can often make them perfect for comedic scenarios. It is important to note, however, that some aspects of this character can also be traced to the same roots that gave rise to militant activism organized to make statements against oil exploitation, and eventually to effect political control. This brash narrative archetype of the Niger Delta character is used in a lot of Nigeria media and it is very recognizable. For instance, Nigerian Pidgin English is something that the character is known to speak most richly and confidently, and this particular feature is most observable in the standup comedy industry. These archetypes of the Niger Delta identity – the Warri (Wafi[37]), Port Harcourt, boy or girl – are essentially variations of the same kind of narrative archetype. They are usually street smart, brash, fearless, always ready to defend what's theirs, experts at speaking the richest versions of Pidgin English to be found anywhere in the country, and ready to always defend themselves. They might be characterized as wily, sharp-witted, perhaps unexposed to the wider world—possessing provincial sensibilities—and proud of it. There is a sort of bravado that is just the essence of what this character represents. Certain aspects of this character archetype are then exported from the Niger Delta to the country at large, to represent part of what Nigerian (more so the informal "Naija") identity is to the world. When this happens, however, it is not often credited to the urban spaces in which it is cultivated and incubated.

The truth is that this narrative trend and archetype did in fact arise out of the delta region, and this origin is important given the history of the Niger Delta supplying Nigeria with oil wealth

[37] Slang term for either the city itself, or a person from there.

and now narrative wealth. There is not enough attention to the reality and the origins of this archetype, and why it works so well in comedies, TV, and memes or memeification of Nigerian identities. In this chapter, I give thoughtful consideration to this other story of the Niger Delta that does not survive much outside the country. This character represents the unabashed agency of the Niger Delta indigene that is not properly captured in the stories of the environmental degradation of their ancestral lands. These prominent stories tend to almost always position them as either helpless, voiceless, disempowered victims, or as noble, militant, or misunderstood activists. This is not to say that they are not put in these positions through the blatant disregard of environmental justice perpetuated by transnational oil corporations in cahoots with the Nigerian government. However, what these narratives elide is the rich history of regional identity and regional strength that the rest of the country recognizes, admires, and often co-opts. Therefore, the threat of disempowerment and erasure once again looms in this cultural field. In what follows, I will explore some of the history and characteristics of this archetype. I will pay particular attention to how it has been utilized in the comedy industry to market accessibility and attract diverse audiences. In this vein, I will explore the commercialization of this Niger Delta identity by examining some of Nigeria's most successful comedians such as Abovi Ugboma (Bovi), Anita Alaire Afoke Asuoha (Real Warri Pikin), Otaghware Onodjayeke (I go save) and Jephthah Bowoto (Akpororo), and their associations with the hugely successful *Night of a Thousand Laughs* shows hosted by Ayo Makun (AY) a comedian, who does not himself claim this delta identity.

Objects of Inquiry

My focus on the Warri character archetype in particular allows access into a story that is very common and salient within Nigerian media but doesn't get properly exported in literature and other kinds of storytelling media that make it into global understandings of what the Niger Delta can signify within a Nigerian cultural context. For this reason, I have chosen not to use literary narratives such as novels or memoirs as my primary objects of inquiry. Close reading a narrative archetype involves looking into prevalent stereotypes, especially as they are peddled and played out in performances on stage and screen. I have decided to focus on the narrativization that takes place within the stand-up comedy industry because this kind of character is more appropriate for comedy and memeification. It is, therefore, not quite suited for the momentous depths of literary novels and short stories which tend to have more serious implications and are thus more likely to present the Niger Delta street character as militant and/or activist. The tradition of mythologizing the delta region through narrative is such that, "In literary scholarship, there has been a proliferation of creative works whose core preoccupation is the living/environmental conditions in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. …the issue of environmental degradation is key and a more worrisome one; it is at the core and a landmark concern with which [sic] literature from the region is known for" (Ohagwam 12). In fact, the focus of these narrative texts is almost always on various crises – "the crisis of environmental despoliation, the crisis of youth restiveness, the crisis of betrayal and the crisis of infrastructural neglect" (Ohagwam 13). We see this play out in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist,* Helon Habila's *Oil on Water,* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow.* Other long form narrative texts that are canonical in studies of the region include Ken Saro-Wiwa's own memoirs and letters, which of course have a necessary socio-ecological justice motivation. In both Ojaide and Habila's novels, it is always clear, even in moments of relative levity and opportunities for comedy, that there is an underlying seriousness just beneath the

surface—the lesson of the text is never really far from each moment. In Ojaide's *The Activist*, for instance, the title of the novel makes already quite clear the primary preoccupation of the narrative, so much so that the main character has no name and the narrator simply calls him "the activist' throughout the novel. This has the effect of making sure that no matter what the main character is doing – whether he is on a date, or lounging with his friends – his very existence, through that moniker, always holds the promise of social reform. These factors illustrate that the structure and history of the African novel predisposes it to deal with social issues or to have serious implications. It is therefore not a conducive form for the affect (humor through comedy) I will explore. Literary texts that engage with the region are much less likely to play up regional stereotypes and engage in the kind of joke-making through which stand-up comedians ply their trade. The Niger delta characters in literary narrative texts do not get to just be proud of who they are; they explicitly use that identity to fight for something, to regain empowerment, or to emphasize a message that is precisely about the nature of the crises they face daily.

In popular media, however, there are often more opportunities to escape from these limited narrative modes. The militant and activist aspect does not get as much resonance in the media that Nigeria consumes en masse—films, TV shows, comedy shows. The comedic potentials of the regional identities and cultures find far more proliferation and appreciation in popular media. While there is clearly ample potential for Niger delta comedy, the novel as a form is not a comedic medium, especially the African realist novel with its history of educating and commenting on heavy topics, and delivering thought-provoking messages. Most novels can reach for a comedic tone or comic relief through black humor, satire, or sarcasm and irony, but would not have the infrastructure to construct a pure and sustained edifice for humor. There is also a lot of the figure/archetype that has to do with situational and physical comedy, because the

Niger Delta figure is often played as very animated and often quite ready and even eager to fight. This aspect is quite visual and will not look too much like comedy on paper but seeing it on screen makes it easier to see how this can elicit laughter in a ready audience. What this means then, is that while literary narratives are definitely important and useful in engaging the political and crises narratives of the Niger Delta, there is at least one other major process of narrative mythologization that is not only ongoing in building the character of the region, but also quite prolific and deserving of scholarly attention. In response to the question why literature on humor and laughter in Africa is rare, one scholar proposes that "in the altogether understandable desire to map Africa's landscape of pain, African sociologists and Africanists have focused on what might be regarded as the stuff of 'hard' politics, leading to…'a social problems-oriented sociology'" (Obadare 244). The popular media which feature the delta narrative archetype tend to sidestep direct engagement with these "hard" social, environmental, and political problems. One could argue that recognizing the inescapable crises that plague the region could force the national audience to consider their responsibilities and accountability to the delta region. This would undercut the implicit focus on what the region can give to the nation and instead would redirect attention to what the nation owes to the region. In his analysis of popular jokes told across Nigeria, Obadare contends that "The jokes are generally meant to encode the socio-political malaise and economic degeneration in the country, which partly explains why many of them are rendered in pidgin, which is generally seen as the language of 'the streets', and thus of the 'powerless' and 'excluded' who 'own' them" (Obadare 259). Unlike Obadare, I am engaging with an industry that has become quite popular and even commercialized, so much so that its use of pidgin is no longer indicative of a class-specific audience. My work also differs in the sense that I will not analyze written jokes. Instead, I will be looking at performances, and doing meta-

analyses of performativity of a particular type of Niger Delta identity, paying particular attention to the processes of narrativizing identity through appropriated stereotypes. I am therefore, not particularly invested in decanting the socio-political critiques encoded, however obscurely, in the jokes these comedians choose to tell on stage. Telling jokes that coerce a sense of responsibility and accountability from a largely mixed national audience is not entirely conducive for entertainment and warrants more serious and educative conversations, such as can be had in discussions of literary narratives based on the region. Ignoring or making light of regional crises in popular media paves the way for individuals from the delta region to lay claim to an empowered image. I will unravel some of this complicated and often imbalanced interdependence later in this chapter.

I have also chosen not to use television shows and/or films in this analysis, although the delta character archetype has appeared in far too many television shows and movies to name exhaustively. There are examples of the Niger Delta (often specifically Warri) character archetype present in shows like *Back to School, The Flatmates, Jenifa's Diary, Call to Bar,* and popular movies such as *30 Days in Atlanta.* However, stand-up comedy acts have an advantage over these other formats for two reasons. First, representations and even appropriations of various versions of the Niger Delta archetype do not dominate the field of Nigerian TV and Cinema (Nollywood) in the same way they do with the stand-up comedy industry. As I will show later, certain key elements of identity and performativity deriving from this character archetype appear to be a major source of the popularity and thus economic viability of the comedy industry. Secondly, television and film are populated by fictional characters, as opposed to actual people on stage performing a version of themselves – appropriating their identity to build humor. It is important to observe that in creating humor and eliciting laughter on stage, "Laughing at

another person's suffering creates an uneasiness for certain viewers, but a balanced mix of drama and comedy can yield powerful laughter and disrupt assumptions about incompatibility. Through their candor and making themselves the butt of their own jokes, many West African stand-up comedians are able to turn suffering into laughable matter…In contrast to self-deprecation, this kind of humor highlights a life philosophy and resistance strategy in the face of adversity" (Sawadogo 44-45). This layer of intentionally creating a tension between drama and comedy on the basis of the performer's chosen identities is one of the major reasons why stand-up comedy is a much sharper entryway for this kind of analysis. Comedy comes in various subgenres: "the actor's performance is critical in each subgenre, but it is pronounced in character-based comedy, in which individuality in itself constitutes the power of attraction and identification. That power is enhanced and takes on a multiplicity of meanings for local audiences when the character is a familiar archetypical figure" (Sawadogo 59). The performers I engage below are not explicitly making a show of playing fictional characters. They are very much playing off the very real possibilities that surround them in everyday life, and they are using that material, in conjunction with their identities, to elicit laughter through humor. In contrast, television shows and movies have an added level of separation that would make it difficult to craft a claim about the role of individual agency in both building and marketing this narrativized identity of the delta character[38].

[38] I should note here that other forms of media like memes or skits by Instagram comedians are also very good representations of what I'm discussing in this chapter. They might in fact be more appropriate to capture the fast and dynamic pace of proliferation of this archetype and the ever-evolving features that make it up. However, they would only work well as an aggregate, and not as individual examples. This is because individual memes and skits are not going to endure in the context of a dissertation analysis. As a result, even the mode of scholarly analysis through academic writing presents its own limitations in engaging the dynamism of popular humor, and the narrative process of mythologization through memeification.

Another form of narrativization where the delta region can and does find representation is in poetry. However, this has mainly become another avenue for exploring the mood of lamentation and protest against the various political and environmental crises that come with being micro-minorities in a resource-rich region of the nation. In her analysis of Nigerian poetry from the Niger Delta region, one critic surmises that,

> [the] scholarly response to the Niger Delta situation has been remarkable but it has also been confined to assessing the social and economic realities that precipitated the collective revolt of the people after the late Ken Saro-Wiwa brought the plight of the Ogoni people to the attention of the international community. But the neglect of the cultural dimension of the crises necessitates exploring the unique contribution of the region to the making of contemporary Nigerian poetry, especially as it sustains a remarkable trans-ethnic literary practice. (Okunoye 1-2)

In this work, Okunoye takes on poetry as an often-neglected aspect of the delta region's contribution to a Nigerian body of work. My work on comedy is taking on a similar project of foregrounding the "cultural dimension" of the delta's contribution to the nation. However, I propose going beyond the conclusion that the poetry of the region translates the shared yearnings of the people for political/social equity[39]. Taking this rhetorical and cultural unification of the delta region as a given, I want to suggest that comedy from the region conveys the cultural agency of the people to thrive as individual artists and actors in shaping the image of their perceived identity and their lived spaces. This then means that when the basis of their claim to

[39] Okunoye concludes that the poetry of the Delta "affirms the inevitability of inventing a new identity in a crisis-ridden state and also confirms that the ethnic agenda articulated in the blueprints presented by the Ogoni and the Ijaw in the past actually inscribe the shared desires of the peoples of the entire region. To this extent, the literary rendering of the Niger Delta experience draws inspiration from the same source with the political actions" (Okunoye 15).

respect and self-determination is rooted in their identity as a person originating from Warri or other Niger Delta area, then the conflation of spatial discreteness, and individual identity harnesses a history of regional narrativization with underpinnings of socio-ecological justice and makes it into a tool for the creation of a robust cultural currency somewhat divested from that ecological cause.

The final form of narrativization of the delta that I could have considered comes in the form of popular music from the region. In his work where he analyzes hip-hop acts that emphasize their delta identities, Ogaga Okuyade argues that "Popular music on the Niger Delta becomes a strategic mode for sustaining the spirit of resistance" ("Rethinking Militancy" 97). The objective of his analysis is to discover if these songs are purely for the entertainment of the immediate audience, or if "they operate on deeper aesthetic and intellectual levels for the songwriters and audience members in their respective communities" ("Rethinking Militancy" 85). He answers this question by recognizing the "spirit of resistance" encoded in the work of artists like Timaya, whose "music has an ethnic and regional temper, which exposes the asymmetries in the distribution of resources in Nigeria—telling the Niger Delta predicament to other Nigerians, who may refuse to examine the plight of the microminorities today in the Niger Delta…[and] capturing existential angst" ("Rethinking Militancy" 88). However, the question Okuyade answers here is precisely not what I will ask about comedy. I am not very invested in whether or not the actual comedic acts offer "deeper" or "intellectual" messaging. Additionally, one could make the case that what makes the broader Nigerian audience engage with popular music from the delta region is not merely that they sympathize with the region or are moved by the political implications of, for instance, Timaya's music. It is instead this appeal of the charismatic maverick, a popular figure standing outside of the mainstream culture, defying the norms of

official discourse about the nation. Figures like Timaya thus feed this Naija popular culture space with the cultural currencies of self-possession and being "cool" which is produced in the tension of the ever-present threat of militancy and extreme action against the establishment. While I will not put the Warri comedic archetype at this same level of being a charismatic maverick, it still possesses an element of widespread allure that counters the official narrative of the Niger Delta. However, unlike these kinds of music and the musicians that make them, the comedic delta archetype escapes the weight of political, socio-ethnic, and environmentalist expectation laden on most other delta figures that gain national attention. I am thus approaching the comedy acts from an angle which sees them as forms of entertainment that through their performance and subsequent co-opting by other groups, becomes, first, a way for people with Niger Delta identities to claim agency (narrative agency, economic agency, and creative agency), and second, another way that the Nigerian public at large acts again as a nation to co-opt a resource of the delta.

Although these other forms of representation and narrativization (film, television, poetry, music, literature) are not entirely adequate for analyzing the comedic facet of the Niger delta identity in Naija culture, the stories they tell do constitute a massive part of why this character archetype possesses as much cultural currency and popularity as it does. These other forms do so much of the work in capturing all the threads that make up the lattice of Niger Delta identities: intranational marginalization, microminority status, loss of traditional livelihoods, loss of ancestral homelands, the juxtaposition of extreme wealth with extreme poverty, and the culture of protest against social, political and environmental injustice. The base formed by this solid history of mythologizing the delta through narrative does then inform both the development of the comedic delta archetype, and the significance of its status as a product of specific urban

spaces in the delta region. Before I move on to expanding on some of the observable characteristics of the comedic delta archetype, I will explain a bit about why the urban aspect matters in discussions of this character. In what follows, I trace a kind of genealogy of the character and its marketability.

Why and How Does the Urban Matter?

