ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: IMMIGRANT LITERACIES: LANGUAGE AND LEARNING IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA NOVEL BY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN WRITERS

Uchechi Ada Okereke-Beshel, Doctor of Philosophy, 2019

Dissertation directed by: Professor Zita C. Nunes, Department of English

"Immigrant Literacies: Language and Learning in the African Diaspora Novel by Twenty-First Century Anglophone African Writers" examines the fiction of contemporary African Diaspora writers that introduces new tropes of reading and writing in narrating the experiences of African migrants to Europe and the United States. The writers who are the focus of this dissertation—Teju Cole, Chimamanda Adichie, Brian Chikwava and NoViolet Bulawayo— grapple with the difficulties of migration and its impact on preconceived notions of the self and the world. Each writer links the different pathways that their immigrant characters must take to multiple forms of teaching and learning, demonstrating that literacy is a contextual cultural practice that fosters social

connections across the African Diaspora, even as it takes power relations into account. Using the work of Brian Street and other New Literacy theorists, I explore four versions of literacy as a socially embedded cultural practice in novels mainly about Nigerian and Zimbabwean immigrants in the United States and Britain. These theorists are key to my understanding of how revised attitudes to self in an expanded community are being developed in the contemporary African novel because they enable a shift in attention from learning to read and write in order to master a stable and transferrable set of skills to teaching and learning to read and write using a range of codes that characterize hybrid environments. Early criticisms of the African novel focused on the integration of written and oral forms in literature that would nurture a nationalist and postcolonial agenda. Twenty-first century African Diaspora literature expands these goals in demonstrating the transnational and transcultural evolution of both writing and orality. My dissertation organizes each chapter around an exemplary novel to argue that contemporary African novelists writing in English and living in and outside of Africa address the defining question of literacy they have inherited from previous generations by suggesting that multiple and fluid forms of literacy characterize the experience of Africans in the context of migration in the Diaspora.

IMMIGRANT LITERACIES: LANGUAGE AND LEARNING IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA NOVEL BY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN WRITERS

By

Uchechi Ada Okereke-Beshel

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2019

Advisory Committee:
Professor Zita C. Nunes, Chair
Professor Merle Collins
Professor Randy Ontiveros
Professor Jessica Enoch
Professor Fatemeh Keshavarz

© Copyright by
Uchechi Ada Okereke-Beshel
2019

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been a wondrous labor of love and would not be without the support of people near and far. First, I am grateful to God who made all of this possible in more ways than I can count. Thank you to my husband, Barrister Ukelina Beshel for working so hard and making sure to keep a roof over my head throughout. I am grateful for you. I deeply appreciate my wonderful parents, Dr. Okoreaffia and Professor Grace E. Okereke. I won the jackpot with you two as my parents. Thank you for your love, prayers and unflagging support that held me up through some of the most difficult periods in my life. I am grateful for all you have taught me.

I am especially grateful to my dissertation Chair Professor Zita C. Nunes, who championed both me and my work with such faith and joy, she continues to astonish me. I sincerely hope to do the same for someone else someday. Thank you to my other committee members: Professor Merle Collins, Professor Randy Ontiveros, Professor Jessica Enoch and Professor Fatemeh Keshavarz. You all brought much grace and blessing to both me and this project. A huge thank you to Professor Ted Leinwand whose gentle encouragement and kind words showed me a path forward at a very low point in my professional and personal life. I am also grateful for all my students over my years at UMD, College Park whose curiosity and attention lit and sustained the fire of my own teaching, learning and writing.

Thank you so much to my sisters, their husbands, my niece and nephews: Engineer Nsima and Mrs. Nene along with Inimfon Pearl and Ukobong Jesse Antia, Mr. Azuma and Dr. Nkechi along with Daniel Somtochukwu and Nicholas Ngozi Nwankwo; and finally my brother, Engineer Chinemere Okereke. I could not have done this without your love, care and kindness. I am also grateful to Professors Kelechi and Anthonia Kalu and family for their generous love and support throughout this journey- all of which began so long ago when I lived with them upon first arriving in the United States in 2001. Thank you to my many in-laws, both in Nigeria and here in Maryland. I am especially humbled by the expansive love of Dr. Akinsheye and the entire Beshel family, Professor Ashiwel, Dr. Amaka and the entire Undieh family. Thank you to Mr. Adi Emmanuel Adi for his faith, encouragement and constant willingness to assist me in rain, sun and snow. Thank you to Dr. Bekeh Utietiang also for his many prayers and open door that gave me much needed respite on occasion. And to my god daughter Precious Osinachi and her family, Engineer Emeka and Mrs. Margaret along with her sister Joy Dike, what a delight to have you in my life.

A deep and extended bow to my many “sisters” and friends who have loved, listened and held me: Stephanie Onyeforo and family, Rosemary and Godwin James and family, Dare Owolabi, Janelle Wells Opie and family, Paulette Campbell and family, Nabila Hijazi, Dr. Bernard Oniwe, Dr. Nicole Cesare, Dr. Megan Cole-Paustian, Dr. Gilbert Shang Ndi, Porter Olsen, Dr. Jeremy Metz, Dr. Sarah Bonnie Humud, and the wonderful Rakia Khalid and Dominique Young of Tawes 2230 whose cheer sustained and saw me through to the end. I love and appreciate you all and so many others I cannot list here. I am eternally grateful for all of you.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements……. ii

Table of Contents……. iii

Introduction: Immigrant Literacies …… 1

Chapter 1: Reading and Writing the City: Lagos in Teju Cole's *Everyday is for the Thief*……. 40

Chapter 2: Racial Literacies in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* ……. 85

Chapter 3: Propaganda Literacy in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* …. 136

Chapter 4: Local Literacies in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* …….175

Conclusion: Literacy for the Twenty-First Century ……. 209

Bibliography …… 214

Introduction: Immigrant Literacies

> Of course, Nigerians read. There are the readers of newspapers, such as the gentleman next to me. Magazines of various kinds are popular, as are religious books. But an adult reading a challenging work of literary fiction on Lagos public transportation: that's a sight rare as hen's teeth. The Nigerian literacy rate is low, estimated at fifty-seven percent. But worse, actual literary habits are inculcated in very few of the so-called literate. I meet only a small number of readers, and those few read tabloids, romance novels by Mills & Boon, or tracts that promise "victorious living" according to certain spiritual principles. It is a hostile environment for the life of the mind.
>
> -Teju Cole*, Everyday is for the Thief*.

Sitting in a Danfo Bus in Lagos, Nigeria, Cole's unnamed narrator experiences what can only be described as rapturous delight upon seeing a woman enter with a Michael Ondaatje book—not just any book but a "challenging work of fiction." Though one-sided and in the mind of the narrator, the intimacy that fiction offers him and the stranger, as they never meet or speak to each other, presumes their similar tastes in books means similar modes of appreciation. The narrator has faith in the woman's potential: "-What, lady, do you make of Ondaatje's labyrinthine sentences, his sensuous prose? How does his intense visuality strike you? But is it hard to concentrate on such poetry in Lagos

traffic, with the noise of the crowd, and the tout's body odor wafting over you? I see all those gathered here, and I believe in you most" (Cole 43). The narrator's imaginary conversation and the intertextual structure of Cole's novel points to a sea change in the shape and focus of African literacy that is being repeated across contemporary African literature.

While early generations of African writing focused on shaping a specific form of cultural literacy for the postcolonial future, new African writing has shifted its focus. With colonialism and the coming of European literacy that redefined African learning and valued forms of indigenous knowledge, cultural conflict dominated 20th century African literature. The works of twenty-first century writers like Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Atta, Chris Abani, Teju Cole, NoViolet Bulawayo, Brian Chikwava, Taiye Selasie, Petina Gappah, Chigozie Obioma, Nnedi Okorafor, Chika Unigwe who live in the West, reflect on the extended challenges of independence and globalization. In this postcolonial era, part of the challenge exists because African literacy did not lead to the boon of continental development that early writers imagined. As they redefined European knowledge systems that formed the foundations of colonialism and led the battle for independence, African writers envisioned a complete overhaul of the system with positive change for intellectuals, professionals and illiterates. But this is not what happened.[1] To find new routes to change, contemporary postcolonial migrant writers have reimagined African literacy with a specific focus on the diaspora. This study addresses the innovative ways of practicing literacy that these writers spotlight in their various novels.

---

[1] See, Neil Lazarus' "Great Expectations and after: The Politics of Postcolonialism in African Fiction." *Social Text*, vol. 13/14, 1986, pp. 49-63.

"Immigrant Literacies: Language and Learning in the African Diaspora Novel by Twenty-First Century Anglophone African Writers" examines the fiction of contemporary African Diaspora writers that introduces new tropes of reading and writing in narrating the experiences of African migrants to Europe and the United States. The writers who are the focus of this dissertation—Teju Cole, Chimamanda Adichie, Brian Chikwava and NoViolet Bulawayo— grapple with the difficulties of migration and its impact on preconceived notions of the self and the world. Each writer links the different pathways that their immigrant characters must take to multiple forms of teaching and learning that demonstrate that literacy is a contextual cultural practice that fosters social connection across the African Diaspora, even as it takes power relations into account.

Using the work of Brian Street and other New Literacy theorists, I explore four aspects of literacy as a socially embedded cultural practice in novels mainly about Nigerian and Zimbabwean immigrants in the United States and Britain. These theorists are key to my understanding of how revised attitudes to self in an expanded community are being developed in the contemporary African novel because they enable a shift in attention from learning to read and write in order to master a stable and transferrable set of skills to teaching and learning to read and write using a range of codes that characterize hybrid environments. Early criticisms of the African novel focused on the integration of written and oral forms in literature that would nurture a nationalist and postcolonial agenda. Twenty-first century African Diaspora literature expands these goals in demonstrating the transnational and transcultural evolution of both writing and orality. My dissertation organizes each chapter around an exemplary novel to argue that contemporary African novelists writing in English and living in and outside of Africa

address the defining question of literacy inherited from previous generations by suggesting that multiple and fluid forms of literacy characterize the experience of Africa in the context of migration in the Diaspora.

Beginnings: History of Literacy in Africa

Between 1958 and 1980, modern African writing was organized around cultural literacy. Concerned with the dismal lack in colonial representations of the culture and people of the continent, early African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Ayi K. Armah, and Buchi Emecheta wrote differently about Africa's precolonial past and its colonial present in anticipation of its postcolonial future. For Achebe, cultural literacy has been critical to countering the spiritual and psychical detritus of colonialism: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past- with all its imperfections- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (*Hopes and Impediments* 45). For Achebe especially, the African novel has a role to play in this process of teaching and learning.

Books and book learning symbolized Africa's entry into modernity and the spread of print capitalism, so eloquently discussed in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), helped to introduce an alien form of literacy that reorganized forms of learning and knowledge critical to the organization of the community. Where oral narratives, proverbs, song, and dance had previously been used to teach, entertain, record history etc., colonialism led to critical changes as African oral narratives became written

narratives and stories now had to include moral purpose. According to Ernest Emenyonu in *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (1978) the primary goal of folktales was didactic instruction and schools took over this primary purpose: children got moral instruction in the school; and in most cases, this instruction included formal religious studies. Schools had counselors who advised children directly on their behavior; and parents now had to talk to their children directly, punishing or rewarding them as the occasion demands, instead of having them learn through the morals of animal tales (16). In the colonial encounter, books, even in local languages, were organized around European/colonial ideas of what natives needed to know and the shape of that knowledge. Although directed at the Indian colonial situation, Thomas Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) defines the benefits of literacy organized in this manner for the colonial regime. According to Macaulay, the success of the colonial project would depend on forming

> a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (*Postcolonial Studies Reader* 375)

The African aspect of this sentiment is evident in the Zimbabwean situation where Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins noted that the founding of the first secondary school, Goromonzi Secondary School, in 1946 was to create an African middle class that would function as "cushion" between the white minority and the "native

masses" (*Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* 180). In this period of schooled literacy, the goal was religious instruction and the discipline it fostered right alongside a black defense force for white colonialists.

According to Neil ten Kortenaar in *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* (2011), much of early twentieth-century Africa is structured by literacy and the school system used to "inculcate it represented a new form of discipline intended to shape modern Christian subjects." The discipline of the school is evident in its environment which Kortenaar notes was intended to establish "a new kind of individual and new social relations among individuals" (25-26). Students left home and went to school sitting at "individual desks facing the flat surfaces of chalkboards and texts of instruction and individual assessment" (*Literacy as Involvement* 104). In *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics* (2007), Karin Barber emphasizes this arrangement of students and the strict discipline enforced when she notes that mission schools in Anglophone Africa "insisted on establishing rectangular schoolrooms with regular front-facing rows of forms which positioned the children as equivalent and attentive units before the instructor" (151). Sitting in such rigid rows eliminated the exuberant engagement that oral narratives inspired in the course of their performance thereby teaching children that quietness was necessary for engaging the written text that replaced the narrator by the fireside at home.

Founded in a context of Protestant Christianity and European classrooms, a Puritan ideology was central to the beginning of African literacy practice. According to Barber, the effect of using writing to teach Christianity and by extension foster African civilization reorganized not only ways of thinking but also relationships:

> Printed texts were agents of proselytisation which could go further and last longer than the spoken word of the preacher. Solitary reading was held to foster an introspective disposition and an individual spirituality based on conscience and private communication with God, central to Protestant theology. The reading habit was itself held to be conducive to civilization, and the development of a local literature was a sign that a culture was maturing and flowering. Through reading and writing, the missionaries fostered a new community, based not on kinship or indigenous hierarchies but on co-operation in a discursive sphere. (*Anthropology of Texts…* 150)

The development of an "introspective disposition" meant that the communities of teaching and learning integral to oral storytelling in traditional African societies gave way to more singular institutions and individual approaches to learning like the school and the novel that resulted in isolation. Therefore, not only did literacy bring "new cultural elements, new beliefs and moral values, new attitudes, new technological skills, new aspirations, new ideologies and new outlooks, which upset the equilibrium of the old traditional cultures" (Obiechina 33), it led to significant changes in how Africans understand civilization and progress.

In contrast to the Zimbabwean context where the initial goal of literacy was to create an education "'appropriate' to their surroundings" to avoid the estrangement of the colonial subjects,[2] literacy completely remade the West African landscape. According to

[2] Flora Viet-Wild writes that the first schools in Zimbabwe were conceived of as industrial schools combining theoretical instruction with practical work in craftsmanship and agriculture. In fact one pupil of those early schools, Ndabaningi Sithole wrote, "We erroneously held the view that education meant exemption from all forms of manual work; to us education meant reading books, writing and talking English, and doing arithmetic…To use one's hands to earn one's living, we thought, was below one's dignity…" (*Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* 46).

Emmanuel Obiechina in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (1975), literacy made it possible for the colonial administrations to bring various West African peoples together in a single frame of modern bureaucracy i.e.

> to introduce large-scale public works and social services such as roads, railways, air- and water transport; to organize scientific medicine, modern technology and the extensive use of machinery; and to cultivate new organs of mass communication and new forms of art, literature and leisure. (33)

Altogether, Obiechina notes that the literate tradition depends on "written records" and so "is more elaborative, exploratory and experimental than the oral tradition and leads to greater diversity of beliefs, sentiments and attitudes. It tends to produce greater skepticism than the oral tradition and is the basis of modern scientific progress. (*Culture, Tradition and Society…* 33). This form of civilization predicated on literacy led to new ideas about the nature of progress for the colonized. For literate Nigerians especially, being civilized meant morphing into "Black Victorians," literarily.

During a period of what Obiechina describes as "'Couriferism'—the uncritical imitation of Western customs" in life and literature, some Black "Englishmen" in the late 19th century and early 20th century dressed in Victorian garb and imitated the works of the colonialists in the form of "journals, diaries, newspapers, polemical pamphlets and amateur anthropological monographs" and showed total disdain for their own native art and literature (*Culture, Tradition and Society…* 11) While these colonial readers *adopted* what they learned from British literature during the colonial era, they did not adapt what

they learned into African modes of being or thought—instead they aimed to be like their European masters, practicing a civility like the one they encountered in literature.

According to Kortenaar, the European empires that carved up the Americas, Asia and then Africa viewed the Roman alphabet as the pinnacle of writing and the cornerstone of civilization. They viewed others, particularly in Africa and the Americas, without writing (a written record of the past), as being without history- without a consciousness of time, secular and linear. And according to colonial ideology, "peoples defined as without history were bound, first, to be ruled by the peoples who made history and, later, to embark on the same historical path forged by the history-makers" (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 13). The dangers of this historical path are evident in the isolation and alienation that has been the consequence of schooled literacy practices central to the idea of self-cultivation propelling education on the Continent. In fact as Kortenaar observes in "The Coming of Literacy: *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe," Oduche's isolation as he reads his primer while his mother and sister are outside telling stories sets him apart, carrying meaning: "In the hearth scene…his monopoly of the light of the taper, and his recitation of mysterious words make manifest to his family his privileged access to private sources of knowledge and authority" (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 24). Private sources of knowledge are valuable for how they replace traditional/communal sources thus giving form to ideas of literacy as the basis for scientific progress. In the essay "In Praise of Alienation" (1987), Abiola Irele recognizes these private sources of knowledge as useful for modernity, unlike the traditional/communal sources which form the "prison of the mythopoetic imagination" (216-217). For Irele, traditional communal sources have no explicit

directions for how to operate and, so stunt scientific growth. He argues that though modern imperialism was an act of "calculated aggression," Western civilization, in its contemporary manifestation, offers an aspirational paradigm of modernity ("In Praise of Alienation" 202).

The aspirational paradigm of modernity that Irele suggests is embedded in those texts that Macaulay so long ago proposed as the proper reading material for colonial natives. Writing in the 19th century about the benefits of the English language for colonial instruction, Macaulay noted the existence of plentiful works of the imagination in written form. In English, there were "models of every species of eloquence"; incomparable historical compositions that are fit "vehicles of ethical and political instruction"; just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and tradition—all of which prove that "whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations" (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 375). Macaulay has been more right than he could have imagined—especially in the African context.

The rapid spread of European imagery and culture through literature has meant that those who are literate are most likely to be first alienated from their African communities. Literacy created a vertical hierarchy of relations in African communities originally organized in primarily horizontal ways. According to J. Willinsky, imperialism divided and created notions of belonging with schooling determining one's location on the hierarchy (*Learning to Divide the World…* 244). Imperial forces worked to "possess" the world by 'displaying' and 'knowing' colonized cultures and peoples 'edified' by a

Western worldview (*Learning to Divide the World…* 19). It is this edification that Ezeulu, the Chief Priest and main character of Achebe's *Arrow of God*, seeks. But he wants the improvements provided by literacy without the trappings of subservience to colonial authority in that quintessential study of the dynamics of colonialism in Eastern Nigeria. It is this reshaping of the African imagination through literate means that has led to a counter in the critical pedagogical project of African literature, past and present, in its engagement of literacy.

The dominance of British literature in the development of literacy and reading habits for both colonial and postcolonial Africans is well documented. Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi, and others grew up on works such as the Bible and books written by Chaucer, Shakespeare, John Bunyan, Graham Greene, Charles Dickens, Jonathan Swift, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Buchan, T.S Eliot, W. B. Yeats, etc. Amongst the younger generation and even in some of the most difficult circumstances due to colonial policies against educating blacks, Zimbabwe's Dambudzo Marechera's search for reading material in a dump outside the city of Rusape, in Southern Rhodesia in the late fifties and early sixties results in his finding Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia* (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 164). While one consequence of this engagement with a prolific British imagination is that African literature began with writing back to the colonial center of Empire[3], there are other effects. Marechera's search for a book amidst refuse is a fitting image of the deficit African writers experienced in their communities during colonialism. It is this deficit that propelled their subsequent challenges to intellectual and material limits to African literacy in the diversity of books produced. Overall, it is the work of African writers in interrogating the meaning and value of the

[3] *The Empire Writes Back,* 1989.

many British texts encountered in both reading and writing that has laid part of the foundation for postcolonial studies today.

The steady presence of British and, more recently American, literature in Africa, is dramatized in the persistence of European imagery in works by more recent postcolonial writers like Chimamanda Adichie. In her talk on why it is critical to have a "balance of stories," Adichie notes that reading British literature while growing up led to a longing for snow and an ache for ginger beer.[4] Also the poet Shailja Patel recalls the British television programs that functioned as points of reference in her classroom in Kenya in *Migritude* (2008).[5] Africa's historical path to development as predicted in colonial ideology, in the assertion that people without history would be ruled by others and then later embark on the historical path of their rulers[6], has almost become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In their views of the development of the novel on the continent, Kortenaar, Irele, and Obiechina's ideas of the civilizing nature of literacy in Africa suggests literacy practices too much in line with the historical path forged by colonial history makers. In contrast, contemporary writers show that migration, with all its challenges, demands and fosters the creation of new literacy practices.

In the past, countering the intellectual adoption of European habits of mind and dress in early African literature included the use of oral forms of narrative in early African writing—a form of cultural literacy. And this use of oral narrative forms was to link to and recover African forms of socialization and organization overtaken by the

---

[4] Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," *TedGlobal,* July 2009.
[5] According to Patel in the "Shadow Book" of her poetry collection *Migritude*, when their British expatriate teacher asks the 11 year olds in his class why they use English names in their compositions instead of Kenyan names, one girl tells him, "That's what is in the books we read." However, it is not only foreign books that create an alternate literary reality, but also other media like American television sitcoms like *Dallas*, *Good Times* and *Diff'rent Strokes*. Children watch these shows at home and there encounter a store of images and ideas eventually replicated in their English composition assignments (*Migritude* 83).
[6] *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy,* 13.

colonial project. In *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy*, where he explores images of literacy in African and West Indian novels, Kortenaar writes that using oral sources enabled early African writers to establish continuity between their own writing and traditional oral story-telling forms:

> The writer's claim to a relation to oral tradition is a familiar move in African literature: the first two generations of African novelists and poets regularly sought to establish such continuities by writing down oral traditions or by creating styles that reflected qualities of the oral tradition. The rubrics of Léopold Sédar Senghor's poems indicate that they are to be accompanied by the kora or the balafong, that is, by music. Achebe's historical novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* feature a proverb-laden style that echoes Igbo oratory and traditional narrative. (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 9)

This continuity between writing and traditional oral forms has caused theorists like Ruth Finnegan, Irele, Liz Gunner, Eileen Julien, and Olakunle George[7], among others, to insist on the complementarity of oral and written literature on the continent in contrast to arguments by theorists like Jack Goody and Walter Ong who associate Africa with orality and Europe with writing, thereby implying the lack and absence of a historicizing consciousness in the former. While this work is not actually concerned with the debate between the value of oral sources and written sources in African literature, it is critical to

[7] See Ruth Finnegan's *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa*. James Currey, 2008; Abiola Irele's *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora,* Oxford University Press, 2002; Liz Gunner's "Africa and Orality", *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature,* edited by F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 1-18; Eileen Julien's *African Novels and the Question of Orality*, Indiana University Press, 1992; Olakunle George's "Achebe's *Arrow of God*. *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2005, pp. 344-362.

note that this linking of literacies, with the translation of primarily oral habits of mind to writing is a significant merging of African modes of communication, education, entertainment and record keeping with European forms. More importantly, this merging signifies an expansion in the literacy practices of African writers and readers with peculiar impact on the current shape of African literacy. It is necessary to the development of the African novel that every reader, African and non-African, learns to read and recognize oral narrative forms within written African literature and vice versa.

Part 2: Bringing the World into the African Novel

The legacy of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as the first modern African novel is in how it showed a different kind of literacy in both the form and content of the novel (a form borrowed from Europe). In contrast to earlier African novels that either retold European narratives in the vernacular,[8] or adapted African language folktales into an unauthorized version of English,[9] *Things Fall Apart* told a contemporary story (for its time) in English. And it also did something else: the novel successfully included words in the author's vernacular/mother tongue without overly contradicting the legitimacy of English as authorized language of literature. Therefore, while the use of vernacular words, proverbs and anecdotes served to contaminate the purity of the colonial language, which symbolized a model education, Achebe's novel showed the possibility of using the language without ignoring local traditions or modes of communication—a novel tradition that continues to be in use today. It is a style of writing that has significantly marked the

[8] D. O. Fagunwa's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons, 1938.*
[9] Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm Wine Tapster in the Dead's Town, 1952.*

immigrant novel in particular ways as it often reveals the local, and sometimes invisible, discourses at work in the text.

Early critical responses to Achebe's novel were two-fold, it was either praise or dislike. African postcolonial literary critics like Simon Gikandi have noted that several of those early readers interpreted narrative practice in Achebe's novels as evoking new forms of expression and proposing new oppositional discourse[10] and European critics initially saw his work as unintelligible.[11] However, Gikandi's view has become the prevailing mode of exploring Achebe's works evident in the countless studies on the importance of its language and structure. Indeed, the significance of the textual and dialogical gymnastics in Achebe's work, and other African writing in similar mode, is in its implicit requirement that readers unfamiliar with the vernacular language or codes of communication actively seek meaning in order to understand the narratives and engage them critically. In the postcolonial era, this practice has been a significant tool in the anticolonial arsena— a way bringing the African world into the novel form.

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy, or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977) is another example of the active incorporation of oral narrative performance styles in a written text. The prose-poem centers on the experiences of the protagonist, Sissie and her growth into a self-aware and vocal critic of the new African elites, intellectuals formed at the colonial metropoles supposedly in service of their home countries. Sissie's journey to Germany first and later to England is an occasion for several lessons on race relations even as it dramatizes the figure of the African intellectual at the beginning of the

[10] *Reading the African Novel*, Heinemann, 1987.
[11] *The Empire Writes Back,* 125.

postcolonial era. Often billed as the reverse of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,[12] Sissie's assessment of what she sees and hears during her journeys signals the challenges of the intellectuals shaped in a primarily alien environment.

Mostly described by critics as experimental, the prose-poem-novel is divided into four chapters in a mix of prose and poetry known as *fefewo,* an Ewe word that "signifies the totality of a storytelling event—performance *and* reception" (*The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo…* 185). According to Vincent O. Odamtten, the value of a *fefewo* is the fact that the "total narrative performance does not end with the telling of one particular episode or story but goes on to involve the audience-reader in a total aesthetic and ideological critical experience. Thus… these stories seek to facilitate 'interminable palavers' occasioned by their (ir)resolution" (*The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo…* 82). The interminable palavers are evident in the cacophony of voices that dominates the pages of the prose-poem-novel in both monologues and dialogues. To emphasize the difference in the voices that crisscross the text, Cheryl Sterling notes correctly that there are multiple, polyphonic passages that capture the narrator's shifting subjectivity and these passages are "often rendered through a capricious narrative voice that corresponds with and responds to the dialogue and action of the characters."[13] *Our Sister Killjoy* is one of the earliest and most successful attempts by an African writer to combine and transcribe a mix of communal discourse, oral narrative and song into book form for individual consumption in private. Indeed, I agree with Gay Wilentz who describes the text as a prose-poem that "reverberates with sounds of the orature in the written language and personal dialogue—

---

[12] See Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo", *The Massachusetts Review*, Spring 1995, pp. 122-33; Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *African Fiction and Joseph Conrad*, State University of New York Press, 2005.

[13] "Can You Really See through a Squint? Theoretical Underpinnings in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy,"* 133.

illustrating Aidoo's comment that 'we don't always have to write for readers, we can write for listeners' …"[14] It is an exemplary attempt to expand the limits of the Western novel form and the African oral narrative form in the postcolonial era while interrogating the African adoption of European literary forms.