How does this urbanity aid in encoding the language and cultures that simultaneously produce both comedic and militant outcomes? In order to answer these questions, we can begin this conversation of urbanity by engaging with Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence and the case Saro-Wiwa makes in *Genocide in Nigeria* about the decimation of ethnic ancestral lands, and by extension communities, their livelihoods, and their unique cultures. Saro-Wiwa's fight for the Ogoni was initially about the cultural and economic sovereignty of his people, and what he often called the strangulation of the Ogoni people by the national government which he described interchangeably as the ethnic majority. However, in a later publication, he records the moment he decides to narrow the scope of the Ogoni cause. After visiting the Soviet Union at the moment of a dying multi-ethnic state, and visiting the United States, where he witnesses the political power that can be wielded when environmental groups "press demands on governments and companies," Saro-Wiwa decided on more succinct parameters for the Ogoni's battles (*A Month and a Day* 54). It is after these experiences he realized "the environment would have to be a strong plank on which to base the burgeoning Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People [MOSOP]" (*A Month and a Day* 54). In other words, he recognized the discursive power of a singular and spectacular talking point such as environmental degradation, and thus harnessed that primary concern to build an ultimately charismatic cause for the Ogoni. Already a very

experienced storyteller in film and print, Saro-Wiwa was very strategic in using the environmental justice narrative for MOSOP. This decision then allowed, in his final years and since his death, for his legacy to go beyond the very particular Ogoni cultural and economic sovereignty at the core of his passion, in order to serve the entire Niger Delta cultural region and all the ethnic groups therein. In spite of his particular devotion to the Ogoni ethnic identity, the fact remains that other groups in the region suffered similar ills and could find kinship in this environmental justice focus. Therefore, although Saro-Wiwa outlined the effects Trans-national Oil Corporations (TNOCs) have had on Ogoni land specifically, we can use the understanding of this decimation and thus forced dispersal of the Ogoni people, as a basis to understand why these multiethnic urban centers become particularly central as spaces of refuge and collective identity formation.

When ancestral lands are made uninhabitable, and farmlands and fishing rivers are rendered insolvent, the people whose livelihoods rely on these ecosystems are inadvertently forced to find refuge in urban spaces where they can have access to other means of survival. These ancestral lands are decimated to such an extent that very few people actually choose to spend the night in their villages, if at all they ever visit. In outlining what he describes as an attempted genocide on his people, Saro-Wiwa describes his people's suffering: "burning methane and other hydrocarbons into the lungs of Ogoni villagers every day of the year…The noise of burning gas has made the people…half-deaf—they have to shout when they speak to each other; burning gas continues to turn their nights into day. They have no electricity, no pipe-borne water and no hospital" (*Genocide in Nigeria* 81). He goes on to detail a series of pollutions that make it very difficult and nearly impossible to survive and live healthy lives in Ogoni land. In the passage above there is the pollution in the air making it hard to breathe, the aural pollution

that makes it hard to hear, and the light pollution from constant gas flares that bring the curse of constant sunlight, so that there is no darkness in which to sleep and rest and have a normal circadian rhythm. In addition, there is also a severe lack of resources and infrastructure that would make modern life possible in these spaces. These are all elements that pave the way for the coming together of multi-ethnic urban communities that congeal into Niger delta, urban-space-specific, identities.

In other words, the fact that robust identities form with specific ties to urban spaces such as Port Harcourt, Warri or Sapele can actually be read as another consequence of the extensive environmental degradation of ancestral lands tied to singular ethnic groups—another instance of a slow and understated violence. These urban identities, however, take on a tribal quality that runs across the multiple ethnic groups making their lives in the same space. Consequently, the collective Niger Delta identity becomes not only indirectly coerced, but essential for the people to organize themselves and build or maintain certain aspects of their cultures that can stand up to the onslaught of subjugation coming from the neo-imperial TNOCs and the intra-colonial policies of the Nigerian federal government.

In the decades since he was murdered, Saro-Wiwa's image has become a symbol for the liberation of the entire Niger Delta region, especially those parts that are not dominated by a single ethnic group[40]. He rails against the ethnic majorities that constitute the majority of Nigeria's federal government, and also notes bitterly that "most Nigerians only pay lip service to

[40] Here, I am explicitly making a distinction between the Niger Delta as a geopolitical zone, and the Niger Delta as a cultural zone. These two definitions of the region represent divergent geographical boundaries. While the political zone covered by an organization like Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) includes all oil-producing states such as Igbo states like Abia and Imo, and a Yoruba state like Ondo, the cultural zone does not. The area culturally recognized as the Niger Delta is more closely aligned with the South-South geopolitical zone. This is distinct from the Igbo South-East zone, and the Yoruba-dominated South-West zone. The cultural core of the Niger Delta region primarily includes Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa states, and then Akwa Ibom and Edo states to a lesser degree.

the concept of a Nigerian nation-state, and what is 'Nigerian' property is mostly regarded as belonging to no one" (*Genocide in Nigeria* 84). While the oil mined from the Delta region is considered the property of the entire nation, the environment from which it is sourced sees a diffusion of responsibility. These concurrent circumstances then have the effect of making the oil-rich Delta region simultaneously every man's land and no man's land. Saro-Wiwa became a figure for speaking up on behalf of this land, focusing on Ogoniland specifically. However, the figure of Saro-Wiwa goes on to become a uniting factor under which men like Farah Dagogo, Ateke Tom, and Mujahid Dokubo-Asari (Asari Dokubo) came together to build militant factions that continued the struggle for the liberation of the region and its resources. If these militant factions were evangelists preaching the gospel of socio-ecological liberation to the youth of the region, then Ken Saro-Wiwa and the rest of the Ogoni Nine were the martyred messiah and apostles who fueled the mission in their death.

In light of this pedigree of regional agitation, I argue that urbanity aids in propagating a code, a language, and a broadly Niger Delta culture that bears comedic, poetic, and militant fruits all at once. The activism of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the militancy of Ateke Tom, the music of Timaya, and the comedy of Anita Asuoha (Real Warri Pikin) and Otaghware Onodjayeke (I Go Save) are all connected in their cultural history. The destruction of ancestral villages and the ability of the indigenes to make their lives and livelihoods in those spaces was a driving force behind Ken Saro-Wiwa's activism. His fight was one for environmental justice, but it was also explicitly tied to the recuperation and recognition of specifically Ogoniland and Ogoni identity. In this way, it was also a struggle for cultural sovereignty, and the recognition of Ogoni agency and cultural might. It is therefore important that the militant or vigilante leaders who came after him formed more broadly defined organizations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

(MEND) co-founded Farah Dagogo and Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) founded by Ateke Tom. This is not to say that there are no ethnically motivated divisions and clashes among these groups. These clashes certainly happen, especially since some militias are dominated by specific ethnic groups, and larger numbers often mean more military and political might. However, unlike Ken Saro-Wiwa's MOSOP, which was specifically named for the Ogoni people – Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People – these newer groups chose to adopt a regional and broader "Niger Delta" identity in their nomenclature.

Contemporaneous to the militant groups who began to take the life work of Saro-Wiwa as a catalyst for region-wide movements for justice, there were also musicians like Timaya, Lover Boys, and Duncan Mighty. While the militants physically took the fight to the TNOCs and by extension the Nigerian government with whom they collude, these musicians coming out of the delta were able to take the narrative of this struggle to the rest of the country through their popular music and their access to Naija popular culture. In "Rethinking Militancy and Environmental Justice: The Politics of Oil and Violence in Nigerian Popular Music," Okuyade analyzes the music of Timaya and Lover Boys to argue that "[t]hese singers foreground the importance of making music function beyond entertainment" ("Rethinking Militancy" 97). Beyond the expression of political angst and a spirit of resistance, the art of these musicians can also be tied explicitly to the geographical and cultural spaces in which it took shape, because "[t]he delta itself, the most marginalized geopolitical zone in Nigeria, gives vibrant expression to the paradox of wealth and poverty tied to a single space" ("Rethinking Militancy" 79). In examining how these popular artists articulate the predicament of the delta in their songs, Okuyade concludes that "Popular music offers the Nigerian public an alternative to the hegemonic position" (79). This attractive counterculture is captured as protests from the region

that are channeled through art. Therefore, these musicians create a narrative mythology around the peoples of the Niger Delta that both incorporates the bravery and irreverence of the violent militants, and the cultural currencies of being fashionable and popular.

Following in this vein is the comedy from the region, which harnesses both the proud provincialism of the Niger Delta and the in-fashion factor that is now effectively attached to the Niger Delta figure in the Nigerian popular culture imagination. Comedy functions to challenge the notion that the "dominant mood of this doubly marginalized people is depression, and their sociopolitical and economic conditions are poverty and political impotence" ("Rethinking Militancy" 92). The various ways the Nigerian stand-up industry challenges this notion makes the realm of comedy particularly important for engaging the regional identities of the Niger Delta, especially as it continues to engage in often uneven or imbalanced exchanges with Naija writ large. In analyzing the comic traditions of various West African locales, one scholar posits that "comedy set in urban space draws…on despair, dissatisfaction, and risk-taking," but there is also a notable "trend toward entertainment, which is indicative of a shift in paradigm beyond the didactic function that has sometimes been associated with African cinema" (Sawadogo 52). This particular approach of emphasizing entertainment more so than any other political or otherwise didactic agenda, is precisely what makes Niger Delta comedy particularly appealing. This is because "The appeal of daily survival comedy lies in the immediacy and forcefulness of the actions involved…Comedy featuring survival strategies in daily life therefore draws on the rawness and immediacy of reactions to situations of conflict and increased risks for characters to blunder" (Sawadogo 49). In harnessing certain key aspects of the already established Niger Delta cultural stereotypes, of resistance and implacability for instance, and simultaneously creating a bit of distance from the political implications of otherwise depressive narratives of the region,

comedians with strong ties to a city like Warri, are able to base their acts on self-aware versions of this image in ways that make the stereotype or archetype more charming and harmless, and thus appealing to a wide Naija audience.

Some of the elements of survival and hustle that fuel comedy with a Niger Delta flare can be traced to the fact that in the urban spaces of the region, there tends to be a stark juxtaposition of oil wealth held and displayed by an often-imported minority, and extensive poverty among the more local masses. This dynamic, along with the urban setting, makes for the development of a robust street culture and the consolidation of a lexicon and attitudes that bear both comedic and militant fruits in the social consciousness of the people. To elaborate on this, I will refer to Ato Quayson's work in *Oxford Street Accra*, where he works to decipher the nature of street cultures and the lexicons of urban life. He accomplishes this through an examination of the spatial practice of Oxford Street, which is understood as "an approximation of the moment of communication" (Quayson 20). After analyzing a few real-life moments of traded insults over the rules and use of space on Oxford street, Quayson surmises that "the traded insults turn out to be an important aspect of the intersection of spatiality and spectatoriality endemic to Accra's street life, such that the ultimate fact of seeing and being seen translates everything in the heated altercation into the display of the mastery of unstated yet critical cultural codes of rhetoric and delivery" (Quayson 17). This argument ultimately feeds into the idea that space itself is not a constant or static entity, but always in the process of transformation through local moments of communication and spatial practice, as well as through the always-changing human infrastructures and technologies for communication. Looking into these very specific and local instantiations of spatial practice, Quayson concludes:

> The interpersonal interactions manifest different dimensions of economy, culture, and society and their transformations through time. Language is thus only the entry point into a broader structure of multilayered levels and relations. It is out of the interactive multidimensionality of all such levels that we gain a sense of the spatial practice(s) to be seen on Oxford Street. The two anecdotes [of traded insults] encountered earlier, far from connoting a breakdown of communication, rather divulge the character of spatial practice precisely manifested as a flashpoint of rhetorical intensity. In other words, such rhetorical flashpoints, coded at the simplest level as debates about the civilities of road use, are actually the points at which spatial practices reveal themselves. (21)

For people who do not have direct access to witness firsthand the moments and flashpoints at which urban "spatial practices reveal themselves" in a city like Warri, the performative nature of standup as an art form can similarly allow uncommon insight into certain elements of the "spatiality and spectatoriality" endemic to Warri's street life. Quayson's idea of a street character and a humorous urban cultural lexicon is quite useful here in foregrounding the Warri comedic persona. His analysis also shows that a lexicon tied to specific urban spaces can develop, and also be related to local cultural expectations and implications, influenced by but in spite of whatever global or cosmopolitan presence might be gleaming from the top down[41]. Additionally, these communicative spatial practices always already manifest the culture and society in which they have been produced as well as the way these societies have changed over time. The

[41] In his Oxford Street example, this includes the large billboards and fancy shops looming over the more informal and local elements of life in Accra, and in the Niger Delta example, this presence is captured the Trans-National Oil Corporations and their wealthy employees in the Niger Delta. It is important to note, "The fact that the local is inextricably linked to the transnational (international migration, international development banks, global commodity markets) through national and regional-level intermediaries complicates the privileging of one scale over another" (Bassett et al. 105). This means there are always dangers to privileging one scale over another. Therefore, the interactive multidimensionality of communicative urban spatial practice, which can be captured in the performativity of standup comedy, is particularly useful for engaging the Niger Delta more dynamically.

"interactive multidimensionality" of the delta region, communicated through the entry point of a creolized pidgin English, can be effectively revealed through the delta narrative archetypes' most identifiable features. Ultimately, Quayson's analysis of the spatial practices of Oxford Street illuminates how the textures of an urban space can give birth to comedic, poetic, and militant elements all at once.

What Constitutes the Niger Delta Narrative Archetype?

Now that I have discussed the ways in which Ken Saro-Wiwa's environmental discourse, and the ensuing regional agitation formed the basis for the formation of the collective Niger Delta identity around urban spaces, I have set the scene for exploring the basic features of the Niger Delta narrative archetype, focusing particularly on the Warri comedic persona. Although I traced a genealogy from the activism of Ken Saro-Wiwa to the militancy of Ateke Tom, the music of Timaya, and the comedy space inhabited by I Go Save and Real Warri Pikin, I will not attempt to uncover any hidden political agenda in the actual comedy acts and jokes I discuss below. One could argue that "humour is (or more appropriately ought to be regarded as) an important weapon in the armoury of civil society against perceived state high handedness" (Obadare 244). However, I will not go so far to politicize the humor of Nigerian stand-up comedy because the Warri persona is not often funny in a way that is explicitly conscious of political subversion. Toeing Zina Saro-Wiwa's line, there will be no effort here to make these acts of agency through performance into examples of activism. Instead, I will offer a breakdown of five main observable features of the Warri persona in order to offer a better understanding of what it signifies for the delta cultural region, and the particular urban spaces located therein. These include a provincial pride based on the region at large, or Warri as a lived space in

particular; a robust confidence in one's resourcefulness or what we could call the character's street-smart and streetwise disposition; an unwillingness to be overlooked and a determination to insist on one's self; a propensity to take up space through the physicality of the character on stage, screen, street, or even creek; and finally a confident mastery of Nigerian pidgin English in its most developed state.

Based on a number of factors, including the choice of stage names and a trend in the way Warri comedians introduce themselves and their jokes, it is evident that there is a pride that comes with proclaiming a sense of belonging to and being molded by the city. This could be a legacy of Saro-Wiwa and the movements following his death. It inspired an attachment of both ownership and pride tied not only to the ethnic identities, but also the particular geographical spaces of the Niger Delta. For some, this manifested in taking over the creeks and swamps and forcibly holding TNOCs to account; for others, it translated into a much less violent proclamation of ownership and belonging to the cultural and geographical spaces in which their identities are made. Many comedians adopt stage names that either name the city explicitly or allude to the city's cultures in other ways. Some of these include Real Warri Pikin (Anita Alaire Afoke Asuoha), Dat Warri Girl (Oluwatoyin Albert), and Efe Warri Boy (Michael Efe Ejeba). The importance of naming cannot be overstated: "Names, even on the personal level, can function as an arena where opposing ethnic/racial identities manifest. The choice of a name and the role assigned to a character, including the description of the named person, should not be overlooked, especially in a multi-ethnic Nigerian society where ethnic loyalty overshadows national consciousness, on the one hand, and the ways Nigerians have responded to naming in the postcolonial era, on the other" (Aboh 39). This critic is writing in the context of character names in Nigerian novels and the ways in which the culture of naming in various parts of the

country is reflected in the work of novelists. This same argument can apply to the way standup comedians choose to name themselves and thus build a brand around the identity implied by their stage names. They often also choose to begin their sets or certain jokes by proclaiming their Warri identity. It is not unusual for comedians to preface a joke by stating this identity: "Anyway, I be Warri boy and those wey dey form aje, wey say Warri boys no be aje…actually, we no be aje. But, we dey take care of aje. Na confam issue" ("I Go Save and the Army" 0:10-0:24)[42]. "Aje", in this context means someone who is soft or spoilt and has had a relatively easy life. In the opening line to his set, the comedian has not only made his claim to the Warri identity, but has also made an effort to define some of what that implies about his character. In other words, he is not someone who has had an easy life, he is not soft, and has not grown up spoiled and cushioned by privilege. These aspects of his character are explicitly tied to his identity as a Warri urbanite, which is presented as being distinct from the audience gathered in Abuja – a city presumably full of "aje" individuals. This explicit connection between individual characters or personae and a geographical location makes it clear that there is a specific socio-cultural landscape in the city of Warri. This is reminiscent of the concept of a terroir: "In everyday usage, terroir designates a cultivated area but also *a cultural landscape* with which the inhabitants maintain historical and *affective* ties" (Bassett et al. 104; emphasis added). The terroir also "came to represent the socio-natural heritage of a group in which its internal social organization and pattern of resource use were inscribed in the landscape" (Bassett et al. 123). In many of the jokes that come from a Warri comedic persona on stage, there is a very conscious affective connection to the cultural landscape of the city.