While cultural literacy has led to the development of non-Western postcolonial critiques of novels like Aidoo's, Achebe's and other minority writings in the halls of academia and across the globe thereby creating new parameters for intercultural relations and literary criticism, it has been quite limited. Cultural literacy has fostered a postcolonial practice of criticism that often focuses on the hegemonic and oppressive nature of Western engagements with Africa, literarily and otherwise. Examples of such criticism are often directed at the British literature that formed writers like Achebe and Ngugi- books read at leisure that "smacked of one-time cultural subordination" i.e. H. Rider Haggard's *Allain Quatermain*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *She*. Others were integral to African school curriculums like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. As Edward Said points out, these narratives serve to confirm and celebrate the success of the imperial undertaking (*Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes* 174-175). However, despite the anticolonial criticism against some of these works by writers like Achebe,[15] Ngugi,[16] Said and Micere Mugo, Robert Fraser notes that common audiences loved them, therefore demonstrating the "willingness of common readers to dissemble such texts and reassemble them according to a logic- often a political logic of their own making" (*Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes* 175). Such reassembling by

[14] "The Politics of Exile: Reflections of A Black-Eyed Squint in *Our Sister Killjoy*" in *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo,* 82.
[15] Achebe on Conrad in Interview with Bill Moyers, *A World of Ideas, Sep. 29, 1988.*
[16] Ngugi on British literature in his classroom in *Decolonising the Mind*, 1986, 12.

ordinary readers and, by professionals too, underscore the socially embedded nature of African literacy practices and the choice that readers bring to how they receive a text.

The socially embedded practice of literacy is an ideological model of literacy developed by Brian Street in his seminal *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984). In contrast to the autonomous model argued for by Goody, which holds that literacy fosters progress, civilization, individual liberty and mobility, Street argues that the ideological model reveals the cultural nature of literacy practices. In this model, understanding the general social institutions where literacy socialization takes place is critical to understanding the particular construction of literacy for an individual or community.[17] The influence of institutions in the development of literacy practice is a crucial aspect of Obiechina's *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel.* Writing of the Black Victorians, Obiechina notes their keen attachment to "sedate and 'respectable' professions, such as medicine, law and Christian ministry…" In terms of literary interests, these Victorians "shared the puritan suspicion of fiction as ineffectual, frivolous, even morally subversive" (*Culture, Tradition and Society* 11). This distrust of fiction has continued to plague the African reading scene as the socially embedded nature of literacy practices in Nigeria and Zimbabwe is rooted in colonial literacy, and in two specific institutions—the church and the school.

For example, in response to a question by *The Times Literary Supplement* Achebe's 1972 essay, "What do African Intellectuals Read," examines reading habits in Nigeria. In the essay, Achebe notes that in contrast to the European residents of Enugu, in Eastern Nigeria where he lived at the time, who read fiction, poetry, drama etc., Africans read history, economics, mathematics, etc. No African went to the library in search of

[17] *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 2.

"literary pleasure."[18] The narrator in *Everyday is for the Thief* echoes this trend when he goes into the biggest bookstore in Lagos and notices that the largest section is devoted to 'inspirational' and Christian books—a woman comes in to buy a Bible while he is there—and, the shelf for fiction is small and "other than a few tattered copies of plays by Shakespeare and Soyinka, all that is available is a handful of recently published novels…." There are no books by Nigerian based writers, no international literary fiction and no poetry (Cole 116-117). This lack of fictional reading culture is also the subject of Wendy Griswold's sociological study of reading habits in Nigeria *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers and the Novel in Nigeria* (2000). In the forty plus years between both Achebe and Cole's narrative observations, the development of Nigerian literacy practices primarily follows the ideological model established during colonialism—religious literacy comes first with professional literacy a close second.

Professional and religious literacy are readily identifiable in the kinds of reading material participants engage. In Achebe's essay, readers of history, economics and mathematics are usually doing so for their jobs, for purposes of improving skill or gaining promotion. And religious readers are interested in the salvation of their souls—the Bible is usually the preferred text and religious tracts follow closely in a practical engagement that connects the Bible to everyday life situations. Other kinds of ideological literacies in the form of schooled literacy aim to create and foster discipline. But still other kinds of literacy practices have made their appearance in contemporary immigrant novels, novels marked by the migratory patterns of both the writers and their subjects.

To assess these literacy practices, my work here is organized around the following questions: with Brian Street's idea of the socially embedded literacy practice as central

[18] *Morning Yet on Creation Day.* Heinemann, 1975.

organizing vision, what literacy practices emerge in the various spaces of immigrant novels? How do these literacy practices underscore the particular ideologies of the institutions at the heart of these novels? Following Karin Barber's point on the discursive communities created with the emergence of print texts, what are the new discursive communities of these multimodal novels, and how do the communities complicate subjectivity? How do the characters negotiate their new discourse communities, and what is the effect of this negotiation on their communities both old and new?

Investigating the development of new literacies in the margins in contemporary immigrant novels is an appropriate way of engaging the life and educational complications that such novels usually foreground. On the whole, immigrants, especially African immigrants who move to the West, have to be re-educated in a variety of ways despite prior educational history especially if it is a permanent move. The peculiar literacy requirements of these new beginnings in culture, language and education point to what Street has identified as socially embedded literacy practices whereby different locations and cultures require a different social practice (*Literacy in Theory and Practice)*. The idea of "literacy practices," in use here, refers to "both behavior and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing" *Social Literacies…* 2) For literacy theorists, David Barton and Mary Hamilton whose work develops Street's more explicitly, literacy practices are the "general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives" and a "powerful way of conceptualising the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape" (7).

In their chapter on "Literacy Practices," in *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (2000), Barton and Mary Hamilton aim to show the link between literacy and the social world in terms of "what people do with literacy" (7), using six propositions that illuminate the nature of literacy. Although not all six propositions will be used in this dissertation, the first proposition is foundational to all my readings of the novels. For the remaining five propositions on the nature of literacy, the key features of each will be listed and described briefly here. In the chapters, particular propositions will be used to investigate the varied and complicated ideas of literacy that have emerged in the recent immigrant novels at the center of this study.

According to Barton and Hamilton, the first proposition is that "Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts" (Barton and Hamilton 8). Events are intimately connected to literacy practice with 'Literacy events' defined as 'any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes'. As a matter of fact, literacy practices "incorporate not only 'literacy events', as empirical occasions in which literacy is integral, but also folk models of those events and ideological preconceptions that underpin them" (*Social Literacies*… 2). This proposition underscores the situated and social nature of literacy which is crucial for understanding how social connections are shaped by and also shape literacy. The second proposition is that "There are different literacies associated with different domains of life." And the third proposition about the nature of literacy specifies that, "Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others." The fourth proposition says,

"Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices." And the fifth holds that, "Literacy is historically situated." Finally, in the sixth proposition, "Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making" (Barton and Hamilton 8).

One proposition that will be used in reading Adichie's *Americanah,* for example, highlights the idea that there are different literacies connected to different domains of life. In the novel, migrating and beginning again is not just in professional terms, it is also in learning new languages and discourse habits for shopping, for making friends, talking to family, schooling, sharing intimacy etc. On one occasion, the main character Ifemelu is told by her Aunt Uju not to speak Igbo (their native language) to her son, Dike, as it would confuse him. Meanwhile, Aunty Uju and Ifemelu had grown up speaking both English and Igbo in Nigeria. Furthermore, Ifemelu becomes "black" in America- a phenomenon that requires a new register of language and thought physically and mentally to comprehend. Unlike earlier immigrant novels like Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) or Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), where the protagonists remain exotic visitors that entertain and are to be entertained by the host cultures, the immigrant characters in Adichie's novel must learn to switch between multiple registers and multiple identities connecting and reconnecting with others in society as needed in order to survive.

The same phenomenon of learning a new mode of speaking occurs in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names.* In the novel, the protagonist Darling modifies her Zimbabwean accent after witnessing the drama of her Aunt Fostalina trying to order lingerie from a Victoria's Secret catalogue over the phone. These are occasions that

highlight what Leela Gandhi argues is the invisibility of difference in the face of the uncritical universalistic notions of community that is based on sameness.[19] The various changes to communication habits that characters make to challenge this invisibility can reinforce or undermine the power-laden structures of speaking, reading and writing experienced by minorities in the West. Although I will be discussing how immigrant minorities deal with this situation in relation to the dominant culture, I am also interested in what immigrant minorities learn to modify informally in relation to other minority groups where they live. Therefore, a different aspect of the nature of literacy in the social world guides the reading of Darling as she readjusts to her new environment. She uses literacy practices acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making in daily life to establish a place for herself in her new community.

Unlike colonial writing about the escapades of British explorers in Africa, the turn towards other parts of the world, occasioned by globalization and immigration has led to literacy practices that articulate what Gayatri Spivak has called the "double bind". In Spivak's formulation, the contradictory instructions that structure human life have great potential especially in the imaginary. For example, "the training of the imagination that can teach the subject to play—an aesthetic education- can also teach it to discover (theoretically or practically) the premises of the habit that obliges us to transcendentalize religion and nation*" (An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* 10). In other words, the play of the imagination can facilitate the re-assembly of the ideas central to foundational institutions that structure human behavior for both good and evil.

The idea of the double bind in terms of immigrant literacies points to the tensions of living in a new home with an identity forged in the "fires" of a previous home. As

[19] *Affective Communities: Anti-Colonial Thought*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Isaac Ndlovu puts it in "Ambivalence of Representation: African Crises, Migration and Citizenship in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names,*" the novel is structured around "binaries constitutive of some recent fiction by diasporic writers who simultaneously (sic) construct identities that repudiate and also affirm attachment to African origins" (141). This double bind, present in all the novels in this study, informs how migrant characters negotiate the social context of their literacies—choosing to tell one story over another, choosing to read to read/write or not in contexts where the "stereotypes about Africa also stubbornly cling onto Africans in developed foreign lands" ("Ambivalence of Representation: African Crises, Migration and Citizenship in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*" 141). In this turn, contemporary African writers are also reflecting on more horizontal relationships, primarily relationships among/between minorities. In their tales about immigrant lives, Cole, Adichie, Chikwava and Bulawayo focus on transitions that promote borderless ideas of literacy in the service of social change. Being borderlesss in this context refers to the sense that status and level of education does not matter. These are literacy experiences primarily determined by the cultural outsider status of the participants. Protagonists practice a mobile literacy that illuminates the lives of and connects those in the margins of American and British society.

Studying the literacy practices of immigrants is to examine the ways in which members of the New African Diaspora read and write amidst new and generally expansive social connections in new communities. My concept of immigrant literacy is similar to Vèvè A. Clark's notion of "Diaspora Literacy. Aimed at foreigners and newcomers to African or Caribbean culture especially, "Diaspora Literacy" explores the

importance of allusion in defining who has "the ability to read and comprehend the discourses of Africa, Afro-America and the Caribbean from an informed, indigenous perspective."[20] My formulation of immigrant literacies relates rather to those African immigrants who, though relatively acquainted with the Western world to which they move, must nevertheless learn, absorb and perform new reading and writing practices.

Immigrant literacy reveals how the form and language of the African novel expresses these emergent reading and writing practices forged during the process of migration and while living in the new community. With the huge numbers of Africans who have voluntarily migrated to the West in the twentieth-century, it is important to understand how this move has changed the practice of literacy for them. In the United States, African immigrants share African American identity, but cannot share in the collective memory of transatlantic slavery which gave rise to the racial discrimination sanctioned with Jim Crow laws. This specific context demands an investigation into the kinds of literacies that become important to African characters and how they make a choice. And in the British context, the legacies and influence of a settler colonialism and neocolonialism shapes reading and writing in both expected and unexpected ways as characters move into London.

The often-permanent move to the West by Africans has occasioned the thematic and structural shift from cultural literacy to world literacy in the African novel outside the continent. This move, legal and illegal, mirrors the movement of Europeans in Africa that fostered the growth of cultural literacy on the continent. There is, however, a key difference; these contemporary travelers usually believe they know the culture of the West and are eager to practice what they know as they travel. In contemporary African

[20] See, Vèvè A. Clark's "Developing Diaspora Literacy: Allusion in Maryse Conde's *Heremakhonon*", 304.

novels, the desire for migration is often rooted in the reading habits of the characters—characters enamored with what Kortenaar describes as "alternative worlds available for contemplation, a broadening of horizons" (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 19). Unlike the reading fare in earlier African writing which primarily consisted of British literature and poetry with occasional European texts, characters read what could be generalized as world literature: a variety from Mills and Boon romances, James Hadley Chase, Ondaatje, W.H. Auden, Tomas Tranströmer, Gabriel García Márquez, Jean Toomer, Vikram Seth to magazines, blog posts, text messages, TV shows like *ER*, *Roots, Fresh Prince of Bel Air, Cosby Show* etc. These are encounters that point to the institutional and media contexts of literacy that shape the protagonists in the novels. They also mark the often dramatic reshaping of life in the diaspora as things are of course not what they seem in the books or on television once they have moved. Ultimately, the characters get to learn and practice new literacies, immigrant literacies.

The patterns of literacy practice in these immigrant novels range from reading and writing for survival to reading and writing for pleasure and everything in between. As migrants in new cultures, survival often means alienation. Practicing a literacy of alienation often involves cutting off some or all relations with those at home. In all the novels, the characters at one point or another during their transitions into their new lives find that they can no longer continue to link fate and fortune with home as it prevents them from moving forward. One by one, each comes to this realization and cuts ties.