[42] Translation: "Anyway, I am a Warri boy and those who act like aje, tend to say that Warri boys are not aje…actually, we are not aje. But we take care of (or protect) aje. That is a fact."

There is, for instance, an unwavering belief in one's ability to be endlessly resourceful and sharp-witted, on the basis of belonging to and being produced by the city. I Go Save (Otaghware Onodjayeke), for instance ,often asserts, "I be Warri boy, you can never deceive me" ("I Go Save and the Army" 5:15-5:18). In the following joke, he uses an exception to the stereotype of the quick-witted Warri urbanite as the basis for his humor:

> I come come my area. Warri. Somebody die, Ufuoma, 'im best friend. First of all, the way Nigerians dey look who die, e go tire you. They just lie the guy in state, 'im best friend just come [he puts his hands on the hips and sighs in disbelief while pacing back and forth]. 'Efe! Efe!! Efe!!! Efe, you! [While lamenting, he points an accusing finger in the direction of the corpse], Efe, you no get sense? [he points to his head] People dey run, you no go run, Efe? Efe, you loosegaurd, you loosegaurd! O boy take Alomo Bitters! [he makes a gesture of libation over the corpse] Where you dey go far! O boy shine your eyes for that side, no let dem sheat you o! ("AY LIVE ABUJA" 7:13-8:04)
>
> Translation: I went to my area in Warri. Somebody had died—Ufuoma's best friend. First of all, the way Nigerians stare at a dead body is peculiar. They lay this guy in state, and his best friend comes over [he puts his hands on the hips and sighs in disbelief while pacing back and forth]. 'Efe! Efe!! Efe!!! Efe, you! [While lamenting, he points an accusing finger in the direction of the corpse] Efe, are you not smart? [he points to his head] You saw people running away, why didn't you run, Efe? Efe, you were careless, you let your guard down! O boy have some Alomo Bitters [he makes a gesture of libation over the corpse]. You are about to travel a far distance! O boy be very alert when you get there, do not let them cheat you!

The humor in this joke relies heavily on turning pre-established expectations on their head. Both the conventions of mourning and the characteristics of a typical Warri boy are strategically countered and reinforced in this story to elicit laughter from the audience. In this case, in sticking with the conventions of his character as a Warri boy, the best friend Ufuoma contravenes the expectations for mourning and grieving. What he sees as his friend's failure to live out the true character of a sharp-witted street-smart Warri boy makes him weep not just for Efe's death, but for what he perceives as Efe's foolishness. He thus assigns blame to the dead, in a way that would otherwise indicate disrespect at a funeral. However, this affront is forgiven as humorous due to the fact that Ufuoma himself is reinforcing expectations of what it means to be a Warri boy. By expressing the true nature of his grief, he is demonstrating that he is not particularly cognizant and/or respectful of social conventions of tact and/or duplicity at the expense of asserting oneself. He ends his lament with advice to his friend Efe, imploring him to maintain his alertness on the other side, presumably in the spirit realm. In order to show respect and send him forth, Ufuoma pours out a libation in honor of Efe, thereby honoring their streetwise brotherhood and paving the way for Efe's spirit.

While the above joke relies on the failure of one character to be alert and wily, the same emphasis on the Warri character's sharpness is also often utilized for humor even when it works as it supposedly should. In this case, the character takes pride in the fact that the city has prepared them to triumph over any challenge by virtue of instilling a social and spatial shrewdness in them. The comedian Akpororo (Jephthah Bowoto) tells the following joke that is actually invested not only in utilizing the archetype of the Warri urbanite as a wily and shrewd character, but also in adding layers of specialized narrativization onto this already established myth:

I like Warri people. Area! [audience responds "area!"] You know why I like Warri people? Warri, we no dey carry last. Na for Warri dey go thief your fowl, use am cook soup, call your pikin make e come chop [pronounced *sh*op]. So that when you swear, the swear go kill all of them. We dey sabi package things. Ey! No go there! Warri?! Warri, na 'im them dey thief fowl, dey chop fowl small small…as the fowl go outside, they go cut one of 'im legs chop. The fowl go come out [He hops across the entire stage on one leg] like this. Warri, na 'im dem dey pick fowl feather when they never put water for fire. Fowl never die o! You dey peel am. One guy thief our own they peel am for kisheen, the fowl say 'akukuyakoo, akukuyakoo!' e reach sotey, the fowl talk 'wetin I do?!' … How many of una use corn take kill fowl? [raises hand] Raise your hand here…you use corn kill fowl before? Ehen! I know say you must kill [he points at a person in the audience] …Eh! One guy, any time wey 'im wan kill fowl e go put corn, line am, line am enta kisheen. The fowl sef go come out they chop [he pecks like a chicken as he walks across the stage], as e enter kitchen door don lock, fowl don die! The guy don dey do am, dey do am, e get one Warri fowl wey dey look am every time. One day…e come line corn put, enter kitchen. The Warri fowl start to dey chop [pecks like a chicken as he walks across the stage]. As the fowl reach the kitchen, e stop. Na 'im the fowl look the guy, na 'im the fowl say 'I no go enter! [He says this with a facial expression and gestures that indicates, 'you thought you got me'] No weapon formed against my life shall prosper.' ("Akpororo…Mad Again?" 8:08-9:57)

Translation: I like Warri people. Area! [audience responds "area!"] Do you know why I like Warri people? Warri, we are never last. It is only in Warri that someone will steal

your chicken, use it in a soup, and then invite your child to join in the meal. They do this, so that when you curse the thief, the curse will kill everyone, including your child. We know how to make things work. Ey! Don't even get me started! Warri?! Warri is the only place where they will steal a chicken in bits…as the chicken goes outside, they will cut off one of its legs and eat that. The chicken will come out [He hops across the entire stage on one leg] like this. Warri is the place where they will pluck the feathers off a chicken when they have not even set any water to boil. The chicken is not dead yet! You will go ahead to pluck it. One guy stole ours and was plucking it in the kitchen, the chicken yelled 'akukuyakoo, akukuyakoo!' so much, and eventually the chicken had to talk and say, 'what did I do wrong?!' …How many of you have killed a chicken by using corn as bait? [raises hand] Raise your hand here…have you ever used corn as bait to kill a chicken? Exactly! I knew you would be guilty of this [he points at a person in the audience] …Eh! There was this guy, any time he wants to kill a chicken, he will put down a line of corn leading into the kitchen. The chicken will come out to eat [he pecks like a chicken as he walks across the stage], once it makes it into the kitchen, the door locks and the chicken is dead. This guy had been doing this for a while, and there was one Warri chicken who had been observing him every time. One day…the man put down a line of corn leading into the kitchen. The Warri chicken started eating them [pecks like a chicken as he walks across the stage]. Once the chicken got to the kitchen entrance, it stopped. The chicken then looked up at the guy and said, "I will not go in!" [He says this with a facial expression and gestures that indicates, 'you thought you got me'] No weapon formed against my life shall prosper.'

Jephthah Bowoto is one of the comedians who does not belong with any of the ethnic groups indigenous to the Warri area. But he grew up in the city and has picked a stage name that indicates his identity as a Warri urbanite. The stage name, Akpororo, is based on Urhobo or Isoko words that loosely translate to "life is hot," a phrase which connotes a hard life or a life of poverty[43]. Urhobo and Isoko are two of the ethnic groups indigenous to the Niger Delta region, and the Warri area specifically. Beyond being an Urhobo or Isoko word, "Akpororo" makes sense for a comedian who is laying claim to the streetwise identity of the Warri, and the provincial lack of privilege it implies. In this particular joke, the thieves reinforce the pre-established expectations the audience has for what it means to live in Warri, among seasoned Warri urbanites. In order to get one over on your Warri neighbors, you have to be even more resourceful and alert. A thief must not only be wily and astute but has to anticipate the reaction and ire of a neighbor who has lost a chicken, and then implicate the neighbor's own family to ensure s/he does not get cursed. Even the particular chicken labeled as a "Warri fowl" reinforces this stereotype. The Warri fowl is the only prey that is able to get around the traps set by its predator. It is important to note that the Warri fowl does not observe the man's traps in order to avoid them, but makes a point of defeating the trap, and basking in the victory granted by its alertness. The humor in this joke derives from the fact that even animals who are identified as Warri have this shrewdness, and also the fact that the thieves in Warri have more layers of wiliness and cunning than the average thief, because they must try to get one over on their equally Warri neighbors. It goes beyond the blanket statement "Warri no dey carry last" and instead implies something more individualistic about the effect of the city. The people and even

[43] Akpororo is the combination of two words: akpor, which means life, and ororo which translates into oil. The combination of both words into a name relies on the notion that the oil is hot, and therefore life is hot, or difficult and uncomfortable. It is no longer a commonly used name due to these negative implications.

non-human animals who can prove that they possess more of the city's characteristics are the ones who will truly come out on top. Living in Warri is not enough, one has to allow the city to live inside of one's self, and to assert itself whenever a situation calls for it.

This combination of pride in the city and the confidence in a Warri urbanite's astuteness is evident even in the way people from the city greet each other. Akpororo, like many other comedians who claim the city of Warri, begins his joke by hailing the audience. The use of the word "area!" as a hail or a greeting is quite common and almost exclusively tied to Warri. On the surface, Warri is of course a geographical *area*, but hailing its people with this word also implies that the people are the city—the "area"—and the city is its people. Along with this implication of mutual ownership, there is also a suggestion of thorough familiarity or knowledge—one *knows* the city because it raised them (or was vital to their upbringing), and the city or the area is thoroughly familiar with its people because it was both instrumental in making them and in fact comprises of the people. The spatial and cultural familiarity encoded in the use of the word "area!" as a greeting is a key element of what makes Warri or Wafi identity. Wafi, as a word, functions similarly to Naija in the sense that it is a marker of an informal identity formed at the grassroots, in popular culture, or on the streets. However, Wafi is also used to denote the city itself, its people, and the particular dialect of Pidgin English spoken in Warri: "the term 'Wafi' has three meanings: it is an alias for Warri, and it may also refer to a Warri urbanite or the particular NP variety spoken in Warri…This report suggests that Wafi, as a variety of NP [Nigerian Pidgin] that has its own distinctive slang, idiom and pronunciation" (Akinremi 38). The self-naming represented in "Wafi" is the ultimate indicator that the space, the people, and the language of the city are considered one and the same. Therefore, the characteristics of one, and the pride that comes along with it, apply to all three. The provincial pride based on the city

and spatiality is also then attached to the language, and the characteristics that the people of the city see as uniquely theirs. There is of course something to be said about the reductive nature of personae exploited through stereotypes for the purpose of manufacturing humor on stage—they are never truly complete representations. However, the fact remains that this narrativization of the Wafi persona and the Wafi city play a major part in shaping the collective imagination of the people of Warri and the imagination of the national audience represented at comedy shows all over the country.

This collective imagination of the Niger Delta character archetypes, however, differs from one city to the next, from comedic to activist, poetic, and militant variants. What they seem to all have in common, however, is an unwillingness to be overlooked, and a determination to insist on one's self, even though they might achieve that in different ways. We can see evidence of how this operates in a set where I Go Dye tells a joke that defines the nature of the Warri character as one who insists on himself, primarily through an often-unfounded confidence that results in humor.[44] In the joke he plays on the common idea that the Niger Delta character bred in or by the city of Port Harcourt might be more inclined toward activism, or militancy and violence. I Go Dye certainly implies this by poking fun at Timaya, who happens to be in the audience. This moment offers a closer look at the similarities and distinctions between different Niger delta character archetypes based on the city of origin. Paying attention to these distinctions will demonstrate that the city of Warri as with Lagos, Abuja, or Port Harcourt, has its own unique character, and the collective national imagination which feeds and is fed by the character

[44] This unfounded confidence is even a noted part of *Warri no dey carry last* because as I Go Save quips in one of his sets, "you no say Warri no dey carry last, but you can neva see the result wey we take carry first" ("IGOSAVE" 7:07-2:12). This translates as; "you all know that Warri is never left behind, although we never see any evidence of us coming out as the best."

of the city and its people. These distinctions are suggested when the comedian pokes fun at the musician, and then ends his jokes about Timaya by declaring:

> But me I no dey fear. I be Warri boy o! Im na Port Harcourt boy, me na Warri boy. When e happen, you go know say I hol' my side. As I crack this joke finish, Timaya no go know how I take commot for here. Area! ("I Go Dye Ooooooo" 3:27- 3:50)

> Translation: But me, I have no fear. I am a Warri boy o! He is a Port Harcourt boy, and I am a Warri boy. If there is any trouble/or if he [Timaya] tries to make any trouble, you will know that I am capable of holding my own. Once I am done telling this joke, Timaya will not be able to tell anyone how I snuck out of this venue. Area!

He later goes on to tell the audience to make a note of his face, so that in case it ends up disfigured, presumably in a retaliatory attack, they can bear witness to the motivations of the culprit. The joke here buttresses the thinly veiled notion that the people who identify as Port Harcourt urbanites are also likely to be violent and/or volatile. It relies on the fact that Timaya, while he is just a musician, is also a Port Harcourt urbanite who harnesses this identity as he sings about the injustices of TNOCs and the federal government. He is often presented as an activist for the delta region and is known to admire and sometimes associate with members of various militant groups. However, I Go Dye makes a key distinction between the Warri and the Port Harcourt urban archetypes; while the "Port Harcourt boy" might resort to force and violence to assert himself, the "Warri boy" relies on guile and sharpness to the same end. Later in the same set, he tells a joke about the way different national passports empower individuals to varying degrees at airports throughout the world. The story is important because it places greater value on Warri citizenship than Nigerian citizenship. He recounts an experience he supposedly

had while going through border control into London. He encounters a rude American traveler who does not hesitate to use swear words in response to the immigration officer's innocuous questions. I Go Dye's comic character sees this behavior as motivation to insist on the ascendency encoded in *Warri no dey carry last*:

> Believe in yourself! Respect yourself. I dey always tell all these men wey dey travel abroad, 'passport is passport.' I no care whether you hol' blue, I no care whether you hol' green, I no care whether you hol' red. All I know, 'passport is passport.' Na how you carry yourself na im people go take respect you. I dey travel enta London…Na that day I know say that there's some passport that is more than passport, but how you carry yourself na im people go take respect you. We dey waka like dis, American guy just dey waka, drag trouser, e be like all dis our Nigerian artist, e dey im nyash. Boxers dey show. Simple kweshon na im immigration man ask am…e even put sir, 'Sir, sorry, can I have your passport" [He puts on a British accent] Finish! Na im provoke American guy, [Now speaking as the American, he says] 'Fuck you' [He follows this up with a long string of expletives]! "…My broda, I be Warri boy. I say this thing wey dis guy do, I must do am [he swaggers elaborately across the stage as the laughter dies down]. I just dey waka dey come like dis, I no even wait make the guy just even ask me dat. As the guy say 'can—' I just say 'fuck you!'… e be like say my tongue different from that guy own. As I dey say…na so I dey see more police [he makes a beckoning hand gesture to indicate the approach of more officers]. Me, I no give up o! Me, Warri?! I say, today, we go die here. Na so I still continue…Na im I shook hand for pocket, exactly the way the guy do, na im I shook my hand…move like dis, raise my nyash like dis, na im I drag am come outside. Poof! 'Federal Republic of Nigeria.' Na im I troway am like dis [He makes a gesture of

flinging the passport while maintaining his indignance]…Na im the guy look am "Federal Republic of Nigeria," na e im tell me say, 'sorry sir, I never knew you were holding a Nigerian passport.' Na im I provoke [he continues to yell rude language] …as I wake up na dream." ("I Go Dye Ooooooo" 11:12-15:55)

Translation: Believe in yourself! Respect yourself. I always tell men who travel abroad, 'a passport is a passport.' I don't care if you have a blue one, I don't care if you have a green one, I don't care if you have a red one. All I know is, 'a passport is a passport.' People will respect you based on how you carry yourself. I was traveling into London, that was the day I learned that there are some passports that carry more value than others, but how you carry yourself is ultimately the basis for how well you're treated/respected. We were walking along, one American guy was just walking like this, his trousers dragged down—he looked like one of our Nigerian artists—the trousers were sitting on his buttocks. His underwear was on display. The immigration officer asked him a simple question, he even prefaced it with 'sir' [He puts on a British accent]. 'Sir, sorry, can I have your passport.' That was all! And this was what provoked the American guy, [Now speaking as the American] 'Fuck you' [He follows this up with a long string of expletives]! …My brother, I am a Warri boy. I said to myself that I must do exactly what this guy did. [He swaggers elaborately across the stage as the laughter dies down]. I just walked towards him like this, I didn't even wait for him to even ask me anything. As soon as the man started to say 'can—' I just said 'Fuck you!'…it was as though my tongue was different from the American's tongue. As soon as I started…I saw more officers approaching [he makes a beckoning hand gesture to indicate the approach of

> more officers]. But I did not give up. How could I, being from Warri? I resolved to dig in my heels. So, I continued…I put my hands into my pocket, exactly as the American had done, I put my hand in…moved like this, raised a buttock like this, and I pulled it out. Poof! 'Federal Republic of Nigeria.' I then threw it like this [he makes a gesture of flinging the passport while maintaining his indignation] … The man looked at the passport and it said, 'Federal Republic of Nigeria,' so he said to me, 'sorry sir, I never knew you were holding a Nigerian passport.' But then I acted provoked again… [continues to yell rude language] …then I woke up and realized it was all a dream. ("I Go Dye Ooooooo" 11:12-15:55)

Ultimately, being a citizen of Warri is, in this joke, equated to possessing the same degree of empowerment as the most powerful national passports in the world. However, the proof of this empowerment, rather than lying in a tangible object or document, has to come from a staunch unwillingness to be overlooked or treated any worse than the most privileged, and a determination to insist on that belief in real world scenarios. However, the punch line of the joke is that the whole encounter was in fact a dream. This revelation dissipates the tension he had built up in the narrative, as the audience is able to laugh at the unexpected release from the consequences of his actions in the story. He would have never gotten away with his behavior in real life, especially not with a Nigerian passport as the basis of his identity at a foreign (European) airport. In such a space that identifies travelers first by their nationality, there is no narrative infrastructure already in place to recognize the aspect of his identity he considers principal—being a Warri boy. The mechanism of the humor is that as much as the Warri urbanite would like to believe that "how you carry yourself na im people go take respect you," the real world, especially outside the boundaries of Nigeria, does not function in the same way. Outside

of a dream realm, the truth remains that there are some passports that carry more value than others. There are still power structures in place that limit the capacity of the Warri urbanite to plot his/her way to the top.