Cole's narrator in *Everyday is for the Thief* cuts ties with his mother and also with his relatives when he moves to the United States. Although he reconnects with his relatives upon return to Nigeria after 15 years, he does not feel any need to reconnect

with his mother who ironically lives in the United States albeit in California while he resides in New York. Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah* stops writing and speaking to her childhood love after a particularly difficult experience of job hunting as a student in a Philadelphia university. The narrator in Chikwava's *Harare North* is actually on the run from the police in his native Zimbabwe as he skips bail after a crime. Although at first he keeps in touch to assure those who have vouched for him of his commitment to paying his debts, after a while he begins to minimize contact. And for Darling, in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, on one occasion she walks away from a Skype conversation with her friends at home and never returns—it is a moment that marks the beginning of the end of conversations that had been precious at the beginning.

In her book, *Literacy as Involvement*, Deborah Brandt notes a key adjustment in literacy learning that our characters put into practice to succeed: "literacy is not a matter of learning how to go it alone with language but learning how to go it alone with each other. It is not a matter of learning how statements stick together but rather how people stick together through literate means" (6). In the novels at the center of this study, Cole's *Everyday is for the Thief*, Adichie's *Americanah*, Chikwava's *Harare North* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, sticking together through a variety of literacy mechanisms involves new technologies beyond the book that influence new relationships. Through these novels, the forging of alliances and the development of community around the world come into focus.

Part 3: And Now…the African Novel in the World

According to Cole's narrator in *Everyday is for the Thief*, literacy rates in Africa have reached dismal lows especially in Nigeria, esteemed Giant of Africa. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 2015 data for world literacy, Nigeria is at 59.6% overall with women at 49.7% and men at 69.2%. In contrast, Zimbabwe has some of, if not, the highest numbers of literates in Africa overall at 86.5%; women at 84.6% and men at 88.5%.[21] As the native countries of the writers at the center of this study who now live in either Britain or the United States, Nigeria and Zimbabwe share a history of British colonialism but with very different arrangements: colonialists settled in Zimbabwe while Nigeria experienced what was primarily a system of indirect rule. After Nigeria's independence in 1960 and Zimbabwe's in 1980, both countries had high literacy rates that have been in decline since the structural adjustment programs for debt repayment imposed by the World Bank in the 1990s. In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (*WNNN*), the chapter "How They Left" marks a break in the narrative as the protagonist moves from the squatter settlement "Paradise" in Zimbabwe to "Destroyedmichygen" in the United States and dramatizes the decline of her home country:

> Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with ambitions are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Those in pain are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing- to all over, to countries

[21] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_literacy_rate

> near and far, to countries unheard of, to countries whose names they cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves. (*WNNN* 147)

This description of leaving is applicable to most countries on the continent. Plagued by political and economic mismanagement resulting in crumbling educational infrastructures and the massive emigration of its populace, it is the literal and metaphorical brain drain that engenders new literacies at home and abroad in the contemporary African novel.

While Zimbabwe's literacy numbers are particularly surprising, Chikwava's 2009 *Harare North* and Bulawayo's 2013 novel portray a very dim view of reading, writing or schooling of any kind: a state of affairs that also has its roots in the colonial era. According to Kortenaar, writing on paper in Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe) was the "direct tool of the totalitarian racist state" therefore, "the connotations of reading and writing are more bitter than anything encountered in West Africa" (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 8-9). During the period of white minority rule, after Britain had relinquished formal colonialism, the racist policies of Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front in the 1960s were such that blacks were not to be educated. It is an experience captured in Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978) where the "only new consciousness fostered by literacy and literary ambitions is a bitter awareness that the world has been written by others. He experiences writing on paper as a House of Hunger or a prison-house to which there is no outside" (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 9). It is also an experience echoed in Tsitsi Dangaremgba's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), set in the colonial era, where the excitement of learning to read and write for the illiterate Tambu is countered by the growing awareness of her British educated cousin Nyasha that

it is all lies that she has been reading and there is not much hope for substantial change in the world.

These visceral reactions to literacy are further underscored by the fact that education has not actually produced any significant gains despite the numbers of people becoming educated. Specifically, the high numbers of literate people reported by UNESCO is undermined by hyperinflation in the country, lack of resources, lack of skilled jobs and brain drain as people leave the country for inability to care for themselves and their families.[22] According to David F. Johnson, whose essay focuses on educational policy and vocational training in Zimbabwe, the deracialization in education that occurred with independence simply meant the movement of black townships into previously white only areas—a process of re-zoning that did not translate into economic power. Instead, it separated children from the "economic, political and ideological trajectories of their families and communities."[23] There has been no effort to transform the material and ideological basis for education as research shows that the curriculum remains inextricably tied to the colonial ideology of racial superiority with education focused on preparing students for menial tasks in society. This mindset is borne out in Chikwava's *Harare North*, in which the narrator was a "shoe doctor" before being recruited for the Green Bombers, Robert Mugabe's youth militia. As part of the militia, he leads his comrades in punishing a member of the opposition because he knows "heaps

[22] Zimbabwe's demographic profile in the CIA World Factbook shows that in the 1990s and 2000s, economic mismanagement and hyperinflation led to a second, more diverse wave of emigration to other Southern African countries, the U.K. and the U.S. Factors that have caused highly skilled workers to emigrate include "unemployment, lower wages, a lack of resources, and few opportunities for career growth while creating problems like "brain drain, illegal migration, and human smuggling and trafficking" (The World Factbook "Zimbabwe").

[23] "The Politics of Literacy and Schooling in Zimbabwe" *Review of African Political Economy,* vol. 48, 1990, 100.

of history" (19);history lessons characterized by lies and inaccuracy.[24] And in Bulawayo's novel, the children just wander the streets of Paradise, their squatter settlement.

In a 1990 interview, Fay Chung, then Minister for Education and Culture in Zimbabwe, was asked by Lloyd Sachikonye if the contemporary ideology guiding education in the country would be viable for either building socialism or the achievement of self-reliance. Chung's response is informative:

> The ideology of the middle classes retains strong elements of what may be termed 'Rhodesian' or 'settler' culture. This is a strong consumerist ideology. It is individualistic and acquisitive. The *nouveau riche* amongst the middle classes also acquire these consumerist tendencies. A strong intellectual culture seems to be lacking.[25]

Her response highlights some of the consequences of a socially embedded literacy informed by colonial culture. Although she is speaking in the postcolonial era, as Zimbabwe is no longer under formal British or foreign rule, Chung's comment echoes the point made by Ndabaningi Sithole in1959, when he noticed that educated blacks desired the things associated with colonial education: reading books, writing and talking English, doing arithmetic, "exemption from all forms of manual work" (*Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* 46). In other words, education included pre-established privileges that the white settlers enjoyed which the newly

---

[24] In the novel, the narrator tells the story of how in the 1890s "them British fat stomachs grab our land, pegging farms by riding horse until it drop dead; that just mark only one side of the farm boundary and that's where the corner peg go" (*Harare North* 19).

[25] "Strains and Stresses in the Zimbabwean Education System: An Interview with Fay Chung, Minister of Education and Culture" 80.

educated blacks also wanted to enjoy. And in the postcolonial era, some people measure the benefits of education in terms of what it provides in material wealth.

In *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education* (1995), Brian Street has also noted how the culture of those with literacy becomes more important than the skills acquired in his study of the ideological foundations of literacy in the context of colonialism. According to Street,

> For social groups with virtually no prior exposure to literacy it is likely that the dominant feature of acquisition will be not so much the consequences of literacy *per se* but the impact of the culture on the bearers of that literacy. By definition, literacy is being transferred from a different culture, so that those receiving it will be more conscious of the nature and power of that culture than of the mere technical aspects of reading and writing. Very often this process has involved some transfer of 'western' values to a non-western society. (30)

As Johnson points out, building more schools did not necessarily translate into the sort of critical self-awareness and interest in self-cultivation and subsequent innovations and improvement in society that education was supposed to promote in Zimbabwe. And from the aforementioned, it is clear that the postcolonial population simply adopted aspects of colonial ideology in relation to the expected benefits of education. Specifically, the citizenry adopted ideas of racial superiority and consumerism, ideals that are also at the heart of the Zimbabwean presidency as seen in its failed political and economic policies and now also present in the literature. This development, which is a consequence of the social conditions in which literacy has been taught, points again to some of the ways it is

indeed possible to skip steps in the "progressive" path of acquiring historical consciousness delineated by the colonialists. It also points to the fact that bypassing elements of that imported historical path can produce unwanted results. The question now is how immigrant novels by Zimbabwean writers engage with and complicate these impulses.

For the narrator in Chikwava's novel, his feelings of racial superiority give him power as a youth militia meting out justice to enemies of the Zimbabwean state - a situation that subsequently leads to his exile. It also underscores his arrogance when he runs to London, Harare North which he sees as an extension of the Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare. As Kizito Muchemwa puts it, "the title of Chikwava's novel is about reconfiguring the coordinates of both a physical city and ideas of home and belonging. It is about the scattering of populations, the migration and complication of the idea of home and its reassembling in memory."[26] As seen in the language, which filters his experience in the novel, the narrator signifies his refusal to be co-opted and corrected into assimilation. All he wants is to earn enough money and go home and so unlike other immigrants in the novels in this study, the narrator never fits into his new society. By the end of the novel, he steals the identity of his friend but seems to have lost his mind as he is last seen wandering the streets of London with his suitcase.

In contrast to the well-educated protagonists in the novels by West African immigrants, the protagonists in Chikwava and Bulawayo are barely literate: they know how to read and write; but, their language competency points to the lower quality of their education. Both narratives occur in ungrammatical/broken English- a situation that is particularly significant for thinking through how language mediates identity while

[26] "Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities…", 402.

challenging ideas of what it means to be literate. According to Ndlovu in "Language and Audience in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009),"

> There is a long held utilitarian view in countries where English is the official language but not the mother tongue of the majority of citizens that reading novels written in English can improve one's command of that language. *Harare North's* use of Broken English complicates this notion. The narrative indicates that mastery of the English language or lack of it, has significant consequences for those who migrate to Britain. (31)

As a matter of fact, Ndlovu's point is also true in the context of the United States that is the setting for Bulawayo's novel. However, while the protagonist in *Harare North* is not interested in changing or improving his language, the protagonist in *We Need New Names* changes significantly. Still, both narratives seem determined to escape the boundaries of language, undermining ideas of proper ways to write or communicate.

According to Street, the achievement of literacy is accompanied by "ways of thinking, cognitive abilities, facility in logic, abstraction and higher order mental operations," things that all denote a strong intellectual culture. However, the lack of a "strong intellectual culture" does not conclusively preclude the development of critical self-awareness as literacy does not necessarily lead to the development of critical thought. Street argues that contrary to the literacy theories of educators and developers, anthropologists and sociolinguists have found that meta-linguistic awareness, the degree of self-consciousness about language, is not tied to literacy. In places where people are in contact with or speak a variety of languages, "they are likely to have developed a language for talking about language, to be aware of the different kinds of speech (and

writing) and of the subtlety of meaning in different contexts" (*Social Literacies*… 21-22). This occurrence allows Street to reject the "great divide" theory of literacy which sees illiterates as fundamentally different from literates. However, his point also directs attention to a situation particularly unique to immigrant literacies: for both literate and illiterate immigrants in immigrant novels, there is an awareness of how language can be used to talk about another language while being highly conscious of the subtleties of meaning in different contexts.

One example of how immigrants are highly conscious of subtleties in language and its effect on meaning is in *We Need New Names*. In the chapter "How They Lived" which is a counter narrative to "How They Left," Darling details the performance of subjectivity in response to stereotypes while living outside that immigrants often make:

> And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47s between women's legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them put in prison and all, there where they are dying of cholera—oh my God, yes, we've seen your country; it's been on the news. (*WNNN* 239-240)

The globalization of media stereotypes of the continent is such that the narrator "takes hold" of the expected response implied in the questions and behaves accordingly. Much like in Chung's comment, the narrator is as much a consumer as anyone else and in the anonymity of this passage risks being "consumed" by his/her Western interlocutor. It is a moment that raises the question of how choice works in literacy practice: what choices does an immigrant have in how he/she practices literacy?

From the foregoing, it is clear that the development of African literacy has always been in response to something or the other with middle class literates as arbiters of proper and improper kinds of literacy. In opposition to the Puritan beginnings of African literacy, where schooled literacy was modeled on European ideas of reading for self-cultivation and discipline, the reading of fiction and the pleasure associated with this kind of reading is portrayed as superior to other kinds of reading and thus more desirable for literacy practice i.e. *Everyday is for the Thief* and *Americanah*. But the other kinds of reading and writing that occur are also legitimate and indeed challenge those ideas of what is proper and appropriate in literacy practice i.e. *Harare North* and *We Need New Names*. This study consists of an Introduction, four Chapters and a Conclusion that explores the ways these novels mobilize various ideas of literacy to promote different agendas. In these novels, immigrants develop and use forms of literacy that will enable their success in new communities; while also facilitating a process of growth and change that becomes resistance.

Chapter 1, "Reading and Writing the City: Lagos in Teju Cole's *Everyday is for the Thief*," explores the narrator's inadvertent learning and documentation of a literary and historical consciousness gathered in his exploration of the city of his childhood. In

what seems like an attempt to objectify the city and its inhabitants through writing, the narrator of Cole's novel is obsessed with the general lack of writing. Paradoxically, the narrator ends up ends up writing the cultural history and the lives of Lagosians while wandering the city. While the narrator of Chikwava's novel sees everything in London through a filter of his life in Zimbabwe, the narrator in Cole's novel sees everything in Lagos through a filter of his life in Europe and America—he is an Afropolitan flâneur. In this chapter, I explore the social institutions and power relationships in the novel that make some literacies visible even while hiding others. Here, Achebe and Grisworld's ideas of the literary and its usefulness for shaping habits of mind and thought are on full display. In the novel, the imported ideas of the narrator about what Nigerians should know and how they should know it suggests that historical records are necessary for progress and the development of consciousness.