While I Go Dye offers up jokes based on imagined and/or exaggerated stories that reify the Warri narrative archetype, Real Warri Pikin, who often blurs the lines between her on-stage persona and her real life as Anita Alaire Afoke Asuoha, gives us a more nuanced look at the Wafi insistence on one's self and unwillingness to be overlooked:

> But, I dey vex. [audience asks why?] FreeMouth [the organizer of the comedy show] scam me. Una know wetin e do me? When e first call me for Abuja, say ''ow far, Real Warri Pikin, o boy na small ting dey o, I neva even sell one table o! Lai dis lai dis naa, as e dey be so, just hol' dis small ting, make you take press o.' I collect a, I believe a. How many table dey here now? [She points around in the audience.] Make we calculate, shey na hundred thousand for six people? Make una follow me, make we calculate abeg. [As she turns to count the tables, she is interrupted by an audience member] You say wetin? … dey price am? FreeMouth, the only ting wey go settle this one hmm. As we don close so, you go gee me my money, y'hear? Eh, you go complete am, because I dey weigh two and half bag of cement, and my husband marry me because security reasons. I dey gee wahala problem! No take me play! Just go, as dey dey gee you bundle, collect…as we dey go, gee me my money! Wetin I dey see so, no be all the table dey price so? … So, everybody now dey negotiate, everybody negotiate?! If you negotiate now, mae I see your hand. So they pay complete! No take me play o! I no come Sapele come play Candy Crush o! My two back pocket dey tosh o! I leave ma full family for Abuja, wey I come

here, I no get money o! Shuo, people still dey come sef. Dey borrow shair from different place. (“Real Warri Pikin” 1:07-2:52)

Translation: But I am vexed. [audience asks why?] FreeMouth [the organizer of the comedy show] scammed me. Do you all know what he did to me? When he first called me in Abuja, he said ‘how are you doing, Real Warri Pikin, there is very little money coming in, I have not been able to sell even one table! Based on how things stand now, could you please make do with this little amount.’ I collected the money, I believed him. How many tables are in this venue now? [She points around in the audience.] Let us calculate, just to confirm it is a hundred thousand [naira] for six people, right? Please, everyone should help me let us calculate. [As she turns to count the tables, she is interrupted by an audience member.] What did you say? …people haggled over the ticket prices? FreeMouth, this is the only thing that will resolve this issue. As soon as this show ends, you will give me my money, do you hear me? Yes, you will complete my fee, because I weigh two and a half bags of cement, and my husband married me for security reasons. I am more trouble than your worst problem! Don’t play games with me! Carry on, as soon as you collect the bundles [of money] …on our way out, make sure you give me my money! Based on what I can see, is it possible that people haggled over the price of every single table? …So, everybody negotiated? If you negotiated, let me see your hand. Okay, so people paid the full price! Don’t play games with me! I did not come to Sapele to play Candy Crush! I am quite broke! I left my family in Abuja to come here, I have no money! Can you imagine [she says, incredulous], people are still arriving as I

speak. They are now pulling chairs into the venue from other places. (“Real Warri Pikin” 1:07-2:52)

It is never entirely clear if this is a planned comedy bit, or an actual conversation she is choosing to have with the show organizer in the presence of the audience. As a woman in a male-dominated industry, performing in what is supposedly a less lucrative city, it is possible that she has discovered an attempt to con her into being underpaid[45]. In keeping with her stage persona as Real Warri Pikin (a proper child of Warri), she makes it clear that although she is willing to accept a lower fee, she is not willing to be cheated into agreeing to take less. When she says “I dey gee wahala problem! No take me play!” she is both warning him about how troublesome she can be, and also making it clear that she takes offense at being manipulated or tricked. However, she is doing all this using an unusual idiomatic turn of phrase that undercuts the sternness conveyed in her mannerisms. The phrase “I dey gee wahala problem” translates most literally to "I can cause problems for trouble itself." In claiming that she is capable of upsetting a personified trouble is both unusual and an exaggeration of how disruptive she can be based on her Warri identity. In the process, she mentions her family, the fact that she lives in Abuja, her relationship with her husband, and her relationship with the show organizer. These references begin to blur the line between the performer on one hand, and the wife, mother, and friend, on the other. For the audience, the humor here works in the discomfort of witnessing a person being threatened publicly and the tension of not being quite sure how serious those threats are, or what the consequences might be. The audience is seeing a conversation about fee negotiations that should be happening in private play out on stage because Real Warri Pikin is not willing to choose tact and decorum at the expense of being swindled. In some ways, by enlisting audience

[45] Throughout this set, she mixes in more of her native language, and the accents on her pidgin is thicker, and this might be in part because she’s speaking to an audience in Sapele, Warri’s sister city.

participation, and making a public spectacle of this concern, she earns a similar kind of insurance against retaliation that I Go Dye does when he jokes about Timaya. This is where the shrewdness of her Warri persona shines. If in fact the organizer, FreeMouth, was plotting to pay her less than she deserved, possessing the stage as Real Warri Pikin thus allows Anita Asuoha to advocate for herself using the context of a performance. She is able to use the mechanisms of humor associated with the Warri persona and mannerisms that convey incredulity to assert her agency as an artist and advocate for proper pay without endangering her relationship with the industry and the audience. This is in keeping with the argument that "débrouillardise (hustle) has turned the urban space into a comic scene… In his or her efforts to develop initiatives for survival, individuals often reveal their vulnerabilities, which can lead to comic moments" (Sawadogo 12, "Introduction"). The comedian's "débrouillardise," which translates into resourcefulness or ability to cope or hustle, and her willingness to do so publicly, confidently, and even brashly, has turned the urban space and by extension the urban persona into a setting ripe for comedy, especially in this Niger Delta and Warri context.

The improvisation permitted by pidgin English allows Real Warri Pikin to lean on unusual idiomatic turns of phrase in order to blur the lines between potentially austere business negotiations and playful or friendly banter. In addition to the richness and creative fecundity permitted by the language, its accessibility makes it a lucrative narrative medium for mixed audiences. However, the fact remains that Nigerian Pidgin English originated in the delta region, and it is there that it exists in its most complex and developed form. Pidgin languages are "characterized by a simple, often anarchic and rudimentary, grammatical structure, a severely limited vocabulary, and are used for the expression of really basic thought-processes. This is because they emerged as 'emergency' languages for casual, short-term linguistic encounters"

(Kperogi 36-37). However, when pidgins acquire "complex, well-ordered, rule-governed grammatical forms, a rich lexicon for the expression of complex thoughts, and become the first language of a people, they mutate to 'creoles'" (Kperogi 36-37). This description applies to the varieties of Niger Delta Pidgin English. The versions of the language spoken in that region are quite rich, they have their own idioms and proverbs, and rules guiding the formulation of the language, and they also go far beyond expressing "basic thought-processes" in "short-term linguistic encounters." Kperogi concedes that "Nigerian Pidgin English is now increasingly being creolized especially in Nigeria's deep south and in such cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic urban centers as Lagos and Abuja" (37), although it is still referred to as a pidgin. There isn't really one clear moment at which an emerging language shifts from one category to the other. Nigerian Pidgin English did develop as "a trade or makeshift language" which "arose to fulfil the communicative needs created by the contact between the peoples of the multilingual coastal areas of Nigeria, and Europeans, who came as traders" (Akinremi 26)[46]. Here again, Akinremi points out how the multiethnic and multilingual nature of the delta region acts as a fertile ground for nurturing emergent cultures and languages which evolve over time. The fact that the delta coasts were "multilingual" makes the trajectory of language evolution distinct from a coastal region like Lagos, which was primarily dominated by one language. This then makes it abundantly clear that Nigerian Pidgin originated from the coastal regions of the Niger Delta.

As the pidgin language grew and developed, it spread throughout the nation, to become a language of improvisation or emergency in urban centers around the country where multiple ethnic groups converge and must communicate with each other regardless of class, ethnicity, or

[46] Akinremi buttresses this point stating, "Nigerian Pidgin has remained strongest in coastal towns like Calabar, Port Harcourt and Warri in the so-called ''Pidgin zone''… where it is reported to be in the process of creolising … or to have already acquired mother tongue or creole status in some communities" (Akinremi 26).

literacy level. Nigeria's pidgin English is typically utilized "as an informal medium of communication in the oral domain. However, its domains of use have, in the course of the past two decades, expanded to include public broadcasting" (Akinremi 28-29). The accessibility of NPE makes it very valuable in an urban setting, and there are nation-wide and regional radio stations that broadcast exclusively in the language. Recently, the British Broadcasting Corporation initiated BBC Pidgin, alongside BBC online news outlets in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba—the three major native languages in Nigeria, in recognition of the widespread use and value of this informal language. However, it also raises concerns about the possibility of this foreign broadcasting company becoming the gatekeeper of written Nigerian Pidgin English as it continues to evolve into a creole. As a language of emergency and a rising creole, there are no formal rules for spelling or writing it. The neo-imperialist implications of a British company undertaking this task in service of a former British colony are particularly troubling. Although there are local radio stations that use NPE exclusively, these are still spoken words that differ in flavor from one city or one region to the next. They are not written and saved for posterity like the BBC pidgin online. Therefore, there is less risk of the language formalizing and calcifying along whatever parameters for transcription are set by these media. Along with its spread and the recognition of the accessibility NPE offers, it "has continued to increase in number of speakers and economic value, and to expand to more diverse segments of society and domains of use," moving largely away from its previous association with poor and/or illiterate populations (Akinremi 34). This language, which originated in the delta region, has thus over time become an "urban lingua franca" of the nation (Akinremi 22). Through the natural progress of spreading throughout the nation, NPE developed distinct flavors as words from various languages were incorporated into it, depending on the ethnic groups that dominate each region. In this vein, "the

spread of NP to the cosmopolitan city of Lagos is said to be 'a recent development,'" and more recently, "the spread of NP has been facilitated by the media, music, and comedy" (Akinremi 32). The association of NPE with popular culture and the fashionable media of music and comedy cultivates the economic value of the language and thus opens it up for exploitation.

It was once the case that "within the Nigerian imaginary, Pidgin retains its associations with illiteracy, poverty, and sexual license," while "English, on the other hand, operates as a linguistic signifier of affluence in the popular arts" (Adejunmobi 96). However, Nigerian pidgin English is now utilized "used by virtually every category of speaker, from illiterates to university professors" (Akinremi 27). This previous perception of the language falls away over time, and it is no longer true that the Nigerian elite is not seen speaking pidgin because the culture of the wealthy elite and the connotations of Pidgin English are practically opposites. This assumption collapses, particularly in the context of the Niger Delta, where both poems considered "high literature" and popular hip-hop music are written in the same language. It also does not apply in the context of comedy shows, largely dominated by comedians with a strong delta identity, where audiences range from highly rated actors and ruling politicians in federal positions to average citizens. As a result of the increasing ubiquity of the language, it is increasingly being exploited for its high economic value, even though in the national context, Nigerian pidgin "enjoys no form of official recognition" (Akinremi 30). Massively popular and well-attended series of comedy shows like Opa Williams' "Night of a Thousand Laughs," Ayo Makun's "AY Live," Abovi Ugboma's "Bovi: Man on Fire" among others, depend heavily on pidgin English both for the humor of the sets, and the accessibility of the shows as a whole. It is therefore not unusual for a show to feature eight to ten out of ten comedians who deliver their sets entirely in pidgin English, except for moments where they codeswitch to offer formal greetings to the

audience. The use of pidgin English emerges as a key strategy to make sure the comedy shows sell to the widest audience. However, this monetization of the language also leans heavily on its origins on the Niger delta, its existence as a creolizing language in that region, and the robust cultural capital all these qualities entail. It is another way in which the characters of the Niger Delta, its landscapes and its peoples, are co-opted. Nigerian Pidgin English is often used as a signifier of inter-ethnic balance, as "an ethnically neutral code" (Akinremi 34). This is because it is supposedly the language of the people forged over time as many "languages represented in Nigerian cities contribute to the NP lexicon, making it an 'ethnically balanced' language that is able to accommodate the contributions of substrate languages" (34). Although the accessibility and ubiquity of NPE cannot be denied, I would not go as far as calling NPE a "neutral" language, especially if we were to think of it in its most creolized form. This is because the various socio-political and cultural regions of Nigeria are still tied to ethnic identities, even if those ethnic identities are grouped, as is the case for the Middle Belt and The Niger Delta. This diffusion of ethnic identities calls into question the subject of ownership. The recognition of authorship and ownership is not as widely prevalent as it ought to be. As NPE becomes increasingly monetized and exploited for its vast economic value, it is necessary to pay attention to the particularities of those spaces from which these cultural pieces emerge, and to intervene against history repeating itself by denying agency, credit, value, and recognition to the most dedicated stewards of the language. The language of ethnic neutrality certainly threatens to do just that by denying the vast impact the delta region has had on the trends in Naija popular culture. This impact is most clearly measurable in cases such as the standup comedy industry, and how the Warri persona in particular dominates that scene.

Warri as a Resource for the Nation

The spread of pidgin in the comedy industry implies that what has—based on a creole continuum—become a part of Niger Delta identity, is commodified through its high economic value. Although different versions of NPE are spoken all over the country, the language's origin and the confidence and depth associated with its creolized form mean that it assumes the status of a regional language. In that case, we must recognize "the intertwined bond between language and culture and how this interconnectedness serves as a vehicle for the expression and enactment of cultural identity," particularly if we "consider cultural identity as a critical portrayal of a people's ways of life that distinguishes them non-antagonistically from other[s]…as mediated through the use of language" (Aboh 53). Although different versions of NPE have become a vital part of life in Nigerian cities all over, "the direct association between the variety of Nigerian Pidgin known as Wafi or Warri Pidgin with the life of its host city (Warri)" is notable because as a variety of NPE, it has "its own distinctive slang, idiom and pronunciation, [and] serves as a means of constructing an ethnically neutral identity in a cosmopolitan city" (Akinremi 38). Warri comprises the homelands of three ethnic groups – the Itsekiri, the Urhobo and the Ijaw. Due to the ethnic diversity of both the indigenous ethnic groups and people who have settled in the city from other parts of the country, Wafi dialect works as a marker of identity for a Warri urbanite, where that identity takes on a pseudo-ethnic quality. I will insist, however, that the use and ownership of Wafi Pidgin is not ethnically neutral, but rather ethnically diffuse. This is because there is still a distinct sense of ownership over this language spread out across all Warri urbanites regardless of their original ethnic identity. As Adejunmobi explains, "the language of cultural texts can, for example, also reference affective affiliations such as those manifested in shared aspirations and desires, in addition to marking inherited and chosen ethnic ties" (92). In other

words, one can be initiated into a Warri citizenship or identity through prolonged association and a commitment to the distinctiveness imbued by the space, hence the possibility of the "chosen ethnic ties" as a source of affective affiliation for a comic persona. Therefore, it is much more difficult for a Lagos urbanite to convincingly don a Wafi persona, although it may be approximated through utilizing a confident pidgin dialect that falls closer to Wafi on the pidgin-creole continuum. To this point, although standard English has a historical affiliation with formal and even colonial education, it is not something the Niger delta narrative archetypes are known to brag about. Since the Warri persona is provincial and proud, they often instead brag about their origins in these cities and the skills and personality traits that have been instilled in them by virtue of their association with a particular urban space. This assertion of belonging and the associated ownership of Wafi or other Niger delta dialects of NPE, the co-opting of Pidgin English, and the associated provincial pride, function as essential tropes in Nigerian comedy. The distinct cultural context of the Niger Delta terroir cannot be ignored and using language that suggests neutrality threatens to do just that.

Neither the broader Niger Delta's culture of protest, nor the more specific Wafi identity, cleanly overlaps with any specific indigenous ethnic identity. Just like the activism and eventual militancy from the region became a concern wider than any one ethnic group (the Ogoni of Saro-Wiwa's activism), the culture of the Warri comedian has a diffused identity that is not so much of a specific ethnic identity, i.e., the Warri comedian is not specifically Itsekiri, Urhobo, or Ijaw. The Warri comedian is more aptly tied to the urban space and everything that urban space means in the context of the region and the nation. Taken in these smaller scales of context, Wafi implicates what it means to be located in a kind of urbanity in the Niger Delta as a geopolitical region. It is located in the Niger Delta as a cultural region, which is a space teeming with ethnic

diversity and multiethnic communities. It is also a space rich in oil wealth that through being juxtaposed with indigenous poverty and infrastructural dilapidation recalls the intra-colonial plight of micro-minorities, and the trauma inflicted by the neo-imperial trans-national oil corporations. And, finally, Wafi implicates an urban space that along with all these other factors makes it necessary for its inhabitants to be skilled at getting by and hustling. Therefore, when someone claims the urban identity of Warri, they also claim all of these elements of the space, without needing to have specific ties to the space as ethnic ancestral lands. This makes the Warri comedian somewhat distinct in his/her act from the way that other comedians operate when they base their acts on their ethnic and/or regional identities. For example, while Julius Agwu (Igbo) and Seyi Law (Yoruba) can make jokes that are specific to the cultural identity of their region of origin and also the particular ethnic group that dominates it, Warri comedians make jokes that are specific to the cultural identity of that urban space in the geopolitical and cultural region of the Niger Delta. There is very little recourse to languages and stereotypes of individual ethnic groups, except in moments where elements of various languages from the region are adopted as slang. Warri comedic personae and their acts are not tied to any specific ethnic group or ethnic identity. The comedic currency of the city is exported into the broader Naija popular culture because anybody can be initiated into and lay claim to that resource regardless of their ethnicity.

Interestingly, this Warri persona has been repeatedly exported and narrativized as the struggle and the movement for environmental and social justice in the region has exploded over the years, and this connection does not end the overlap of Warri comedy and the socio-ecological justice movement. What is unique to comedians who embody this Niger Delta identity, who play on their Warri or Wafi identity, is that theirs is not just an ethnic identity. It is a cultural identity, and it is a culture that has a lot of currency in Nigeria's popular entertainment industry because

anybody can lay claim to it so far as they have been baptized into it either by being born there, bred there, or having schooled in that region. Warri identity, in this sense, develops in parallel to the oil wealth that is siphoned out of the delta region, while the responsibility to its peoples, lands, and biomes dissipates in national and inter-regional discourses. Ironically, the overwhelming focus on the violence of the oil industry on the delta region overshadows other conversations we could have, and other narratives we could tell about the region. For instance, the looming threat of erasure that is ongoing in Nigeria's comedy industry is a mirror image of the diffusion of responsibility that takes place where the natural lands and ecosystems of the delta are concerned, in view of its immense oil wealth. The wealth harvested and mined from the delta belongs to "everybody" in the nation and is shared throughout the country, while the responsibility of stewardship towards the lands, creeks, and their ecological health falls to nobody in particular.

Similarly, Warri becomes everybody's land, open to all of Naija since it does not have one major ethnic tie. Once any storyteller zooms out enough, Warri's contributions meld and blend into the background, so that it is indistinguishable from other regional, ethnic, and urban contributions to Naija comedy. In the comedy space, Warri can easily become a resource to be mined in a similar way to the delta's oil, in the sense that the stories, narratives, cultural currency of this city, are excavated and dispensed to a larger public domain, where everybody in Naija has access, but need not be responsible in stewarding its history. In contrast, although Lagos is a globally recognized cosmopolitan city, within a national context, Lagos is still fundamentally Yorubaland. When discussions of ethnic identities arise in the city space, it is still dominated by that pre-existing ethnic identity. The same goes for major cities in other parts of the country like Onitsha in the Igbo-dominated east, or Kano in the Hausa/Fulani north. Within Nigeria, places

that are dominated by one ethnic group, even when they become urbanized, still have a strong association with that ethnic group when it comes to the regional, urban, cultural and political identity of that space. Since Warri does not have this attribute, it is easier for people to claim Wafi identity, to become Wafi, on the basis of being born, bred, or having lived in Warri. This ultimately diffuses the ethnic implications of the richness Wafi identity brings to the standup comedy industry and makes it much less difficult to erase agency and contributions of the delta.

Although I have so far emphasized the significance of ethnic and pseudo-ethnic urban identities on the Nigerian standup stage, it is important to note that there is not always a major emphasis on ethnic or even regional identity. Of course, this is only a part of a growing industry. There are Nigerian comedians who rely on other tropes and cultural archetypes that are relatable or unique to them as a basis of their comedy. There are comedians whose comedy revolves around religion and playing characters from different church denominations and shrines[47]. There are also comedians who rely on drunkenness (Afamefuna Klint Igwemba or Klint da Drunk) or madness (Jephthah Bowoto or Akpororo) as the major motif for their comedic persona. However, it is still immensely vital to pay attention to these regional and even more local distinctions and idiosyncrasies as they play out in the comedy industry:

> Analysis of the changing forms in popular arts helps reveal how groups from the minority ethnic groups construct their identities as the "other," with emphasis on how they are worked out and negotiated, and how these identities contest the dominant group. The use of popular culture as a means of embodying and elaborating ethnic or regional identities has been prevalent in postcolonial Nigeria, and one can expect broad similarities across

[47] Ayo Makun or AY, Helen Paul and Kenny Blaq all fall within this category.

> space and time; however, one needs to be aware of significant regional differences if the experiences of Nigerians are going to speak more directly to each other. The chronologies and contexts of colonial history are central here. ("Rethinking Militancy" 86)

In order to be more attuned to how regional differences across the nation "speak more directly to each other," it is crucial to be vigilant about the potential erasure of already-vulnerable distinct groups at risk of deletion or diminishment in the broader narratives that make and remake Nigerian national identity. In spite of the negative connotation of co-opting Wafi identity in comedic personae, there is still something redeeming about the fact that the comedy space gives the underrepresented Niger Delta people a space in which they can reclaim, inscribe and re-inscribe the value and the currency of their cultural agency, and also the individual economic value that it can bring to each performer. This is also important on a larger scale, because as Zina Saro-Wiwa made clear, it is important to talk about the culture of the delta region besides just dwelling on the degradation of the environment, the different kinds of slow and spectacular violence, and militancy that lives in those landscapes. While all of these are still important, it is not productive for that to be the single story of the Niger Delta. This singular track threatens to render reductive any conversations of Nigeria's inter-regional and intra-national narrative imaginaries and identity formation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I posit that part of the slow violence on the Niger Delta actually has to do with the erasure of the people and their cultures, values, and agency in light of their status as doubly colonized microminorities. In spite of a rapidly degrading natural environment, the growth of multiethnic urban spaces becomes another avenue for self-narrativization, whether

through activism, music, militancy, or comedy. I have focused particularly on the medium of comedy because it offers a story of the region that is somewhat divergent from the others in the sense that it does not center the delta's relationship with oil and actually allows for a kind of narrative agency whereby the delta urbanite is an empowered storyteller, shaping his/her world, rather than a victim twice colonized. However, within this same context, it is easy to see how the scene has been set for the cultural contributions of the delta region to the nation might be hidden under layers of nationalist rhetoric and narrativization, at the expense of the former's visibility. Thinking from a global perspective, it is true that "'globalization' is nothing new," but "the current situation affords a greater degree of sophistication and self-consciousness in what we might call 'scalar' thinking - in other words, how we think about the relationship between our 'localities', our 'regions' (plus other intermediary levels), and our 'worlds', and how we make connections between actions and agencies in one level and those in others'" (Castryck & Sieveking 5). This idea of "scalar thinking" illuminates how the imbalanced exchange between Warri and Nigeria runs somewhat parallel to the relationship between Africa and the world. Being able to acknowledge and engage with various scales of the region and the local (Global, African, West African, Nigerian, Niger Delta, and Warri) allows us to engage the nuances and interactions inherent in the narrativization of identity formation at all of these scales. To this point, my emphasis on Warri and its intermingling with a national comedy industry reflects an effort to "focus on how all scales come together in urbanity, which can hence be characterized as multilayered and interconnected" (Castryck & Sieveking 3). There is a distinct character of urbanity in the delta region of Nigeria that distinguishes it from the urban character of other places in Nigeria. Within the delta region, there are even more subtle distinctions in urban

character from Warri to Sapele and Port Harcourt. The Niger Delta's urbanity is still linked to its regional cultural identities, which have roots in ethnic identities.

The Warri comedic persona, as it dominates the Nigerian standup comedy industry, provides necessary insight into how the often-overlooked storytelling agency of the delta people can be re-inscribed even under threat of erasure. In his analysis of African comedy tropes, Sawadogo asserts that "Marginal comic figures inform us about social dynamics at play beyond the laughter, humorous scenes, and comic relief. In Africa, humor serves a variety of functions, including a 'healing function' for a continent whose history is marked with exploitation and colonial violence" (Sawadogo 60). However, I would like to point out that the non-combatant nature of the Warri character-based comedy goes beyond serving a "healing function" for a region whose history and present is marked by exploitation and various degrees of violence. In fact, in enacting some distance from the explicitly political and often militant nature of other forms of storytelling from the region, Warri comedy offers a diversion from the overwhelming focus on narratives about oil.

This same recuperation of agency and value can equally apply to the emergent, lush, and rapidly evolving distinct urban spaces and characters in the Niger Delta region. There is immense value in the variegated urban realities that are available through the interaction and intertwining of the different scales of local. This focus on the specifics and distinctions in the local, without any emphasis on exceptionality, creates a space for engaging urbanity in a way that does not "[squeeze] the representation of African cities between micro-studies of cultural resilience and macro-accounts of global deprivation," but rather sees "African urbanity as the outcome of efforts to live with and between these different realities" (Castryck & Sieveking 6). Engaging the representation of Warri life and urban character on stage has thus allowed me, to

some degree, to “[study] the way people navigate and create space” and “highlights the creativity and resilience of ordinary actors to circumvent hardship without adopting a Utopian narrative of the (eventually) victorious subaltern" (Castryck & Sieveking 13). Ultimately, one of the major ways I have found to harness this more nuanced approach is to pay attention to the particularities of these simultaneously urban and local spaces, without necessarily losing sight of the larger spatial scales that loom above and play a role in the making of these localities as they are captured in narrative.

Works Cited

Aboh, Romanus. *Language and the Construction of Multiple Identities in the Nigerian Novel*. AHP Publications, 2018.

Adejunmobi, Moradewun. "English and the Audience of an African Popular Culture: The Case of Nigerian Video Film." *Cultural Critique*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2002, pp. 74–103., doi:10.1353/cul.2002.0001.

Agoda, Francis. "I Go Dye Ooooooooo." *YouTube*, uploaded by AY Comedian, 23 Jan. 2014, https://youtu.be/-yO8WlyZR0I.

Akinremi, Ihuoma I. "The Nigerian Urban Vernacular and the Emergence of Youth Language Varieties." *Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Perspectives of Youth Language Practices in Africa: Codes and Identity Writings*, edited by Gratien Atindogbe and Augustin E Ebongue, African Books Collective, 2019, pp. 21–40.

Anugwom, Edlyne E. *Religion, Occult and Youth Conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria*. Langaa RPCIG, 2017.

Asuoha, Anita Alaire Afoke. "Real Warri Pikin - Funny New Year's Resolution That Would Crack You Up." *YouTube*, uploaded by Comedian Freemouth, 19 Jan. 2019, https://youtu.be/G-_0inmnN_o.

Bassett, Thomas J., et al. "Constructing Locality: The Terroir Approach in West Africa." *Africa*, vol. 77, no. 1, Feb. 2007, pp. 104–129., doi:10.3366/afr.2007.77.1.104.

Bowoto, Jephthah. "Akpororo…Mad Again?" *YouTube*, uploaded by AY Comedian, 19 Mar. 2015, https://youtu.be/iONO_hINEXE.

Castryck, Geert, and Nadine Sieveking. "Introduction: Performing Space In Urban Africa." *Africa*, vol. 84, no. 1, 5 Feb. 2014, pp. 1–16., doi:10.1017/s0001972013000648.

Kperogi, Farooq A. *Glocal English: The Changing Face and Forms of Nigerian English in a Global World*. Peter Lang, 2015.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Obadare, Ebenezer. "The Uses of Ridicule: Humour, 'Infrapolitics' and Civil Society in Nigeria." *African Affairs*, vol. 108, no. 431, 2009, pp. 241–261., doi:10.1093/afraf/adn086.

Ohagwam, Uchenna. "The Niger Delta Crises in the Niger Delta Novel: Reflections on Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow." *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 11, Nov. 2018, pp. 11–17., doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.18533/journal.v7i10.1310.

Okunoye, Oyeniyi. "Alterity, Marginality and the National Question in the Poetry of the Niger Delta." *Cahiers D'études Africaines*, vol. 48, no. 191, 20 Sept. 2008, pp. 413–436., doi:10.4000/etudesafricaines.11742.

Okuyade, Ogaga. "Negotiating the Local in the Global Context: Tooling the Nigerian Video Film for Language Empowerment and Cultural Preservation." *Nigerian Languages, Literatures, Culture and Reforms*, edited by Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, African Books Collective, 2016, pp. 89–98.

-- "Rethinking Militancy and Environmental Justice: The Politics of Oil and Violence in Nigerian Popular Music." *Africa Today*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2011, pp. 79–101., doi:10.2979/africatoday.58.1.79.

Onodjayeke, Otaghware Otas. "IGOSAVE." *YouTube*, uploaded by FunnyBone Comedy TV, 11 May 2020, https://youtu.be/Sj9p1oyuxh0.

-- "I Go Save and the Army." *YouTube*, uploaded by AY Comedian, 9 Feb. 2015, https://youtu.be/40wew86H2Do.

-- "I Go Save on this one…AY LIVE ABUJA." *YouTube*, uploaded by AY Comedian, 23 Aug. 2019, https://youtu.be/QWFw7_dBSh0.

Quayson, Ato. *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Saro-Wiwa, Ken. *Genocide in Nigeria: the Ogoni Tragedy*. Saros International Publishers, 2005.

Saro-Wiwa, Ken, and Ken Wiwa. *A Month and A Day & Letters*. Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2012.

Saro-Wiwa, Zina. "Worrying the Mask: The Politics of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in the Worlds of African Art." *YouTube*, uploaded by UCLA African Studies Center, 26 June 2020, https://youtu.be/cz5FBmbebxs.

Sawadogo, Boukary. *West African Screen Media: Comedy, TV Series, and Transnationalization*. Michigan State University Press, 2019.

The Prince of Wales. "Royal Visit Nigeria: The Prince of Wales gives a speech in Lagos." *YouTube*, uploaded by The Royal Family, 7 Nov. 2018, https://youtu.be/11cpC99zE3o.

@UKinNigeria. "'I was thrilled when I heard the news of my posting to Nigeria. My predecessor, @PaulArkwright, has told me how fantastic the country is. I can't wait to get started. I know there's a lot to learn, but I'll catch up fast as Naija no dey carry last' @CatrionaLaing1 #WelcomeToNaija." *Twitter,* 27 Nov. 2018, 8:21 a.m., https://twitter.com/UKinNigeria/status/1067453468489723905.