Chapter 2 explores "Racial Literacies in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah.*" In this novel where the familiarity of home and hearth is exchanged for the unfamiliarity of immigrant life in America, it suggests answers to the question of how writing mediates immigrant subjectivity while providing access. Moving between Nigeria, America and Britain, the novel dramatizes the benefits and complications of multimodal literacy practices that emerge with location. As a strong female character used to speaking her mind and getting her own way, the protagonist Ifemelu quickly learns that she has to adopt and adapt new ways of communication to successfully navigate institutions like school, work, family and intimate relationships as a Non-American Black. In *Americanah*, the idea of assimilation and its centrality to success in the American context is complicated by the invisibility it simultaneously engenders.

Chapter 3 focuses on "Propaganda Literacy in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North."* The ex-youth militia and Mugabe loyalist, seeking asylum in London, who is the unnamed narrator in this novel exposes the dog-eat-dog life of the legal and illegal immigrant. As Street argues, although illiterates are presumed to lack all the qualities of literates, "to be able to think less abstractly, to be more embedded, less critical, less able to reflect upon the nature of the language they use or the sources of their political oppression,"[27] it would be a mistake to imagine that they are "backward" or "ignorant." In a mix of Zimbabwean pidgin, Nigerian pidgin and Caribbean creole, the language of the novel creates and consolidates a pan-African immigrant identity that challenges the non-Africans, immigrant "lapsed Africans" and, immigrant non-lapsed Africans the narrator encounters in London. Furthermore, while the language of the novel effectively conveys the weight of the narrator's experience, it is also a cover that allows the narrator to manipulate not just the people around him in the narrative, but the reader as well. The narrator uses language to hide his contempt for people in his community and his valiant efforts to sabotage various institutions in the novel—the State and its institutions like immigration, home (signified by the house he shares with other immigrants), extended family and friends, his employers. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which purposeful literacy practices are "embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices."[28]

Chapter 4, titled "Local Literacies in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*," examines how a variety of literacy practices outside familiar institutional contexts work in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. In this novel, the lack of schooled literacy that has considerably shielded the lives of the characters in the earlier novels

---

[27] *Social Literacies…* 21.
[28] *Situated Literacies…* 8.

reflects the vulnerabilities of the protagonist and her friends. In contrast to the multiple readings of the novel as enacting an African "aesthetic of suffering" in its stereotypical representation of abject poverty and thus "performing Africa for the world,"[29] I will be reading the novel as articulating non-traditional forms of literacy practiced by the children as they take what they see and adapt it into narratives of survival. Street notes that children have learned to "interpret logos on commercial goods and advertisements, or to 'read' television with its often sophisticated mix of script, pictures and oral language"[30] and the ways Darling does this, not just in Paradise where her schooling is non-existent, but also in America where she attends school and does very well is compelling.

The Conclusion suggests ways in which immigrant literacies can complicate the future of postcolonial subjectivity in African literature. The ways in which immigrants see themselves and name themselves both at home and in their new locales present new modes of resistance to alienation and oppression that are worth extended study.

[29] Helon Habila "Review of *We Need New Names*" *Guardian*, 2013.
[30] *Social Literacies…* 20.

Chapter 1: Reading and Writing the City: Lagos in *Everyday is for the Thief*

Teju Cole's first novel*, Everyday is for the Thief*, takes place in two major cities—New York and Lagos—anticipating its publication history. First published in Lagos, Nigeria by Cassava Republic Press in 2007, it was later published in the United States by Random House in 2014 and 2015.[31] *Everyday* (I will use this abbreviated form of the title going forward) begins with its unnamed protagonist planning a return to his home country, Nigeria, after a long absence. As the male narrator wanders around Lagos, the mega city of his childhood, noting and comparing the scenes of life he now witnesses with what he has become familiar with while living in New York, he also makes comparisons between the Lagos he is in at the moment and the city of his childhood memories. Narrated primarily in the stream of consciousness mode as the narrator moves about these cities, this short hybrid novel weaves together photographs and multiple forms of writing including orature (proverbs and oral stories) in order to introduce and perform its concern with forms of literacy.

Literacy, as promoted through colonial education, has been a central theme of colonial and postcolonial fiction (especially the Bildungsroman and "been-to" novels) and memoirs. In some cases, like Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and Ayi Kwei-Armah's *Fragments* (1970), this engagement with literacy reveals how individuals are recruited into the colonial and postcolonial order with devastating effects. In other cases, like Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), the acquisition of literacy understood as the ability to read and write

[31] While *Everyday is for the Thief* was Cole's first novel, it was published in the United States only after Cole's second novel, *Open City*, came out in 2011 to widespread critical acclaim.

English and decode its embedded values has provided a measure of freedom or success to its characters. Through its hybrid form and multiple linguistic registers, *Everyday* provides an opportunity to reflect on this commonplace of colonial and postcolonial African literature in English to explore how engagements with literacy may help us to understand the revision of the past and reimagining of the future undertaken by a generation of transnational African writers in English of the 21st century.

The links between the African novel and the practice of writing are quite fraught. Neil ten Kortenaar's *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* (2011) brilliantly outlines some of this history and its particular relations with the development of the African novel. The first generation of West African writers like Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong's, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei-Armah, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and others focused their writing on recovering the African past and showing its potential for both the present and the future. Therefore, the social patterning of literacy and the power relationships in the fiction of the first generation, especially, centers around stories reflecting what was, what could have been, and what could be in tone, form and theme. These impulses are present in the two views that have dominated discussions of literacy and the rise of the novel in Africa: on one side is the view of Africa as primarily oral and thus orality is more "valuable or at least more authentic than –literacy."[32] The other view insists that "Africa has always had literacy but that it has gone unrecognized."[33] For Kortenaar, both views "tend to hypostasize Africa and, by extension, Europe as

---

[32] Liz Gunner "Africa and Orality" in Francis Irele and Simon Gikandi (eds.) *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature.* Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 1-18

[33] See, Simon Battestini's *African Writing and Text* (2000) and Konrad Tuchscherer's 'Recording, Communicating and Making Visible: A History of Writing and Systems of Graphic Symbolism in Africa, in Christine Mullen Kreamer et.al's (eds.) *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 2007, pp. 37-53.

monolithic, unchanging entities always mutually opposed" (*Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy* 16). However, as Kortenaar points out and I agree, it is not true that orality and literacy "determine behavior and identity in predictable ways" i.e. African writers have viewed the development of print literacy quite differently.

Growing up in the period during and after colonialism, Achebe saw print technology and writing as a way to teach contemporary readers about the dignity of the African past which includes the oral text in the form of proverbs and storytelling by the fireplace. As Kortenaar puts it, "Achebe's writing is intended to remind Africans of what their training in reading has made them forget." In contrast, Dambudzo Marechera's fiction, set during the brutal colonial era of 1960s and 1970s Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, "depicts print literacy's great capacity for violence without upholding orality as an alternative value" (Kortenaar 5, 9, 16). In these accounts, it is clear that each writer makes a choice about the use of orality and writing in their work based on what they perceive as useful to their particular environment at the time of writing. In this way the writers established what has become dominant habits of reading and writing Africa that contemporary writers are trying to undo in their own works.[34] The significance of the school both in the colonial era and now, in the postcolonial, is represented in the role it plays in the formation of dominant literacies.

According to Barton, it is in school that reading and writing is focused on acquiring the language of the text, an oral activity that is also bound up with the written: school is the place where children learn how to "talk around texts" (*Literacy: An*

[34] Speaking on the work of the literary critic Achille Mbembe in the field of Afropolitanism in "Cosmopolitanism with African Roots. Afropolitanism's Ambivalent Mobilities," Susanne Gehrmann writes that Mbembe is one of the few francophone thinkers who both valorizes and criticizes postcolonial theory for its affinity for binary identities expressed in discourses of victimhood and writing (65).

Introduction… 181). And this talk regulates which texts are prized above others thereby assigning value. While the skills discourse of learning to read and write is a critical aspect of the schooled literacy that has shaped African writing, this form of literacy has taken a remarkably downward turn as seen in the state of schools and the kind of learning that students encounter on the continent.

Events in a contemporary moment give rise to writing and so the novel engages directly with Brian Street's notion of literacy as socially embedded practice.[35] In the novel, specific skills of reading and writing are simultaneously used and interrogated contextually. The event of return, that sets the narrator on a quest of rediscovery, is mediated by his extensive knowledge of history, literature and art. This knowledge causes the narrator to want to also set his pen to paper, to record history and story. However, he eventually gives up this need and instead substitutes writing with photography momentarily. The experimental mode of Cole's novel engages with and challenges the usual form of the African novel and makes visible the literacy practices that are often times ignored or left out of novel reading and writing practices.

Street's idea of literacy as social practice, which is foundational to how Cole's novel is examined here, has been further developed by the literacy theorists David Barton and Mary Hamilton in ways that are critical for understanding how literacy is reshaping the African novel. For Barton and Hamilton, literacy is "best understood as a set of social practices" that are observable in events that are "mediated by written texts." Literacy events are defined as "activities where literacy has a role." And these events are "observable episodes" that emerge from and are shaped by practice. Practice in this

[35]See *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 1984.

instance refers to the cultural ways of using literacy.[36] These events, particular kinds of activity, are social in nature and so spotlight the "situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context." This general view of literacy as social draws attention to the idea that literacy connects people and communities. And Barton and Hamilton are quick to note that literacy practices exist in the "relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals." Overall, literacy practices are not only social processes that connect people, they "include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" and, they are "shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them" (*Situated Literacies* 8). In other words, these connections that are fostered by literacy function are rooted in rules, knowledge and ideologies. Fortunately, the structure of the novel can reveal these usually imperceptible rules, forms of knowledge and ideology if properly examined.

The environment has an important role in the development of literacy. According to Barton in *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* (1994), the environment of literacy, which can also be called the "ecology" of literacy, refers to how an activity, literacy in this instance, is "part of the environment and at the same time influences and is influenced by the environment" (29). This ecological rootedness is central to Barton and Hamilton's assessment that literacy practices, by nature, "are patterned by social institutions and power relationships." In other words, since literacy practice is social in orientation, it is shaped and informed by the institution that births it. The influence of the originary social institution is one that renders some literacies "more

[36] Barton and Hamilton emphasize that practice in the sense of "cultural ways of utilising literacy" is quite abstract and not to be mistaken for the usual definition of practice which refers to "learning to do something by repetition" (*Situated Literacies* 8).

dominant, visible and influential than others" (*Situated Literacies*... 8). In other words, the growth of a particular literacy is dependent on how it is supported institutionally and in the relationship between humans. Within the context of the African novel, schooled and religious literacy have grown substantially with the institutional support that began during the colonial era and has continued in the postcolonial.

As Barton argues, literacies are not equal in society and the value of a particular literacy practice depends on the power it commands (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 74). For this reason, there can be restrictions to literacy in society, which is a critical aspect of the "social patterning of literacy practice." Barton writes that "All societies control access to the written word in some way, because literacy involves information and idea transmission and is practised in a context where its uses may both maintain and challenge existing social institutions" (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 75). This regulation of information particularly through the institution of the school has been a key aspect of the development of literacy practices in Africa. In an echo of the assertions of the British colonial officer Thomas Macaulay[37], who noted that the goal of colonial education was to create a class of interpreters, James Collins and Richard K. Blot assert the same but with a key difference: while colonial conquest was "accompanied by the schooling of select aboriginals in the cultural ways of the colonizer," in order to ensure the effective dissemination of the dictates of empire, the spread of literacy was "not to facilitate the sharing of power with a subservient population." The social patterning of literacy and the power relationship during colonialism aimed to create "docile, subservient subjects, subjects whose *identity as subjects* made them malleable to the dictates of the crown" (*Literacy and Literacies*… 123). To put this in context, it is through the texts assigned in

[37] See Thomas Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education", 1835.

school that Chinua Achebe learned that precolonial Africa was savage and uncivilized in its primarily oral mode of social organization. He had to learn to read differently in order to do the kind of writing that challenged colonial ideology in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) set in precolonial and colonial Iboland respectively.[38]

While the school continues to be a particularly powerful institution in the development of literacy, it was even more so in the African colonial context. In a reading of Michel Foucault's groundbreaking work in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Collins and Blot emphasize his arguments about modern schooling in the point that the school is a "prominent site of disciplinary power, a "power-knowledge" that remakes morality through relentless observation, measurement, hierarchy, distribution into groups and scheduling." The force of the institution is such that its, "Disciplinary power is the 'other face' of Enlightenment universalism, creating subjects who may live in a world of universal rights but are inured to economic, political and cultural domination" (*Literacy and Literacies* …82). Cole's novel is a strategic challenge to the habituation of economic, political and cultural domination that prior generations of African writers lamented in their writing while hoping that the Enlightenment character of the novel form would foster change.

Cole's novel reflects on the precariousness of schooled literacy in a conversation the narrator has with his nephew, Adebola. In their conversation, Adebola tells the narrator that the founder of the boarding school he attends, Tai Solarin,[39] is a humanist

[38] Achebe read the works of writers like Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, and John Buchan. These European writers produced stories about Africa and Africans that primarily served to distort and undermine the life and cultures of people on the continent. It is the author's encounter with these disempowering stories that caused him to write down new and different kinds of stories *(Interview with Bill Moyers, A World of Ideas, Sep. 29, 1988).*

[39] Solarin advocated for free elementary education in Nigeria in the 1950s.

and being a humanist correlates to being an atheist. The narrator responds by telling his nephew, "A humanist is someone who believes in humanity, someone who celebrates human ability and potential. That's where we get the word "humanities" from. A person who doesn't believe in God is an atheist." And his nephew responds with, "A humanist is someone who doesn't believe in God. That's what we were told at school" (*Everyday* 53-54). The regulatory and disciplinary nature of the school is underscored in Adebola's response; a response that ignores the potential that lies in critical interrogation of the idea of who else a "humanist" might be other than an atheist. The response hints at a rote form of teaching and learning in school that prizes repetition as heard in the phrase, 'that's what we were told at school.' Therefore, the absence of books on literature, on philosophy, on science, that the narrator later discovers when he goes to the book shops is simply part of a larger pattern where reading for self-improvement is not a part of social life. The social pattern of literacy practice in school and elsewhere does not support the pursuit of knowledge beyond what is taught in the classroom, in school. And there is no curiosity or alarm in the populace.