Borrowed Charisma: Narrating Piped and Domestic Water

In most of its naturally occurring states, water has historically served as a rich source of narratives about everyday human life and the development of our civilizations. Water as a worthy spectacle and robust object of exploration and meaning-making abounds in literature from all over the world and throughout recorded history. We have an abundance of narratives that present the oceans as sublime and dangerous, rivers as the anchors of societies and sources of socioeconomic power, streams and marshes as the sites of communal self-actualization, springs and geysers as objects of marvel and aesthetic appreciation, and even dams as the technological sublime. However, this all changes when the conversation is shifted to potable water, particular piped potable water, or what activists and philanthropist most often refer to as "clean water." The notable absence of everyday domesticated water sources, particularly in African literature, is just strange enough to merit this inquiry. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be asking the question, why is such a ubiquitous aspect of everyday life so notably absent from African realist fiction? And, if it were to be present, what kind of work could it do for the narrativization of African urbanity beyond the spectacle of charisma-driven charity work?

In what follows, I argue that the notable absence of tap water, boreholes, and other piped and domesticated water sources in contemporary Nigerian realist fiction is due to a combination of three key factors. First, there is a hypervisibility of "clean water" as an object of Western philanthropic interventions on the continent. These discourses are often then specifically affixed the moral uprightness and generosity of a charismatic individual, whose figure and image dominate and often overshadow the object itself. These figures and their organizations become the loudest voices in any discussions or narratives about accessing "clean water." Potable piped

water, which may be sourced from boreholes or might comprise of treated water from other sources, thus grows into a signifier of this particular relationship between "clean water" as a cause in the Global South, and the charismatic philanthropist. Second, the invisibility of potable piped water in Nigerian literature could be a reflection of the structural and politically induced silence around the inefficient and inadequate access to potable piped water as a social or public good. In exploring this factor, I will examine some of the history of socially induced silence about this subject, particularly where municipal water supplies and governmental responsibility are concerned. Third, and final, I also argue that the absence I observe could be because potable piped water is a yet underdeveloped chronotope in contemporary African literature. I conclude that, to some extent, the combination of hyper-visible charismatic voices dominating clean water discourse, on one hand, and a socially induced silence on piped water supply, on the other, could result in a representational absence of this ubiquitous object in some of the most realist of Nigerian literature. I then turn to Jumoke Verissimo's 2019 novel, *A Small Silence.* This text is exceptional at the moment, because it offers a rare model of what it could look like to represent piped water as part of everyday life in urban Africa, without it being affixed to a more charismatic figure or a more spectacular topic like oil exploitation or environmental pollution, for instance. Verissimo's text illustrates that there is room for piped water, particularly in the form of the borehole or public standpipe, to be developed as a Bakhtinian chronotope for contemporary Nigerian, and even African, literature.

Celebrity, Charisma, and Clean Water for Africa

Clean Water in Africa has long been co-opted as a signifier among Western celebrity and INGO activism circuits. In global press and storytelling outlets, it has come to be closely

associated with personal ethics and affects around morality. This has happened particularly as a result of its long association with the spectacle of anti-poverty and anti-disease aid in Africa, and the perpetuation of the "white man's burden" narrative. From this lens (of an already co-opted "cause") it makes sense that African writers, giving voice primarily to African subjectivities, would not readily reach for stories that would present piped "clean water" in ways that might evoke the virtue and morality of a Western individual or corporate savior. In what follows, I will examine how piped potable water is narrativized through attachments with charismatic and exceptional individuals in order to highlight some of the dangers of this prevalent coupling. There is already a well-established tradition of International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) securing celebrity endorsements and partnerships in which "the role of celebrity is to provide a theatrical focal point" (Brockington 119). Beyond INGOs seeking celebrity endorsements to raise public awareness about a cause, there are also the celebrity-founded organizations, which may provide us with more direct view into the perpetuation of the cult of the individual to which various causes can be affixed to achieve a desired public image. There is a different texture of charisma involved when an organization is actually founded or co-founded by the celebrity. When we take a look at the philanthropic work of people like U2's Bono, Bill Gates, Matt Damon, and Jaden Smith, it becomes quite clear that where aid in the global South is concerned, "celebrities are branded personalities that are professionally marketed—increasingly by the celebrities themselves—with their worth determined by their ability to garner loyalty through affectivity" (Daley 378). In many ways, they come to embody the "'charismatic individual'- as an alternative source of authority within society" because they possess a democratic currency that appeals to very broad audiences (Daley 378). This "alternative source" is, however, not at all divorced from global neoliberalism. In fact, in his study of celebrity

spectacle and post-democratic politics, Dan Brockington surmises that the "Celebrity, then, is not just a pawn in negotiating arrangements between charities and corporations, nor is it just a vehicle for getting into the news. It is also a lubricant in the negotiation machinery, it helps bring people to meetings, it facilitates the negotiation of deals, and it enables a large number of policy and financial discussions to take place at a speed and with a conviviality that would not otherwise be possible" (Brockington 118). I would add that, in addition to the celebrity, the cause itself can also serve as a lubricant that allows for Western intervention, much in the same way that proselytizing Christianity served as the worthy cause that opened the path for colonization.

The most significant narrative maneuver that celebrity involvement enables is the transformation of sociopolitical problems into issues of personal morality and altruism. While supposedly sitting at the intersection between corporations, government, and INGOs, "celebrities can serve to depoliticise globalisation and its humanitarian consequences by presenting their moral concern for humanity as being outside and above conventional politics" (Daley 379). This is because they envision themselves as being particularly capable of taking "[a] step back from politics, talk straight to big business and to the leaders of G8 countries, and solve global, distant problems through consumption and aid" (379). The consequence of depoliticizing both the cause at hand and the political identities of the celebrity themselves is that they are more likely to advocate neoliberal solutions that shift some of the responsibility to Western individuals and governments. The nature of celebrity activism is that it often obfuscates the mechanics of neoliberal imperialism. As such,

> Western celebrities, addressing issues of social inequality and poverty, tend to direct their attention to the non-Western other...The continent is the focus of much of celebrity humanitarian advocacy, primarily because of its well-established inferior position in

> global imaginative geographies - at the bottom of the development hierarchy and outside of modernity, coupled with a colonial legacy that constructs it as the 'White Man's burden' …Critics of the celebritisation of poverty highlight celebrity activism's role in perpetuating gendered and racial ideologies. (Daley 376)

This particular approach to interventions in the global South then aligns with the modus operandi of international financial institutions (such as the IMF and World Bank) and their predatory economics by enabling a "stealth transference of accountability" and responsibility to parties other than the governments. ("Hybrid Governance" 13). Several issues thus arise when this particular brand of activism is overlaid onto the discourse about access, supply, and attitudes towards piped water in urban Africa.

The first problem with approaching the "clean water" discourse from the viewpoint of the "celanthropists" is that it creates a narrative that revolves around the cult of the individual—dependent on charisma and affect (Brockington 120). Given that these popular figures are usually Western, they also then primarily curate non-African interests and audiences, by diverting attention towards the image of the charismatic champion of the cause than to the issues at hand. This effect is evident in the idea that celebrity involvement in philanthropy and global aid serves to "[infuse] some passion, joie de vivre, anger, and excitement into topics that can be dull to Western minds" (Brockington 120), essentially to harness consumer affect and establish celebrity expertise. For instance, the 2019 documentary *Brave Blue World* is narrated by Liam Neeson and features other starring cast, Matt Damon, credited as the co-founder of water.org, and Jaden Smith as the co-founder 501CThree.org and Just Water. This documentary primarily explores the future of providing adequate access to clean water. Some of the narration we hear at the very beginning of the film is Liam Neeson's very recognizable voice saying, "Right now, all

around the globe, an army of visionaries and innovators is working to reimagine and reinvent water systems to generate, supply, and clean the water we all depend on for our very lives" (*Brave Blue World* 2:20 2:40). The unironic proclamation of this "army" of exceptional individuals and their technological advancements is particularly striking when one takes into consideration the origin of the phrase "brave new world" after which the title is styled. Both in the original Shakespearean quote from *The Tempest* and Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel, the phrase is loaded with negative connotations, and in both texts comes to represent social situations in which things may appear wonderful at first glance, but eventually turn out to be disastrous. In this intertextual context, the "army of visionaries and innovators" reads as ominous, because it is implied that they are coming to impose their vision of an ideal world. Consequently, as the film wraps up with Matt Damon speaking, the self-proclaimed power of the charismatic and altruistic innovator could then be read as menacing. Damon muses, "Like how lucky are we that we're the ones who get to solve this? In a hundred years, people are gonna wish they could solve a problem this big" (Brave Blue World 48:49-48:56). Coming almost at the very end of the film, this statement is perhaps the biggest indication that the efforts of the "stars" in this production are equally dedicated to building up the image of the individual hero and innovator, and also elevating the stature of this charismatic celebrity with heart.

It is true that it may be exceptionally difficult to have an already established celebrity figure visibly involved in a cause without their public image front and center. Beyond celebrities whose popularity comes from other public endeavors in the film, music, or tech industries, there are those figures and organizations whose public image consists almost entirely of their efforts towards a particular cause. We could, for example, take a brief look at how publications about the founders of Ryan's Well Foundation, and Charity: Water are marketed. *Ryan and Jimmy:*

And the Well in Africa That Brought Them Together is a book marketed by CitizenKid as part of a collection that aims to inspire children "to be better global citizens" (*Ryan and Jimmy*). It tells the story of a Canadian boy named Ryan, and his eventual friendship with a grateful village boy, Jimmy, who benefitted from a well Ryan had built in his Ugandan community. The descriptive copy at the back of the book states, "To Jimmy and the other villagers, Ryan's well was a priceless thing of beauty" (*Ryan and Jimmy*). While this kind of language might appear to be patronizing, one could overlook it on the basis of this being a book marketed for children. However, the fact that it continues to be called "Ryan's" well, even though it was built for the people of Agweo, Uganda, is emblematic of the hero's journey narrative arc that I am interested in critiquing here. The full publisher's description on the website further entrenches this idea:

> It costs a lot of money to build a well in Africa—a lot more than Ryan Hreljac had thought. Still, the six year old kept doing chores around his parents' house, even after he learned it could take him years to earn enough money. Then a friend of the family wrote an article in the local newspaper about Ryan's wish to build a well to supply people with safe, clean water. Before long, ripples of goodwill began spreading. People started sending money to help pay for Ryan's well. Ryan was interviewed on television. His dream of a well became an international news story. In Agweo, Uganda, villagers were used to walking a long way every day in search of water. What they found was often brown and smelly and made a lot of people sick. But when Ryan's well was built, life in the village changed for the better. A young orphan named Akana Jimmy longed for a chance to thank Ryan in person for this gift of life—clean water. (Kids Can Press)

This uplifting tale of two young boys from vastly different parts of the world who become friends and eventually brothers is tailored to accomplish the goal of inspiring more privileged

children to the kind of unimpeachable goodwill and tenacity Ryan exhibits. The story here is about Ryan, and the organization founded on the basis of his exceptional dedication as a six-year-old child, and also the kindness he must possess to sustain such dedication. This description begins by establishing the importance as well as the scarcity of money as the major problem facing our young protagonist. Eventually, we see him begin to progress in this goal through the exposure granted by media coverage of his exceptional dream. The attention is garnered by the spectacle of a six-year-old possessing such a noble goal. Therefore, even though Jimmy's smiling face appears alongside Ryan's on the cover of the text, it is not so much a story about Jimmy, nor does it say much about the village and the villagers who have supposedly benefitted from this well. In fact, to a certain degree, Jimmy and the people of Agweo are all elements in the story of Ryan and the Hreljac family's journey to heroism through philanthropy.

We see a similar narrative strategy and investment into the cult of the individual in the story of Scott Harrison, the founder of charity: water. The publisher's summary begins by praising his memoir, *Thirst,* as "an inspiring personal story of redemption, second chances, and the transformative power within us all, from the founder and CEO of the nonprofit *charity: water*" (charitywater.org). The narrative maneuvers this organization and its founder make in their approach to the "clean water" problem are made even more evident in this origin story:

> At 28 years old, Scott Harrison had it all. A top nightclub promoter in New York City, his life was an endless cycle of drugs, booze, models - repeat. But 10 years in, desperately unhappy and morally bankrupt, he asked himself, "What would the exact opposite of my life look like?" Walking away from everything, Harrison spent the next 16 months on a hospital ship in West Africa and discovered his true calling. In 2006, with no money and less than no experience, Harrison founded charity: water. Today, his organization has

> raised more than $400 million to bring clean drinking water to more than 10 million people around the globe. In *Thirst*, Harrison recounts the twists and turns that built charity: water into one of the most trusted and admired nonprofits in the world. Renowned for its 100 percent donation model, bold storytelling, imaginative branding, and radical commitment to transparency, charity: water has disrupted how social entrepreneurs work while inspiring millions of people to join its mission of bringing clean water to everyone on the planet within our lifetime. (charitywater.org)

The same hero's arc as in Ryan Hreljac's repeats itself in Harrison's story. If Ryan's goodwill and dedication as a child brought him fame at the same time that it also supplied clean water to people who had limited access, Harrison's story of redemption through a moral turnaround appears even more recognizably self-serving. There is no singular "Jimmy" figure who is centered to bring some semblance of balance to this tale. In fact, the evidence of Harrison's success is measured by the amount of money his organization has raised, and the exemplary way in which he has structured Charity: Water, to be a "most trusted and admired" nonprofit. In a story that is truly about "clean water," one would expect the measure of success to include at the very least some mention of the number of wells, boreholes, and purification equipment and facilities that his organization has supplied. Ultimately though, this book instead promises a coverage of the individual hero, who has made a journey from living a "desperately unhappy and morally bankrupt" life to becoming an exemplary figure in the world of nonprofit organizations.

The second problem with the overrepresentation of piped water access through the charismatic individual or celebrity is that it often depoliticizes the issue. Access to water is ultimately a human rights matter that necessitates conversations around local, national, and

global politics[48]. However, these nuances get flattened, and "clean water" is instead treated like a question of innovation, or a problem of morality and generosity. Although it is true that some activists and social movements are increasingly relying on legal avenues to "force States to fulfill their obligations," making human rights claims is not really the primary approach in celebrity activism (Acey, "Hybrid Governance" 17). Toward the end of Neeves' *Brave Blue World*, for instance, the narrator rattles off a list of ways the audience could get involved in making clean water more readily available and accessible. These options for action include "pressuring local utilities to be more progressive in their approach to water supply and sanitation;" "applying our talents to become part of the solution;" "[asking] yourself, what can I do today to be part of the solution?"; being "more mindful of our own water usage and that of our family and friends"; "[researching] new technologies" and applying them to our homes and workplaces; "[supporting] companies showing leadership in water management"; and [encouraging] brands we care about to rethink their water policies." Finally, at the very end of this list, the narrator suggests that the audience could also "pressure our local, regional, and national governments to take tangible action [through] Letters, emails, petitions, social media campaigns" (*Brave Blue World* 45:12 – 46:10). Taking action that would involve the government or directly call for political change does not come until the very end of this list, which emphasizes individual responsibility. In fact, Jaden Smith's company, Just Water, is put forth as one of the innovative brands the audience should support. This then falls in line with the idea that "the marketing of commodities to appeal to 'caring' consumers" facilitates "the link between celebrity-promoted

[48] "In 2010, the United Nations passed resolution 64/292 recognizing the human right to water and sanitation (UNGA 2010) … Explicit recognition of basic human right to water and sanitation shifts the conversation about delivery of water from being merely a development challenge or a privilege enjoyed by those who can pay (and, by extension, charity if provided for those who cannot) to an entitlement, for which individuals should be able to hold actors accountable when their rights have been violated" ("Hybrid Governance" 11).

humanitarian intervention and neoliberal imperialism" (Daley 377). The depoliticization epitomized by this film serves to promote capitalism, facilitate the privatization of social goods, and government responsibility, and then encourage consumerism with a cause.

The mention of the water crises in Flint, Michigan, solidifies this erasure of politics. Neeson's voice informs us, "Nothing focuses the mind like a crisis. So, when Flint, Michigan, faced a *shocking* crisis of lead contamination in its drinking water, activists not only demanded change, but actively sought creative solutions to the problem" (4:20-4:40). As a trendy pop music sound comes on, Neeson continues by introducing "one such creatively focused mind…rapper, actor, and entrepreneur Jaden Smith" (4:40-4:50). Smith goes on to explain how his interest in water began at a young age, and he sought to make a difference in the world:

> I really wanted to make an active change, I wanted to do something that could make a difference in the world. I always wanted to go above and beyond and just go across the world and make an impact, and make a change, you know? I want to put a filtration system in Africa. I want to put a filtration system in India. As I started to evolve these ideas, I started to realize that we have problems so close to home. We have water sanitation issues that are right here in our backyard that need to be addressed. (*Brave Blue World* 5:10-6:08)

Although his interest in water and the environment might genuinely have been motivated by a deeper concern for the racial and socioeconomic factors of the Flint water crisis, the film does not go in this direction. Instead, what the film does give its audience is an explanation of Smith's plan to reach the world by beginning his charity at home:

> The entire plan and the goal to make it work here first and then to take it places across the world that are having the same issues and say okay, well maybe this is not a lead problem

over here, so we can change the configuration of the machine. The goal is to have it wherever it would be necessary and to modify it for that specific place so that it would work efficiently just as it does in Flint. (*Brave Blue World* 6:28-6:55)

The environmental racism aspect of the Flint crisis is entirely glossed over, as are the political implications for the government offices in the state of Michigan. Instead, the film erases these politics from the water crisis by focusing solely on the creativity and heroism of a young entrepreneur whose "motivation around water started when [he] was about 11 years old" (5:02). A more glaring example of depoliticization and the oversimplification of potable piped water access is this exchange that takes place when Matt Damon appears on *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah:*

[Noah] - I read one of the stories from your organization where there is a woman who was paying $60 a month to get bottled water delivered to her so that she could have something to drink. Through your program, she got a loan to have her own water source and then pays back the loan at five or $6 a month.

[Damon] Exactly.

[Noah] Which is a simple and yet insane concept that nobody has thought of that. Is it that simple?

[Damon] Yes.

[Noah] Giving access to money…

[Damon] Yes.

[Noah]…to make their own water source…

[Damon]-Yes. And then they participate in their own solution. They fix their own problem. (*Brave New World* 11:28-12:09)

Noah's line of questioning in this interview suggests that perhaps the solution—which is essentially generosity from Westerners on a moral high ground—is *not* so simple. However, Damon has come onto the show to promote the interventions his organization is championing for this particular cause, and not necessarily to elaborate on the nuances and sociopolitical webs at play in water crises around the world. This is exemplified in the way that Damon continues to interrupt Noah's questions, with short simple answers that convey his conviction in the effectiveness of his organization's intervention. Therefore, there is not much room for Noah's doubt or bemusement to be meaningfully explored. This kind of erasure of the politics and broader social networks at play could do some damage because it further enables the silence and acquiescence of these communities in the face of racialized neoliberalist capitalism.

The third problem with narrativizing access to clean water from the perspective of the charismatic and often Western individual is that it reinforces certain racial hierarchies and attitudes towards Africa as a whole. Having observed that "Western celebrities, addressing issues of social inequality and poverty, tend to direct their attention to the non-Western other," Patricia Daley goes on to argue about the peculiar position Africa occupies in this sphere of philanthropy: "Africa's image as a 'remote' and 'dangerous terrain' is utilised to enhance the intrepidness, determination, courage, and moral worth of the celebrity. Imaginative, geographically distant and racial privileging, along with charismatic status gives credence to whatever narratives they present on their return" (384). In their appeals to the Western individuals and corporations whose moralities they appeal to as they seek contributions for the non-Western Other, the celanthropist deploys a combination of depoliticizing these African causes and centering the morally sound hero figure. However, the effect of this approach is also that since they are appealing to audiences outside of the continent, they express very little interest in seeking legitimacy from the

Africans they aim to serve. A key reason for this outcome is that "contemporary Western celebrities' engagement with Africans draws on the colonial legacy of proselytising Christianity, Western enlightenment and assumed custodianship of humanity… [thus, they] rely on their audiences' pre-existing assumptions about Africa in order to evoke superiority of knowledge and rightfulness of purpose" (Daley 388). The danger of this particular attitude towards Africa and Africans has been demonstrated throughout history and continues to play out in the devastating ripples of neoliberal imperialism across the continent.

The fourth problem, and the one that is perhaps most pertinent to my argument about piped water in African literary representations, is that the attachment of the charismatic and heroic individual to this subject can monopolize the narratives around "clean water" in Africa. Due to a combination of the factors already discussed above, the charismatic figure as the focal point in discourses engaging "clean water" threatens to dilute sociopolitical nuances, the hybrid and varied nature of access, and the diversity of attitudes about domestic, piped and potable water in urban Africa. With the affect-harnessing spectacle of a heroic charismatic individual at the center of global discourse around it, piped water itself, which already faces invisibility, is monopolized by this context in which it is often discussed.

While it might not be properly developed as a Bakhtinian chronotope in contemporary African literature, there should still be room for the borehole and public tap to develop in literary representations, particularly in the communality and hope that it already symbolizes for everyday life. This potential, however, may continue to dim, if the tradition of affixing a charismatic individual continues to dominate the piped water discourse. As an object of discussion, clean water in itself is so mundane that accessing it can very easily be presented as a simple problem with a simple solution involving little to no politics, as Damon demonstrated in the interview

with Noah. It is even easier then to depoliticize and commodify 'care' or monopolize the discourse in this realm of humanitarianism[49]. I posit that the narrative of "potable water" is so strongly tied to this particular perspective—of the Western charismatic humanitarian and philanthropist, which I have explored extensively—that this object itself as a motif has begun to calcify into a signifier for the heroism and morality of a certain breed of charismatic altruism[50]. As a result, to write about it in a different way would require a persistent action of counter-narrativizing potable piped water to shed the object of the Western savior and celanthropist associations it can evoke. I will return to an exploration of how Jumoke Verissimo models a version of representing piped water by presenting a borehole in a context that allows the water to have a character and significations of its own.

Piped Water Policy and Structural Silence

As of 2010, the United Nations affirms that access to clean water is a human right. What then does it mean that this right of access is not readily depicted in African realist fiction, in spite of the fact that the "clean water" charity machine focuses very heavily on African countries?

[49]Patricia Daley explains that "Celebrities are examples of neoliberal subjectivities, and their attempts to monopolise particular crises lead to humanitarianism becoming privatised around the cult of the individual, and commoditised, as protest is channelled through increased consumerism. This trend towards the commodification of 'care' offers immense opportunities for capital accumulation by celebrities and their corporate backers - using new business models" (390).

[50] It is important to note, at this point, the danger of this monopolization. Although he later faced some backlash, and the narrative was amended by local activists who were more familiar with the situation on ground, Jason Russell's KONY 2012 film and ensuing movement still hold a place in the public imagination. It represents a challenge to the attempted monopolization of the narrative about child soldiers in central Africa. Russell, the activist/philanthropist behind the notorious film, had a background in "US-military-funded Institute of Creative Technologies of the University of Southern California, where story-telling and common sense reasoning using social media are developed as key counterinsurgency strategies" (Daley 385). The dangerous implications of harnessing storytelling and social media narrative control as military strategies is particularly salient in examining the overlap of the cult of the charismatic individual and humanitarian charity in Africa.

Why are Nigerian novels more likely to approach potable water as a given, or as an economic good? Where is the room for piped water to be depicted as part of the social infrastructure of day-to-day life? It could very well be narrativized as a part of community building, a site for advocacy, or for critiquing the national government. Charisma Acey is an urban planning scholar who has studied the infrastructure of water supply in African cities extensively. She explains that "While the right to water establishes a legal framework for individuals to claim their rights, the structure of water governance in many locales has been driven by an entirely different principle, one that treats water primarily as an economic good" (Acey, "Hybrid Governance" 12). It is therefore possible that, where there is no explicit concern about pollution or some other violation of the water source, many African novels are more likely to treat potable water as an economic good than a matter of human rights, if it comes up at all.

I posit that this particular absence in realist fiction is a literary reflection of the structural silence around piped water access. Before I launch into some texts to illustrate this connection between literary silence and structural or political silence, here is an overview of how attitudes towards piped water supply have been theorized. Acey classifies "silence" into three categories: "unconscious loyalty (being unaware of the problem), stopgap loyalty (hoping that things improve) and acquiescence (giving up out of fear or because of perceived futility)" (329). While the first two kinds were previously established, the third kind of loyalty is based on her own observations. Therefore, this third option really seems uniquely Nigerian, or maybe even African, because she devises this new classification of silence based on her observation of attitudes towards water supply in urban Nigeria. She explains that "acquiescence, or passive acceptance without consent" is in fact a kind of loyalty to the service provider that seems to best characterize behavior of the respondents she questions in both Lagos and Benin. This is because,

"while the water problem is recognized and does warrant the use of voice or exit in the short or long term, there are other barriers that effectively silence voice or inhibit action" ("Silence and Voice" 329). These barriers are effectively implemented by the governing bodies, and the overall federal government through various strains of incompetence, unwillingness, and citizen intimidation. Acey elaborates, using the concept of "political silencing," which is defined as "the subordination of attitudes and behavior to authoritative viewpoints through hidden and quiet means (versus noisy methods such as police power and prisons)" (332). This kind of silencing occurs through "the discursive, coercive, but non-physically violent ways in which governments neutralize their critics and silence public criticism of state institutions" ("Silence and Voice" 332). Giving up on the government, however, means that people commit to doing community work around water and urban environmental care[51].

In this way, there is some overlap between this "structural silence" and Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence. The prevalent choice of private boreholes all over the country is both an effect of the imposed structural and political silence, and also often a marker for slow violence when we consider both the risks of undetected contamination and the continued impoverishment of the poorest citizens. It is true that communal support institutions based on a variety of pre-existing organizational systems such as ethnicity, religion, traditional leadership and trade/market structures have intervened with mixed results "to provide the various forms of infrastructure (human and physical) that are essential to the functioning of contemporary urban agglomerations, where engineered, networked infrastructure has always been fragmented and service delivery intermittent and uneven" ("Silence and Voice" 333). However, the structural

[51] This is evident in the answers given my some of Acey's respondents: "People are doing self-community work, like the construction of roads ... [We] mostly do communal work here ourselves. Government has not come to our aid … We have been crying to them to assist us with provision of water—and they have not come" ("Silence and Voice" 331).

silence is undoubtably pervasive, as it is not only shaped by the formal State, "but through people's daily interactions with it, filtered in this case by different authoritative channels" (333). As a result, people are then conditioned to **"**downplay the usefulness of complaining, as there is no one to complain to and because nothing will be done" ("Silence and Voice" 333). In her study of Lagos and Benin City, Acey found that "Both cities have experienced explosive growth in the number of households who installed private boreholes utilizing groundwater, much of which is contaminated. These households, in turn, sell water to their neighbors" ("Silence and Voice" 319). There is, of course, no way to say for certain which boreholes are contaminated and which are not without conducting detailed studies and collecting a significant amount of data. However, the lack of data collection is also a part of how structural silence is enforced, because "silencing can be secured through poor or non-existent data collection or the very social ties of kinship and associational life" through which many communities survive ("Silence and Voice 333)[52]. Since a lot of the realities of piped water access is not recorded officially, understanding the nature and role of potable piped water ends up being left to anecdotal narratives and oral history, and for the most part, the silence and slow violence is perpetuated[53]. However, there is also room for these

[52] Even when there is data to consult, the figures that are available can often be misleading. In Benin city "With a current population of nearly 1.1 million in the metropolitan area, the present operational capacity of the waterworks does not meet the (bare) minimum World Health Organization standards of 15 liters per person per day needed to maintain healthy populations. Even these figures are misleading, however. Data from the 2006 census indicates very few households actually used piped water in any of the three local governments comprising the Benin City metropolitan area…in the oldest parts of the city, there was nearly universal use of groundwater through private boreholes" ("Forbidden Waters" 223). In fact, beyond assessing the quality of the water being accessed and circulated, "significant gaps exist in the development literature when it comes to systematic analyses of how hybrid systems function and reliable cross-city data on their reach and quality. The information deficit is particularly large in African countries, and specifically for second- and third-tier cities" ("Hybrid Governance" 25).

[53] In addition to the risks of undetected contamination, structural silence around potable piped water also obfuscates the sustained impoverishment of the already poor. In a measurement of the efficacy and impact of municipal power and water supply, one study found that in Nigeria, outside of the "44% of households [who] have their own private boreholes" many members of the population "rely on water vendors whose high prices amount to more than 30 percent of household income for the poorest" (Alabi and Admas 180). The contours of this structural violence are further illuminated when one considers that, often "the poor lack water because they are politically marginalized: the poorest of the poor must inhabit an 'infrastructure free' zone" (Gandy 132).

realities not captured by official records and data, to find representation and presence in realist fiction.

In light of this examination of the pervasive structure that enables silence, could it be that this structural silence carries through to Nigerian realist fiction? It could be that because there is nothing new happening, nothing shifting or improving, the urban population of many African cities silently exits[54] from municipal waterworks except where larger or more charged political concerns are implicated. These more charged scenarios could be, for instance, water scarcity or water table pollution as a result of corporate interference. Even electricity (another mostly mundane part of day-to-day life that is crucial but often interrupted in Nigeria) is still intrinsically connected to conversations about crude oil, climate change, noise pollution, stalls in technological innovation and advancements, and the national economy—since Nigeria has a mono-cultural economy reliant on crude oil. However, when it comes to water, a lot of people are able to exit the municipal network, or informally address the concern without immediately causing a cascade of other problems. The proliferation of generators for private electricity supply in Nigeria for instance, brings about more of such immediate and conspicuous social concerns as noise and air pollution. People can dig a well, or a borehole, pay to use a neighbor's borehole, contract the services of a *mai ruwa,*[55] without triggering a whole other series of instantly discernable problems, so the problem does not seem quite as dire.

[54] For the purposes of Acey's study, "exit" means "switching behavior that deprives an institution of the feedback mechanism that people may utilize when locked in" ("Silence and Voice" 318). She then uses the example of households that invest significant capital into establishing their own boreholes and are therefore very unlikely to rejoin the municipal water supply lines

[55] *Mai Ruwa* is a Hausa language phrase that loosely translates to "person in charge of water." It is commonly used to refer to water carriers, who fetch water from public standpipes or other piped water sources, and then deliver to households that have contracted their services.

To this point, we could take a brief look, for instance, at Chigozie Obioma's 2019 novel *An Orchestra of Minorities.* There is a notable absence of a clear domestic water source is this very domesticity-focused tale of a poultry-owning protagonist. We get detailed descriptions of his daily chores, as he gets up, cleans his house, feeds his chickens, packs up for the market, and so on. However, the only real mention of where he gets his domestic and potable water is indirect. The narrator only gestures to it:

> He walked into the kitchen and fetched water from a blue keg, and his thoughts were suspended by the recollection that they were running out of drinking water. The keg was the only one of the three he had with drinking water still left in it. The family who owned two big tanks and sold water in the street had been gone for two weeks, and many of the people in the street either drove to get water from elsewhere or drank rainwater, which they collected in bowls or basins or drums while it rained. (Obioma 129-130)

In this passage, we get a mention of the big storage tanks from which the family sells water to the street. However, we are not told whether they get this water from a private borehole—which is most likely—or if not, why the rest of the street does not have the same access to collect and store potable water on their own. There is no indication of what sort of place or water source this "elsewhere" could be. Given the level of detail the narrator provides about the protagonist's daily chores, and also the fact that domestic water is such an essential part of those tasks, it is certainly an interesting storytelling choice to have no meditation on the water supply chain. The only other commentary about potable water in the novel is of protagonist's guardian spirit (the narrator) marveling at the fact that water is treated as an economic good:

> He waved down a peddler, who went about carrying water in small, sealed bags, hawking his wares: 'Buy Pure Water, buy Pure Water!' Agujiegbe, this buying and selling of

> water has always amazed me. The old fathers would never have imagined, even in the time of drought, that water—the most abundant provision of the great earth goddess herself—could be sold the same way hunters sell porcupines! (Obioma 70)

Here, the otherworldly narrator calls into question the view of potable water as an economic good, seeming to believe it ought to remain a public and common good. However, in modern times, water—particularly potable piped water—has become "simultaneously a resource, an 'uncooperative commodity', a public good, a private good, an economic good, a productive input and a potent symbol" ("Silence and Voice" 318). As a result, each day, members of the urban population have to navigate the hybrid terrain of water supply. Obioma's protagonist, for instance, drinks the stale remnants of the water he bought from his neighbor's tanks. But, like the rest of the people on his street who might resort to rain, he also has to make these daily negotiations on where to source water, depending on the need. In the passage above, he is choosing to purchase an expensive kind of drinking water, particularly when compared to what he must have paid per liter for the water he drinks from the blue keg. These passages offer a passing critique of water as an economic good in this setting, however, there is room still for a deeper meditation on the other meanings and narrative potentials for potable piped water in similar urban settings across the country.