But there is another skill that develops in the space of the school and more importantly, can be cultivated beyond it. This other skill consists of learning the "literary discourse associated with an elite view of literature" (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 161). According to Barton, the original meaning of "literary" and "literature" did not have to do with "the approved fiction of a culture"- the idea of approved fiction only developed in the last hundred years. Instead, the words "literate" and "literary" which both originated in the "idea of being educated," have come to mean different things in this century: these days, literary refers to "something to do with novels, poetry or plays."

Even more specifically, the words "literary" and "literature" have a "narrower sense and represent a particular theory of literacy." In this view of literacy, it is an elitist act to "take meaning from" and "to respond" to a literary text. According to Barton,

> In studying literature by developing criticism of literature, people are learning a literacy which is not available to them and which is intended as not being available. They are taught to be passive observers of others greatness, to observe but not to participate in literate culture, with creative writing often a separate and distant subject from English, if creative writing exists at all. There is something special about being a writer in this view.

Although "literacy" and "literary" have been considered separately in "an almost deliberate distancing of elite culture and mass culture" (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 169), the distance has been reduced by the school which promotes a view of literacy that comes from the study of literature.

Both, the skills discourses of learning to read and write, and literary discourse, are dominant discourses that "are part of media perceptions of reading and writing and what schools ought to do" and so are "sustained and nourished by various social institutions." According to Barton, the literary view of literacy is pervasive and although it does not necessarily originate in schools, it is still supported and nourished by the institution of school. For instance, the "study of English and advanced reading and writing are located in the literary class. Taking meaning from texts, or *responding* to them, is often restricted to literary texts, particular genres" (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 161). While the text may be powerful, it is the place where this taking of meaning occurs that is most important.

Nevertheless, learning literary discourse is necessary because it is a distinct metaphor in the public discussions of literacy that has to do specifically with the study of literature (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 169).

Literary discourses maintain power through the support of both the school and other institutions in society i.e. the family, the media, the church, and the government. Here, the link between literacy and a particular environment is quite clear as literacy is then modeled on the rules and ideologies of particular institutions. Barton and Hamilton's concept of a social patterning of literacy shows that Cole's novel eschews the comfortable familiarity of the power represented by the school, the media, the church and the government and instead seeks common ground in the literatures of writers from non-African cultures. In the narrative, the dominance of what are certainly literary literacies makes the ability to read both literarily and metaphorically a necessary skill for the narrator's survival during his journey. Throughout, the narrator gets to observe and navigate the visible and invisible structures shaping the social patterns of literacy in Lagos.

Both metaphors, the skills discourses of learning to read and write, and literary discourse, are at the heart of the narrator's experience of Lagos and its inhabitants during his journey. Although these skills discourses are often criticized in public debate, they remain as they "support powerful public discourses about education" (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 161). These are discourses that promote vocational training on the one hand and intellectual/artist training- all for the advancement of society. The environment of literacy in Cole's novel is one where complex practices and the ideal technological advancements that grow out of such practices occur in the periphery, in the margins of

society. The form of the novel, with its photographs and unique engagement with other texts, stages the marginal nature of reading and writing in ways that challenge the status quo thereby shifting the focus and emotion of the contemporary African novel.

Contemporary African migrant fiction like *Everyday* focus on "what is," with occasional gestures to the past and its influence on the present. In contrast to the nostalgia and reformation that characterized earlier African fiction, the emotion of irritation and frustration takes center stage in Cole's novel in the observation of decay and lost potential. The hard look that *Everyday* initiates in its journalistic[40] reporting of the experiences of the narrator during his trips around the city focuses on what is happening in the contemporary Nigerian moment in relation to other events around the world on a much larger scale. It is an approach that allows Cole to invite new and expansive forms of reading and writing Nigeria and the African world.

The unnamed narrator in *Everyday* is a young psychiatrist doing his residency training in New York when he decides to visit his extended family in Lagos after leaving and avoiding all contact for 15 years. The novel begins in New York, at the Nigerian consulate and ends in New York, when he is back at his apartment after a few weeks in Lagos. During his stay in Lagos, the narrator has various experiences as he tries to reconnect with the city of his childhood that he wants to write about, much in the fashion of his literary heroes. Although he hardly names the particular texts he is referencing, the narrator uses works by the world renown writer, Michael Ondaatje, and Nobel Prize winners like the novelist Gabriel García Márquez and the poet Tomas Tranströmer

[40] This journalistic mode of writing is a growing trend in the contemporary African novel as it negotiates both physical and cyber spaces. See Shola Adenekan's "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature in a Digital Age." *Matatu* vol. 45 no 1, 2014, pp. 133-15. *ProQuest Literature Online*. Accessed 18 April 2019.

especially, to make sense of his experiences. The constant references to other literary texts and these authors are significant in defining the literacy practices that have shaped the narrator and influenced his ideas of reading and writing. And it is these literature specific ideas of literacy that forms and informs the observations and criticisms of the narrator in *Everyday* as he rediscovers Lagos.

In the course of the narrative, it is revealed that the narrator's father (who is dead) is Nigerian. Though his mother, who is white, is still alive and lives in California, he has no relationship with her. Even more importantly, he has no interest in a relationship with her as he deliberately refuses to stay in touch; it is a way of being that is contrasted with the bond and affection he has with his father's sister, Aunty Folake, with whom he stays during his journey. With this history, it is obvious that the narrator has been shaped by these absences which show up in the vague descriptions of his education in school and at home. We don't get much of a story about his experiences at the military secondary school he attended as a teenager. The narrator only mentions the school when he notes that he preferred its "deprivations," rather than to be with his mother after his father's death (*Everyday* 118-119). But during his return to Lagos, he gets visited by some classmates. And in terms of home life, there is a one-time exchange of letters after he moves to New York and writes to his mother. Therefore, the many allusions to literature, other texts and museums reveal that the narrator has been shaped by a literary and visual literacy beyond his education in Nigerian classrooms.

Institutional literacy of any kind is underscored by fraud and misrepresentation as seen in the progressive deterioration of public institutions like museums and infrastructures like roads and public buildings. And then there is the death of students as a

result of the decay in infrastructure. The 2005 Sosoliso Airlines plane crash that killed several students of the Ignatius Loyola Jesuit boarding school is an actual event that narrator addresses. He notes that although the mothers of the dead students protest in Lagos, they are teargassed by police, "and that is the end of the matter. There is no further protest, and there is no redress." Religious institutions then seem to fill the gap by fostering literacy practices of reading the bible, speaking faith and praying as acceptable responses to a national problem. According to the narrator,

> Church has become one of the biggest businesses in Nigeria, with branches and 'ministries' springing up like mushrooms on every street and corner. These Christians are militant, preaching a potent combination of a fear of hellfire and a love of financial prosperity. Many of the most ardent believers are students in the secondary schools and colleges. This is the worldview in which prayer is a sufficient solution for plane crashes.

In contrast to the absence of books and book learning that is associated with the humanities, the narrator discovers that religion and texts on religion are flourishing right alongside bribery and airplane crashes. With no scenes of school literacy where students are reading or writing described in the novel, the narrator spends a fair amount of time describing how Nigerians "do not always have the philosophical equipment to deal with the material goods they are so eager to consume" like making the airplanes they like to fly or making the cellphones they like to use (*Everyday* 137, 139, 141). The void left by the absence of a schooled literacy and the narrative of progress that usually accompanies its existence in the African novel is substituted with scenes of various forms of religious literacies which dominates in the society.

Religious literacies are informed by the literacy practices of adherents in locales such as the church or mosque. The powerful influence of these institutions can be clearly seen in their structures in the capital city Abuja which the narrator visits. According to the narrator, "The National Mosque is a gigantic sci-fi fantasy, like a newly landed alien mother ship. The National Cathedral, a spiky modernist confection, is nearing completion." And there is also traditional literacy where supernatural powers are believed to be responsible for ordinary events like the death of an old man (*Everyday* 139, 141). Amidst these religious literacies, the skills discourse of reading and writing only seem to proliferate in instances of bribery, swindling, newspaper/ magazine reading thus illuminating systems of teaching and learning that the narrator finds quite maddening. Significantly, in the same manner that Barton draws a distinction between kinds of literacies when he writes that "Book literacy is afforded a higher status than other forms of print literacy" (*Literacy: An Introduction*… 169), the narrator distinguishes between kinds of reading materials, preferring some to others. In the novel, while the literary discourse that the narrator connects with is an elitist view of literature, he also wants community development, nation building and global participation that the literacies he notices in play seem to be actively corroding.

At the moment the novel begins, with the narrator at the Nigerian consulate in New York getting a passport for the trip, his ability to read is put to the test. Not just the reading of words, but the reading of behaviors and social cues. Interestingly, even before he encounters various corrupt behaviors and attitudes he plots to undermine it rather than engage; in other words, he knows he will be required to participate in an economy of monetary exchange that is outside the law and he is familiar with the protocols of this

system. However, he is unprepared for the scale and how corruption works openly in public settings.

As the narrator rediscovers Lagos and Nigeria as a whole, he observes that in the places where he sees bribery, there is often writing that indicates that the complete opposite act should guide behavior. For instance, at the New York consulate where he discovers that if he wants his passport "expedited", that is to get it in time to make his trip, he must pay an unofficial fee of fifty-five dollars in addition to the eighty-five-dollar fee for a new passport (*Everyday* 6). For the narrator who has "dreaded" this "direct run-in with graft" and prepared to meet it in Lagos, encountering it in New York is a shock and even worse, it occurs in the vicinity of a sign that he notices on his way out of the consulate: 'Help us fight corruption. If any employee of the Consulate asks you for a bribe or tip, please let us know" (*Everyday* 7-8). And when he arrives in Nigeria, after various encounters with people asking for money as he leaves the airport, it still happens right on the street, underneath a billboard with the words, "Corruption is Illegal: Do Not Give or Accept Bribes" (*Everyday* 6-8, 15). These words and various others that will be present and absent throughout his trip to Nigeria serves to underscore the particular kinds of literacies that exist in particular spaces and the social practices that accompany those literacies.

The presence of various injunctions against corruption in both public and private spaces paradoxically seems to enable the bribery that goes on right underneath the signs illuminating a pedagogy of monetary exchanges that the narrator acknowledges as now foreign to his way of thinking. On the first night of his return he notes:

> I am breathing the air of the city for the first time in a decade and a half, its white smoke and ocher dust which are as familiar as my own breath. But other things, less visible, have changed. I have taken into myself some of the assumptions of life in a Western democracy- certain ideas about legality for instance, certain expectations of due process- and in that sense I have returned a stranger.

Thus he must relearn the terms of living in Lagos, a task that he finds illuminating as well as distressing in turn. Of the constant requests and exchanges of money he notices, he comes to understand and describe Lagos as "a patronage society" where "Money, dished out in large quantities fitting the context, is a social lubricant" that "eases passage even as it maintains hierarchies" (*Everyday* 16). For the narrator, who acknowledges that this mode of perceiving the constant circulation of monetary gifts has been accepted by everyone, it is problematic. The problem with the monetary requests lies with the fact that it is often demanded by "someone whose finger hovers over the trigger of an AK-47" (*Everyday* 17). Furthermore, such corruption, "in the form of piracy or of graft" keeps people in poverty, and so "nothing works" as only those with money and resources get ahead. In other words, a form of literacy that has emerged with the power relationships in the society does not promote the development of the whole community; in fact, it maintains poverty and thus underdevelopment in visible ways. This condition can be seen in the people constantly asking for money while doing their jobs i.e. the case of the guard who asks the narrator if he has anything for him outside a store. Those with no jobs at all also do it as a beggar woman materializes from the shadows right after the guard leaves and also asks for money (*Everyday* 18-19).

The narrator notices the corruption that occurs right underneath the signs that gesture to new modes of behavior in the service of nation-building. A notable moment in the travelogue is when the narrator enters an internet café in Lagos and encounters the perpetrators of advance fee fraud known as "419"[41] hard at work. At the café where he has gone to use the internet, he notices that a young man using the "hunt and peck method" is typing the words that are integral to the letters used to perpetrate this particular kind of fraud: "The words I see him type, 'transfer.' 'dear friend,' 'deposited into your account forthwith,' present incontrovertible evidence: he is composing a 419 letter. I have stumbled onto the origin of the world-famous digital flotsam" (*Everyday* 26). Above the young man, who is probably a university student, composing the letter, the sign reads: 'TO OUR CUSTOMERS- Tomsed Cyber Cafe now has an activity monitor software that monitors all activities of 419s including their mails in all our workstations. Therefore any customer caught with 419 job will be handed over to the police. BE WARNED!' As the narrator notices more and more of these college students, also known as "yahoo yahoo" in local parlance, plying their craft without fear or favor even though they are "mangling what little good name their country still has', he gets irritated (*Everyday* 27). For the narrator who is particularly concerned about how Nigeria(ns) connection to the rest of the world, the yahoo boys are using technology/the internet inappropriately.