An Underdeveloped Chronotope: Narrative Possibilities for Potable Piped Water

There are of course many mundane parts of everyday life in urban Africa. Based on experience, and the use of potable and piped water as a motif in Jumoke Verissimo's novel, boreholes do have potential as a site for community building and the exploration of communal interactions. The issue is that there are plenty of infrastructural spaces for these same kinds of

interactions to take place – the marketplace, roadside stalls, informal commerce at road intersections, and the village river or stream. It therefore appears that boreholes and other kinds of piped water, not possessing the longer history of community-building as these other spaces are easily overlooked. In a study from the mid 20th century, the author notes that as of 1963, "the supply from bore holes amounted to 4 liters per capita per day; the other 10 liters per capita came from rivers and springs" (Herrmann 22). The balance of water sources has certainly changed significantly since the 1960s. However, the public standpipe or the borehole are still not the go-to space for a particular kind of urban representation. They have not become, in a way, an established chronotope for the 20th and 21st century urban Africa. In comparison for instance, in any urban home, the absence of electricity is far more conspicuous than the absence of water in the pipes—where these pipes do exist at all. The darkness of a home without electricity, or the noise and air pollution of a generator running to make up for its absence, is far more difficult to ignore or push into the background. It forces a confrontation, in quite a few ways. It is a daily obnoxious reminder of the failures of the country's leadership. It is also particularly irksome for a country whose monoculture economy is dependent on oil to suffer such frequent energy shortages. Where electricity is concerned, guerrilla, informal, or communal means of intervention that might work more seamlessly for other problems do not work as well to sustain any household or neighborhood without resulting in a cascade of secondary problems[56]. In the absence of an efficient municipal water supply, one could sink a deep enough borehole to take

[56] Practically all of the utility services in Nigeria fail "to provide and develop the services and the infrastructure required for social and political development. The electricity and water supply systems are unreliable and under-developed. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) has increased prices but not performance…The importance of the public provision of these networks is emphasized by the inefficient costliness of the attempts to provide private substitutes. In response to the electricity shortages, over 90% of manufacturing companies own electricity generators. In response to the limitations of water supply, 44% of households have their own private boreholes, and many rely on water vendors whose high prices amount to more than 30 percent of household income for the poorest" (Alabi and Admas 180).

care of the potable water needs for their household or even their community, should they be so generous. The negative consequences of this individual solution to the problem will not likely be perceived for decades, if at all. However, a generator massive enough to supply energy to the same household or community will quickly prove to be a nuisance in other ways. Even as it solves the problem of power supply, it will run up costs associated with fueling and maintenance, it will contribute significant air and noise pollution to the immediate environment, and it is not as easily accessible to residents of all socio-economic classes. The conspicuousness of this particular municipal failure is evident in the fact that, all over Nigeria, the acronym for the single agency that managed the use of electricity in Nigeria is commonly used as an exclamation. Even though the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) has since been renamed and then eventually privatized and broken up into several smaller agencies, Nigerians everywhere will still exclaim "Nepa!" whenever there is an electric outage. The same cannot be said for the largely defunct waterworks agencies in the country.

Jumoke Verissimo's 2019 novel *A Small Silence* offers the chance for a reading of piped water as an object with significations and meanings not associated with a more charismatic subject. The novel depicts water as a motif for hope, even if feeble, and it is also presented side by side with the motif of light serving as a trigger of trauma. *A Small Silence* follows the efforts of a professor and former activist as he struggles to reacquaint himself with life outside of incarceration. The Prof is introduced after he has spent decades being tortured in prison at the direction of a former military ruler. The other main character is Desire, a university age woman, whose devotion to Prof as an activist pushes her to persist in building a relationship with him with the hope that he will eventually open up his dark and silent home to light and more human relationships.

In the novel, we learn very quickly that light is an important motif where the Prof's trauma is concerned. The Prof's trauma is deeply tied to light, because while incarcerated, his cell was kept dark until the jailers came by to torture and mock him: "He thought of those days in prison; when the lights came on, he knew that only meant hot iron marks on his back, lashings, and sometimes punches that left his bones praying for a partial immobility" (Verissimo 195). As a result of this experience, when he is released, he spends all day inside his flat, with the curtains drawn and all the lights turned off. In this way, he manifests many symptoms of post-traumatic stress. On the other hand, water, particularly domesticated water which has been structured or trained to go into the home or to serve everyday domestic needs emerges throughout the novel as an object of safety.

The Prof seems to associate water—specifically, piped water—with solace and grounding. In recollections of his time in prison, and even in a hallucination he experiences we can see the role water plays in his trauma. For instance, in one recollection, "Blood rushed down from his nose, he wanted to plead for mercy. 'Water, water…' he said instead. The two men laughed" (Verissimo 193). After his torturers are gone, "There was silence, except for the sound of water dripping from the decking" of his cell (Verissimo 194). While still experiencing this particular hallucinatory recollection of his trauma, he chooses to focus on the water dripping off his head as a way to ground himself. However, his meditative efforts are interrupted by his family and friends yelling for him to allow some light in:

> Prof pulled at his hair. He wanted his head off from his neck, He wanted to forget, so he concentrated on the pearls of water dribbling from the middle of his head to his face. 'I can't. I can't do it,' and when he felt he was becoming loud, he cried, but it sounded like chuckles, because he tried hard to suppress himself from a loud cry. Then, from nowhere,

> in his head he heard, '*Ha! Put on the lights*.' It was like his mother's voice but it came with an authority he had never heard from her. He stopped his ears with his forefingers but the voices were coming from inside him and it became even louder and more confident. His breathing became laboured. He wept. Desire, his mother and even Kayo, shouted, '*Light! Light! Light*!' He heard some other voices shouting in his head in his head too. (Verissimo 194)

In this passage, he experiences a traumatic hallucination in which he struggles to find the balance between safety from the trauma triggered by light, and the crushing self-imposed loneliness that comes with his insistence on darkness. This psychologically trying episode manifests the dilemma he faces as he contemplates his future as a member of a community. Water comes to signify a kind of third option for him. It is an object on which he can focus his attention, neither confronting the trauma of light nor the loneliness of darkness.

Before I move on to an examination of this final scene, it is important to position the living conditions of these two characters, particularly keeping in mind the context of municipal water supply failings and the concept of structural silence I explored above. The Prof is only able to stay holed up indoors because aside from getting food deliveries from his mother, he has access to all the water he needs to sustain himself. Desire, however, lives in a different part of the same estate, where their access to water has been permanently cut off:

> All of the estate used to have water when the blocks of flats were first built. A few years before she and Remilekun began to live in the house, a road construction was said to have resulted in major water pipes getting broken in the estate. Two years after they moved into the area, the road was rehabilitated, yet no one considered repairing the pipes even as the years ran into themselves and the taps in the bathrooms and kitchens became rusted

> antiques. Some houses built boreholes. Many of the neighbours eventually removed their bathtubs and placed them in front of their flats, where they served as water storage and washing bowls. Those who lived on the ground floor found it easier to get the *mai ruwa*, who fetched water for people for a fee, to supply them. (Verissimo 118)

The people who live in the affected parts of the estate have, for all intents and purposes, accepted that these broken water pipes will likely never be repaired, even though the estate might be under private management. Here, we find a literary depiction of structural silence that may go beyond state actors. The existence of the estate itself, as a unit of urban or suburban aggregation is quite common in major Nigerian cities. There are, of course, estates representing different socioeconomic tiers. These gated neighborhood communities illustrate how "more and more the sphere of social reproduction (health care, education, nutrition, etc.) is being off-loaded to individuals who have to fend for themselves while at the same time subsidizing capitalism by alleviating both corporations and states from having to supply basic necessities or commodifying what was previously provided by the state or corporate entities" (Arenas and Sweet 11). The estate itself can be understood as an urban communal housing arrangement that facilitates the distribution of shared resources and fosters a sense of safety in community. In the estate structure, we can see how in spite of leadership failures, the people "have struggled not just to survive, but also to mend and craft new social and spatial strategies through the practices of everyday life. These processes also sometimes create new centers of possibility" (Arenas and Sweet 5). These social arrangements do in fact "create new centers of possibility," as reflected in the story of the Prof and Desire. From her decision to walk over and knock on his door to the frequent late-night discussions in his living room, and their eventual encounter in the daylight at the end of the novel, the existence of this estate community is deeply vital to the development of

their relationship. She may not have ever known where he lived after his release from prison, if not for the estate grapevine that brings her the news. She would not have felt as comfortable staying out so late, if not for the sense of communally assured safety that the estate permits. Even the status of the estate's varied access to potable piped water proves crucial to their story. Not knowing that he was finally out of his flat in the daylight, Desire deliberates on whether she could once again visit the Prof: "For a moment, Desire considered carrying a bucket of water to Prof's doorstep as an excuse to see him in the day, before remembering that his flat was in one of the buildings that did not have water issues like hers" (Verissimo 119). In this moment, the shared knowledge of their estate community proves vital, but beyond that, the motif of piped water once again crops up to potentially serve as an excuse for her visit. In other words, piped water shows up as a site for conversation, socialization and community building.

In conjunction with the informality of the estate community, the relationship between Desire and the Prof represents a viable angle for narrativizing piped water as an emerging chronotope of African urban literature. In the final scene of the novel, we see the clearest manifestation of water as a motif of hope and solace. It is also important to observe that water is able to serve this purpose in the Prof's post-incarceration life because of his degree of access. It becomes such an easy object to reach for and is often very close when he needs a social crutch. In several instances throughout the text, Prof is seen offering his guests a cup of water when they ask an uncomfortable question and he seems to need an escape. In the final scene of the text, water once again serves this purpose for him. Up until this point, his friendship with Desire had been built entirely in the darkness of his living room. Consequently, neither of them knows exactly what the other person looks like—Desire only has an idea, based on old pictures of the Prof as a young activist. However, after a disagreement between them, Desire stops visiting, and

the loneliness Prof experiences in her absence eventually drives him out into the neighborhood to search for her in the daylight. He wanders around the large estate[57], asking questions and hoping to run into Desire to tell her that "the room is lit" (Verissimo 239). However, when they eventually come face to face with each other, neither is entirely sure what to make of the other. The narrator tells this encounter focalizing Desire first, and then retells it from the Prof's perspective. Having followed Desire through her day, as she realizes that she needs water in her flat and does not have enough money to afford the *mai ruwa*, she makes a few trips to the public standpipes:

> Finally, water spilled from the bucket and Desire rolled the piece of cloth she used as padding for her head. She folded it into a ring to protect against the friction of the bucket when she carried it on her head. With this headgear, she bent all her concentration on the bucket in a bid to avoid the man who, though she was not looking, continued to stare at her…There was something about him that reminded her of someone who meant something to her, someone she felt she knew. Like Prof? She repeated to herself that he could not be her Prof. She shook and looked around her, but no one was watching. The street was minding its own business. The man still walked towards her. She stood away from the bucket and held the tap lightly, like she could pull it out and hit him with it if he tried something malicious. …The man wiped his hand against his mouth, smiled at her and bent down to the tap. She moved away and watched him wash his face under the running water. … As Desire watched him a little more, bending down and splashing water over his face again, she made up her mind that she would visit Prof that night, more

[57] To this point, when he sets out on his search, Prof laments, "Where does one start knocking in an estate with over 150 houses, each housing over 12 blocks of flats? It was a daunting task" (Verissimo 238).

> convinced than ever. She was ashamed for him and of herself; that she could compare a vagabond to him, a world-renowned professor. She bent over and lifted the bucket of water to her head in one swoop, before he finished washing himself at the tap. (Verissimo 234-36)

Desire fails to recognize Prof because he has is neither well-groomed nor well dressed, and so does not match the mental image she had of him. However, he is thwarted once again by light—which causes her to misrecognize him—and is thus unable to take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by the social space of the standpipes. Instead, he leans back into his social crutch, choosing to bend down to the taps to wash his face as she watches. In this scene, even for her, the space of the taps allows her to navigate a confrontation with the strange man she is unable to properly recognize. She "held the tap lightly," either for stability in the face of an uncomfortable social situation, or as a potential weapon to defend herself. The public taps also allow for an added layer of support, because although the rest of the street was currently preoccupied, the communal space means that she is not really alone with what she perceives to be a vagabond and a potential threat. From Prof's viewpoint, we see that as Desire walks away, he seems to conclude that their encounter in the daylight would preclude any further development to their relationship, because in the end, "He looked on in the direction of the departing girl thinking, only imagination can destroy its own creation" (Verissimo 246). Although he has rightly noted her disappointment in his appearance, the fact remains that she is still enthralled with him and his intellect. She has not written off Prof as a "vagabond," because she has not positively identified the man at the taps. In fact, the encounter at the taps pushes her to conclude that "she would visit Prof that night." Therefore, even as the novel ends on this cliffhanger, where we are left to imagine what their visit that night would look like, the

encounter at the public taps continue to signify glimmers of hope in the everyday lives of these two characters. Although the light of the day appears to thwart Prof's efforts at reintegration once again, this time by calling into question Desire's mental image of him, it is really crucial to the narrativization of piped water in this novel that he is finally able to emerge from the darkness in the first place. Ultimately, he is able to approach Desire, fully lit, at the public water taps which provide a social crutch for him, and a site of communal socialization for their relationship in the context of the estate.

Conclusion

There might not be a single answer for why such a ubiquitous part of everyday life in urban Nigeria is largely absent from Nigerian literature. The history of narrativizing piped water suggests that it presents a narrative challenge—that for it to be narrativized at all, it needs to borrow some charisma from some other figure, or object, or concern that looms larger and garners more affect and visibility. In fact, this tradition, mainly championed in the realm of Western philanthropy on the continent, does seem to dominate narrative discourses about piped potable water on the continent. However, there are alternatives to allowing this monopolization of the object. Potable piped water, by its very nature, is often invisible, and hard to notice in a world where many other objects and infrastructural characteristics of urban Africa loom larger. This is why Verissimo's *A Small Silence* is significant in my analyses. It presents a model of how drinking water and the infrastructure that delivers it can be made to signify something locally relevant in itself. Perhaps in reclaiming a motif like drinking water—a characteristically domestic and local kind of water—African narratives can more frequently divest themselves of cause-driven or trauma-laden narratives of spectacularity.

Works Cited

Acey, Charisma Shonté. “Silence and Voice in Nigeria's Hybrid Urban Water Markets: Implications for Local Governance of Public Goods.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2018, pp. 313–336., doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12715.

--“Forbidden Waters: Colonial Intervention and the Evolution of Water Supply in Benin City, Nigeria.” *Water History*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2012, pp. 215–229., doi:10.1007/s12685-012-0061-z.

-- “Hybrid Governance and the Human Right to Water.” *Berkeley Planning Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2017, doi:10.5070/bp328133857.

Alabi, Reuben Adeolu, and Oshobugie Ojor Admas. “Who Benefits from Spending on Water and Electricity in Nigeria?: A Benefit Incidence Analysis.” *The Journal of Developing Areas*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2014, pp. 177–197., doi:10.1353/jda.2014.0013.

Brockington, Dan. “Celebrity Spectacle, Post-Democratic Politics, and Nature™ Inc.” *Nature Inc.*, 2014, pp. 108–126., doi:10.2307/j.ctt183pdh2.8.

Daley, Patricia. “Rescuing African Bodies: Celebrities, Consumerism and Neoliberal Humanitarianism.” *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 40, no. 137, 2013, pp. 375–393., doi:10.1080/03056244.2013.816944.

Gandy, Matthew. “Water as an Object of Enquiry.” *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2011, pp. 132–133., doi:10.1080/19463138.2011.582291.

Herrmann, Reimer. “Water Supply in Nutrition in the Humid Tropics: With Special Reference to Eastern Nigeria.” *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1966, pp. 17–27., doi:10.1353/pcg.1966.0007.

Iván, Arenas, and Elizabeth L. Sweet. “Disassembling Cities: Spatial, Social, and Conceptual Trajectories Across the Urban Globe.” *Disassembled Cities*, 2018, pp. 3–14., doi:10.4324/9781315104614-1.

Neeves, Tim, director. *Brave Blue World: Racing to Solve Our Water Crisis . Netflix*, Oct. 2019, www.netflix.com/watch/81326710?

Obioma, Chigozie. *An Orchestra of Minorities*. Little Brown, 2019.

“Ryan and Jimmy.” *Ryan and Jimmy:And the Well in Africa that Brought Them Together | Kids Can Press*, 1 Feb. 2007, www.kidscanpress.com/products/ryan-and-jimmy.

Charitywater.org. “Thirst: The New Book from Scott Harrison, Founder of Charity: Water.” *Charity*, www.charitywater.org/thirst.

Verissimo, Jumoke. *A Small Silence*. Cassava Republic Press, 2019.