In contrast to the connections and economic growth that technology/the internet represents elsewhere, Nigerian is portrayed as living on "borrowed progress" (*Everyday* 140). While the internet is "an index of progress" that countries like India, China, Indonesia, and Thailand have used to create new and legitimate revenue streams in

[41] Popular scam named for the section of the Nigerian criminal code it violates.

software building and manufacturing, Nigerians only use it to perpetrate advance fee fraud. For the narrator, it is a "single creative misuse of the internet" (*Everyday* 24-25). However, as he continues to read surreptitiously whenever he is at the café, he discovers that the yahoo yahoo boys are using storytelling to connect to their potential victims. In their letters, the young men create fictional identities for themselves that include being the Chairman of the National Office for Petroleum Resources, heirs of fictional magnates, widows of oil barons and "legal representatives of incarcerated generals." For the narrator, these texts are "enterprising samples of narrative fiction." In such moments of writing, Lagos becomes a "city of Scheherazades" as "stories unfold in ever more fanciful iterations and, as in the myth, those who tell the best stories are richly rewarded" (*Everyday* 27). In this shift from irritation to acceptance, the narrator seems to suggest that while the yahoo yahoo boys are using their education and world literacy to service their own greed, it is almost justified as they are roping in gullible foreigners. As swindlers, they are competing with their victims, the swindled, for advantage.

Watching the yahoo boys do their work brings Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) to the mind of the narrator, which he underscores, in trying to understand the aberration that the yahoo yahoo boys represent for his imagined community. According to the narrator, in Gulliver's fourth and final journey, his preference for the "horselike Houyhnhnms comes at the expense of a race of uncouth creatures" known as 'the Yahoos'" (*Everyday* 28-29). For the narrator who sees the yahoos in the cyber café as tragic in a reversal of Karl Marx's dictum about history which states that "history repeats itself first as tragedy, second as farce," his assessment of the reading and writing habits he notices all round seems to emphasize this tragic turn in the pattern of

relationships, satirizing literacy practices that ruin the country's ability to engage others on the international stage. Nigeria's global reputation is sacrificed for the momentary gains of the yahoo boys.

The reading of other texts occurs again and again throughout the novel as the narrator seeks to understand the "strange familiar" (*Everyday* 64) in which he now finds himself. As Katherine Hallemeier points out in her reading of the protagonists in *Open City* and *Everyday* in "Literary Cosmopolitanisms in Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* and *Open City*" (2013), "Both Julius and the unnamed narrator offer accounts of themselves that are self-consciously transnational in scope; they frequently allude to world literature and other arts and incorporate and reflect upon experiences of displacement and migration in the context of globalization." Hallemeier also highlights the effects of bringing in other texts into the narrative: "[t]he frequent incorporation of others' stories into their own can be read as admirably worldly, problematically passive, or both" (241-242). This incorporation is a form of literacy, a mode of reading and writing that showcases literacy practices and their links to particular social institutions that can foster action or deflect it. In a lot of ways, the narrator's bringing in of other texts allows him to talk in a particular script, in literary terms, to other elites both at home and abroad who have been frustrated by the inability of the Nigerian nation to change its course and generate true political and economic transformation since obtaining Independence from Britain in 1960. The narrator invokes a literary source of power that these elites can tap into when talking to each other.

To show that the narrator is talking to other elites around the world, the genealogies of books mentioned in the novel are from around the globe- Europe,

America, South America. Only two books by Africans in diaspora are mentioned in any detail and that is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*. And when the narrator mentions both books, it is to lament the fact that a leading bookseller, the famous "CMS (now called CSS) Bookshop on Lagos Island" of his childhood, has an extremely limited selection of general fiction that includes a "few tattered copies of plays by Shakespeare and Soyinka." There is nothing by "Nigeria-based Nigerian writers", nothing in terms of "international literary fiction" and nothing on poetry. However, he sees a "single copy of Dan Brown's ubiquitous book" and a "stack of books by James Hadley Chase" on the shelf (*Everyday* 116-117)- all of which are not the kind of books he thinks people should be reading. The narrator's aesthetic taste and selectivity is a reminder of the figure of "been-to" in the African novel. According to Louisa Egbunike in "One-Way Traffic: Renegotiating the 'Been-To' Narrative in the Nigerian Novel in the Era of Military Rule,"

> As a prominent figure in the movement towards self-governance and the administration of the new nation, the been-to had a significant position in early African urban literary texts. The been-to was often characterized as a young male rural–urban migrant who travelled to the West to further his education, after which he would return to his country to take his place among the emerging middle class. His ability to straddle rural and urban spaces, and his capacity to negotiate the conventions of his nation and those of the West, placed the been-to in a unique position to articulate a nationalism informed by both the local and the global. In the West, the been-to developed a Janus-faced consciousness and a revised

> understanding of nationhood and patriotism, which would often create tension between himself and his local community. (218)

But unlike these "been-to" figures who returned home permanently after studying abroad, the narrator is not home to stay. Nevertheless, he exhibits the habits of mind that has plagued those defined in "been-to" in the African novel with his 'Janus-faced consciousness.'

During a walk on Allen Avenue a few days before Christmas, the narrator sees and enters a jazz shop where he finds music that "caters to the tastes of the minority." He finds discs of music by the "giants": "Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, and many others. However, he learns that the discs are not for sale; instead, the sales lady offers to make copies to sell to him. The narrator ruminates on the implications of her words: "A legitimate business with a public sign, on one of the busier commercial streets in town, catering to a sophisticated clientele, and all the while living on piracy. Do they have any idea that this is a problem? Or is it enough to settle for sophistication without troubling oneself about the laws that defend creativity?" (*Everyday* 128-130). For the narrator, the absence of protection for intellectual property is jarring. It is also a moment that pinpoints the narrator's transnational identity as he is concerned about the ways the works of these musicians are being marketed in his home country.

The literary literacy that informs the narrator's movement, observations and experience in the city is due to his travel around the globe. He has lived briefly in London, visited the British Museum, the Museum fur Volkerkunde in Berlin and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, all of which showcase, "A clean environment, careful lighting, and, above all, outstanding documentation that set the works in the

proper cultural context" (*Everyday* 74). His experience of these museums drives his need to see the one in Lagos, a move that shows that his literacy has been shaped by institutions elsewhere, in the West no less.

The theory of transnationalism offers insight into some of the narrator's motivations. Already absent for fifteen years by the time the novel opens, the narrator is not attached to either his immediate or extended family; rather, he is attached to books and cultural institutions that participate in the proper documentation and display of art. The narrator's expectations are an aspect of what Wendy Griswold describes as "cultural convergence" in *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (2000). In cultural convergence, societies that have been transformed in modernization in terms of "industrialization, urbanization, increased literacy and education, and extensive economic and cultural interaction with the outside world" aim to "produce similar cultural representations" (*Bearing Witness*… 18). And a transnational identity intensifies this need to behave like the rest of the world i.e. to practice literacy in the ways that have been identified as ideal. The script of transformation embedded in cultural convergence is the ideal for the narrator and so crucial to the language of the novel. The script is present in the comparisons of Nigeria to other countries, in the metaphors articulating the similarities and differences in the experience of the narrator compared to the fictional and non-fictional works of world renowned writers and artists. It is a script that speaks to the narrator's multiple affiliations, thus the discourse of transnationalism offers insight into the narrator's choices.

In "Postcolonial Travel Writing and Postcolonial Theory," Justin Edwards notes that transnationalism is a "social phenomenon and a theoretical paradigm for cultural

research that has grown out of the heightened interconnectivity between people and the receding economic and social significance of boundaries among nation states." This paradigm is characterized by the "insights it offers into postcolonial writer's complex personal, textual, and geopolitical relationships to the places' of travel and the links to "multiple homelands or senses of belonging." Furthermore, "Transnational movement engenders an erosion of clear-cut national affiliations and this, in turn, has a profound impact on the ways in which the traveler experiences and represents the place where she travels." Ultimately, in the genre of postcolonial travel writing, the narrative is one that is in "process, multiple, collective, and disruptive" as the traveling subject is a "possible site for active cultural and ideological struggle" (Edwards 29-30). As traveling subject, Cole's narrator is indeed 'possible site for active cultural and ideological struggle.' His visceral responses to the environment, especially in how he perceives its effects on his work, spotlights his resistance and echoes the strategies of transforming African stories promoted in Afropolitanism.

The concept of Afropolitanism which is described by Susanne Gehrmann as "cosmopolitanism with African roots" was first popularized by the writer Taiye Selasi in her essay 'Bye bye Babar!' (2005).[42] But her definition has been criticized for its focus on "its elitism/class bias," "its a-politicalness," and "commodification." In contrast, Mbembe's description of the same concept proves to be valuable for understanding the

[42]According to Selasi, Afropolitans are "the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem. lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion,
New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars…There is at least one place on the African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world."

possibilities that itineraries of migration do hold for immigrant literacies in a transnational environment. For Mbembe, Afropolitanism is "Cosmopolitan in scope, anti-essentialist, open to cultural and intellectual hybridization, but endowed with a particular consciousness for Africa's historical wounds…." And importantly, the concept fosters an "attitude which can contribute to complete the as yet unfinished decolonization process of Africa" (Gehrmann 64-65). The importance of this concept for reading Cole's narrator lies in the fact that he performs a limitless cultural and intellectual hybridity that shows in the structure and language of his storytelling. And his confidence in taking and using the stories of others to put words to his own experience speaks to Mbembe's suggestion that the prior construction of an insular Africa has to give way to motion. According to Gehrmann's translation, Mbembe writes that,

> The second wave of Afropolitanism corresponds with Africa's entry into a new age of dispersion and mobility. This new age is characterised by the intensification of migration and the creation of new African Diasporas throughout the world. With the emergence of these new Diasporas, Africa no longer constitutes a centre for itself. Henceforth, it is constructed through poles, between which there is constantly a passage, mobility, and facilitation. (Gehrmann 65)

The narrator's back and forth through Lagos attests to this lack of a center while his reading and writing habits generate and foster near and far flung social connections.

Indeed, as the narrator spends more time in Lagos, he decides to put the wealth of stories in his environment and the social connections that those stories communicate to use. As he puts it, "Everyone who walks into the house, every stranger I engage in

conversation, has a fascinating story to deliver. The details I find so alluring in Gabriel García Márquez are here, awaiting their recording angel. All I have to do is prod gently, and people open up. And that literary texture, of lives full of unpredictable narrative, is what appeals." He appreciates this unpredictability when he witnesses a collision on the street after which the drivers of both cars get out and fight "fiercely but without malice." A week later, there is another fight on the same bend in the road. The touts in the area join in the "pandemonium" that "fizzles out after about ten minutes" as everyone returns to their own business. Although these fights make for compelling stories, the narrator finds it impossible to record them. Despite the connections that the stories compel, he sees the environment as "hostile" to the life of the mind (*Everyday* 42, 64-65). The hostility is fixed in the very social structures driving daily life.

Besides the fights and the violence generated therein, there are constant power cuts and people use "loud diesel generators" to power their homes.[43] With the power cuts, it becomes very hot which makes it difficult to sleep. Then there is the "traffic congestion," a serious problem in Lagos where "ten-minute" journeys can take forty-five minutes. And then there are what the narrator describes as the "thousand natural shocks to which the average Nigerian is subject- the police, the armed robbers, the public officials, the government, the total absence of social services, the poor distribution of amenities…." In other words, there is no institutional support for intellectual labor. As the narrator puts it, "There is a disconnect between the wealth of stories available here and the rarity of creative refuge." He had come to Lagos hoping to do some writing during his evenings, but he is unable to: "Writing is difficult, reading impossible"

[43] Power cuts and the disruption/discomfort it produces are a dominant trope in the immigrant African novel. See *Maximilian Feldner's Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context* (2019) on power cuts in the Nigerian Diaspora novel (168-170).

(*Everyday* 67-68). The rarity of literary engagement that the narrator encounters is only surpassed by the lack of support institutionally and environmentally.

For Katherine Hallemeier, the narrator's attitude towards the absence of the creative refuge that he sought to find with his journey raises the question of perspective. As she puts it, the

> narrator's need to judge others seems closely linked to his own vulnerabilities. While these vulnerabilities may include a reluctance to acknowledge that the publication of international literary fiction is inextricably bound up with capital, and that the narrator might share the greed he attributes to the "yahoo boys," the text also suggests that the narrator's readiness to condemn the college students stems from an awareness that they are able to produce stories in Lagos, while he is not. ("Literary Cosmopolitanisms…" 247)

Hallemeier's point highlights the different kinds of literacies at work in the novel. The work of the yahoo boys thrives on the lack of institutional support and merely requires a working computer for their stories to develop and circulate. However, the material support that the narrator expects is an integral aspect in the creation of an elitist literature.

In the novel, the narrator acknowledges this expectation in his description of the life of the author Vikram Seth, during his writing of *A Suitable Boy* (1993). According to the narrator, Seth abandoned his doctoral studies at Stanford, moved to India where he lived in "monk-like solitude" at home where his meals were prepared and delivered with a "discreet knock" while he wrote his book (*Everyday* 64-65). It is an assessment that brings institutional support to the fore as critical for the creation of the kind of stories that

the narrator wants to tell. In other words, while Lagos is brimming with stories waiting to be told, the narrator has a choice of whether he wants to tell those stories in the current conditions in which he encounters them or the find more suitable conditions for his storytelling. In other words, the social pattern of a literary literacy, one that involves the writing of books, is particularly reliant on institutional support that includes the home, and the school. It is the kind of support that imbues the writer with power and makes space for the practice of literary writing.

The narrator's point of view is one that speaks to his experience as an afropolitan who is ready for the transformations of a moving culture and the convergences gathered in contact generated by motion. Hallemeier is certainly right in suggesting that Cole seems to be mocking the narrator's inability to adapt to his environment unlike the "yahoo yahoo" who "can work for long coffee-fuelled stretches" (*Everyday* 27). She asserts that "[t]he "yahoo yahoo" belie the claim that Lagos is inimical to profitable creativity and draw attention to the limitations of an elite cosmopolitan writer who is creatively paralyzed when he leaves New York" ("Literary Cosmopolitanisms…" 247). However, I think she is wrong. The yahoo yahoo boys' practice of literacy may be literary because of the stories they are telling, but the context of the writing suggests a social pattern of literacy that is fraudulent. Although the yahoo boys seem to be supported by the institutions in the nation, the support is inadvertent and occurs primarily because of the poor infrastructure and endemic corruption. And ultimately, their writing does not lead to the kind of progress envisioned by the narrator or associated with the elite view of a literary literacy. And Hallemeier's comment on the publication history of the novel points to the precarious institutions of publishing and its consequences for

African writing that must move elsewhere in order to emerge: "Cole's first novella questions the idea that Lagos cannot be a literary centre (particularly in the internet age) and highlights the problematic nature of identifying as cosmopolitan a body of fiction disproportionately produced and published in Northern metropolises" ("Literary Cosmopolitanisms…" 248).The possibility of Lagos as literary center speaks to the connections that writers can make between the imagination and the environment. Lagos especially seems to be that mega city that is at once frightening and inspiring for the literary[44] if there is institutional support. In this environment, writers can foster different stories and thus different literacies if committed.

It is this commitment that the narrator eventually finds in a book shop that caters to his tastes. A book shop that contains "what Tranströmer described as a moving spot of sun" that he had been looking for since encountering the woman reading a Michael Ondaatje book on a danfo bus. The narrator's excitement at encountering another person reading is on the one hand remarkable because of the poor reading culture in Nigeria, but it is also because it means there are others like him; Nigerian others who share his literary tastes. As he puts it, while Nigerians are literate and do read, they are readers of newspapers, magazines, religious books, tabloids, romance novels by Mills & Boon. According to the narrator, "actual literary habits are inculcated in very few of the so-called literate." So it is a rarity to see an "adult reading a challenging work of fiction on

[44] In Frank Bures' "Things Come Together: A Journey Through Literary Lagos," Nigerian writer Toni Kan tells him, 'You can never have writer's block in Lagos… Saying you haven't got material to work with, it would be a lie. There is a novel behind every shuttered window.' For Bures himself, "there is more than that. In Lagos, there is a story on every corner, a novella standing in every doorway. The wind blows poems across the city like the bits of trash over it. Lagos is a huge Dickensian space full of heartbreak and humor and millions of souls putting themselves up against the hard edge of the world. The city is pulsing with stories that flow through its streets." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (November/December 2006: https://www.vqronline.org/web-dispatch/things-come-together-journey-through-literary-lagos/> Web. 31 May 2019

Lagos public transportation" no less. The narrator's visceral response to the young lady with the book is such that he imagines a conversation with her, "What, Lady, do you make of Ondaatje's labyrinthine sentences, his sensuous prose? How does his intense visuality strike you? But is it hard to concentrate on such poetry in Lagos traffic, with the noise of the crowd, and the tout's body odor wafting over you? I see all those gathered here, and I believe in you most" (*Everyday* 42-43). In this way, the narrator silently affirms his connection to the lady and allegiance to the aesthetic power of literature which facilitates the transcendence of the most difficult of environments. Significantly, this one on one encounter is enlarged at the communal level when he finds "a shop called Jazzhole on Awolowo Road in Ikoyi" (*Everyday* 117). It is here that the narrator finally finds the much sought "inspired and congenial setting" for his soul:

> The place is a combination music and book shop. The owner is one of a small but tenacious breed of Nigerian cultural innovators. The presentation is outstanding, as well done as many a Western bookshop: there is a broad selection of jazz, Pan-African, and other international music near the capacious entrance, and rows and rows of books for the general reader toward the back. The shop has a cool and quiet interior. Here, I think to myself, is finally that moving spot of sun I have sought. (*Everyday* 130)

The book shop is an institution that is supportive of the kind of reading that the narrator is interested in and finding it is a sign of hope that there are innovators and creatives at work in the community. In other words, the yahoo yahoo boys and what they represent is not the future of the nation.

Although Cole was born in America and grew up in Nigeria, he considers himself an "internationalist" writer. It is a form of identification that is everywhere borne out in the choices and details that make up his books. In order to allay suspicions about his book, Cole has declared that it is a "novel." And reading the travelogue as a novel invites certain expectations that *Everyday* certainly fulfils thus making Cole's claims true. Griswold's description of how the novel works in *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (2000) is markedly general:

> Novels everywhere respond to the genre's imperatives: novels are written, not told; prose, not poetry or drama; long, so not usually read on a single occasion; mass-produced and mass- consumed, not restricted to an elite literati; read in private, not recited in public; read by one person at a time, not by a group. Technical characteristics pertaining to print and literacy in general, and to the novel as a long, popular prose form in particular, mean that novels anywhere will focus on individual protagonists, explore the interior sensibilities of middle-class people, and have distinct narrative structures of coherent developing action leading toward definitive conclusion. (20)

In other words, novels the world over exhibit these features; therefore, Cole's novel can function within these particular limits as part of the genre.

Griswold is careful in her outline of the general traits of the novel primarily because of the debates of what the African novel is that has plagued the genre since its inception. Some debates recounted in *Bearing Witness* about what the African novel is includes the case of the "universalists" like Eustace Palmer who argues in *The Growth of*

the African Novel (1979) that "Western standards of literary evaluation can and should be applied to the African novel" most especially because it has its origins in the Western novel unlike poetry or drama. Then there are the traditionalists who emphasize "African roots, the oral tradition, and a particular African way of seeing and thinking that shapes literature" symbolized by the Negritude Movement founded by the Senegalese Léopold Senghor and the West Indian Aimé Césaire. This group also includes Chinua Achebe, Abiola Irele and Chinweizu. And then there is the neo-Marxist critic Chidi Amuta who has argued that the African novel may have a "Western physical format" with printing as its material basis; however, its "essence" is one that "give primacy to the action of the community over that of the individual" (Griswold 15-17).

While it is important to note that *Everyday* certainly exhibits Griswold's general traits like "being read by one person at a time" and not in groups, "read in private" and not "recited in public," and focusing on individual protagonists, it is also important to point out that it is a form of travel writing that the narrator sets out to accomplish with his trip. In "Postcolonial Travel Writing and Postcolonial Theory," Edwards explores the tensions between travel writing as "neocolonial mode that reproduces a dominant North Atlantic idea of 'civilization' from which travel writers continue to consolidate privileged position by classifying, evaluating, and passing judgment on other parts of the world" and one that embraces "revisionist, critical, and subversive narratives, political positions, and innovative modes of representation" (19). The criticisms along with human and textual unfolding that everywhere abounds in the text does seem to occur in the revisionist and subversive narrative mode whereby the narrator is uncovering various aspects of

Lagosian social, economic and political history for the benefit of both Nigeria and the world.

One of the postcolonial travel texts that Edwards' finds innovative in its use of form especially is Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1983), a text that the narrator greatly admires in *Everyday*. While the narrator does not say which book exactly, the most impressionable encounter he has during his trips across Lagos is when he notices the woman reading Ondaatje. Furthermore, a dream scene of Ondaatje's own return to the family home where he notices "[t]he doors twenty feet high, as if awaiting the day when a family of acrobats will walk from room to room, sideways, without dismantling themselves from each other's shoulders" (*Running in the Family* 24) is used to explore the narrator's own feelings of returning to his family home:

> The doorframe is wide and high enough for a family of acrobats to walk through in formation. And there they suddenly are, in my presence, standing on each other's shoulders, their limbs in astral shape. They negotiate the opening, thread it. The house, of course, is unchanged. It is smaller only in memory…. Now, in the cool interior of this great house in Africa, proper size is restored. Even the bathroom dwarfs me. I pass through the door that connects the family room to the passageway time and again, as though to test the portal. And each time, I find its generosity marvelous. Part of this story has been told before: the broad doorway, the acrobats. These are incidents from a book I love…. (*Everyday* 22-23).

The narrator's love for Ondaatje's memoir is such that it incorporates a lot of its format- the use of pictures to open chapters (at least some chapters in *Everyday*) and the

incorporation of poetry and chapters that read like journal entries in their narrative independence from the rest of the novel. According the Edwards, in Ondaatje's book, "self-reflection engenders narrative fragmentation so that the text remains open to the plurality of stories and the rejection of metanarrative" ("Postcolonial Travel Writing and Postcolonial Theory" 27). I will suggest that *Everyday* also exhibits this narrative pattern. And it is one that gestures to an elite kind of literacy for understanding as the chapters don't necessarily build on a plot. Furthermore, the presence of several non-African literary texts sprinkled into the narrator's assessment of proper reading material and habits points to a literary literacy. In his practice of a literary literacy, the narrator is not only familiar with texts from other cultures: the texts thoroughly permeate his descriptions and understanding of his world. In contrast, the photographs which are of scenes of everyday life in Lagos seem orchestrated to appeal to the masses. Considering the many intertextualities it embraces, *Everyday* is certainly a transnational novel, with Afropolitan tendencies. But what does this mean for the novel kind of literacy it promotes?

Reading Cole's *Everyday* in terms of an immigrant practicing literacy works a little differently particularly because the novel is set primarily in Nigeria although it begins and ends in New York. While the narrator is actually a temporary visitor in the context of the novel, it is the literacy practices that he has acquired during his time in the US and what this means for the reading and writing habits that inform his narrative that is of interest. In exploring the kind of literacy *Everyday* promotes, Eileen Julien's "The Extroverted African Novel" asks an important question, that the narrator in the novel also seems to be grappling with, which is this: "In particular, what is the relationship of

narrative to culture and society in contexts of radically asymmetrical power and manifestly coercive processes of exchange and globalization?[45] And I would add, what kind of literacy practice does such a relationship engender?

For the narrator, narrative seems to be medium for connection, both locally and globally even in contexts of unequal power and forced exchange. In his reading of the submerged histories of slavery in Lagos, the need to incorporate and make visible such stories is captured in the narrator's imaginary visualization of the actual event. On one late morning on a Wednesday as he wanders around "Old Lagos" watching people move in traffic, he has the thought of a "chain of corpses stretching across the Atlantic Ocean to connect Lagos with New Orleans." In the brief history lesson that follows, the narrator describes the busy slave ports of Lagos that contributed to the "human cargo that ended up in New Orleans" for a "period of three hundred years." However, there is nothing to see now of that history; the calm delta that made it easy to berth and fill ships with great numbers of humans captured in war has left "little physical evidence." As the narrator puts it, "There is no monument to the great wound. There is no day of remembrance, no commemorative museum. There are one or two houses in Badagry that display chains and leg-irons but, beyond that, nothing. Faulkner said: 'The past is never dead. It's not even past.' But in Lagos we sleep dreamlessly, the sleep of innocents" (*Everyday* 112-114). The absence of monuments, the lack of evidence of the trade in humans, speaks to the ways in which social institutions can subsume history, leave no trace and consequently, erase learning opportunities. And because of this erasure, Julien's argument that African novels are "well read" if "perceived as a 'fulfillment' rather than as an 'effect'[46] raises

[45] "The Extroverted African Novel," 667.
[46] Julien, "The Extroverted African Novel," 667

the prospect of making "submerged"[47] histories visible again. And so, what does it mean to read Cole's novel in this vein; to read its constructedness and intertextuality as recovering that which has been buried? To read it as recontextualizing Nigerian history?

Although Cole's unnamed narrator seems obsessed with the submergence of history, with the absence of historical consciousness, his stream of consciousness narrative has the effect of excavating the histories he has been searching for during his trip. He notices the absence of history everywhere around Lagos and he is dismayed by it. And the trip he takes to the museum to see African art in its home environment provides material evidence for his feelings of dismay. The National Museum in Lagos is a "memorial touchstone" for the narrator who invests a visit he made to the museum as a schoolboy with great meaning and so holds onto it during his absence. But when he returns as an adult, after seeing Nigerian art in metropolitan museums around the world in New York, London and Berlin with great pride and admiration, the National Museum is a nightmare:

> The galleries, cramped, are spatially unlike what I remember or had imagined, and the artifacts are caked in dust and under plastic screens. The whole place has a tired, improvised air about it, like a secondary school assignment finished years ago and never touched since. The deepest disappointment, though, is not in presentation. It is in content. I honestly expected to find the glory of Nigerian archaeology and art history on display here. I had hoped to see the best of Ife bronzes, the fine Benin brass plaques and figures, Nok terra-cottas, the roped vessels of Igbo-

[47] As the narrator points out in the novel, New Orleans was the biggest slave market in the New World, and this history is only a "secret because no one wants to know about it." It is a history that has been literally "submerged" long before and again with the recent flood (*Everyday* 112)

> Ukwu, the art for which Nigeria is justly admired in academies and museums the world over. It is not to be. Though there are examples of each kind of art, they are few, are rarely of the best quality, and are meagerly documented. The whole enterprise is clotted with a weird reticence. (*Everyday* 72-74)

The narrator's profound disappointment deepens when he goes in the adjoining courtyard that supposedly has a temporary exhibition dedicated to the "history of Nigeria's rulers from the 1914 political amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates to the present day." Here, things are far worse as there are "no artifacts and no documents," no attempts to engage with the history of the nation's rulers or the slave trade with any depth, accuracy or nuance. According to the narrator, "The worst of the butchers that ran the nation aground are celebrated, without exception. Abacha is there, in his dark glasses. Babangida is there, with his grin. The sequence of posters gives an impression of orderliness and continuity in Nigeria's postindependence history, and no analysis of the coups and countercoups that were the rule rather than the exception for changes of regime. What, I wonder, are the social consequences of life in a country that has no use for history" (*Everyday* 78-79). Indeed, here and elsewhere, the narrator is actively trying to engage with the past but is foiled again and again in his quest. In other words, what he has imagined is countered by the reality of what he actually sees.

In this search for the past and for history, the role of narrative, of a literary literacy focuses on making visible that which has been submerged consciously or unconsciously. According to Julien who takes Hayden White's notion of the novel as a "seizing of the past by consciousness in such a way as to make of the present a

fulfillment of the former's promise rather than merely an effect of some prior…cause," she writes, "if the African novel is construed as a site of fulfillment, it is linked to human agency and self-fashioning." In contrast, if the novel is construed as effect, "it is part of a necessary trajectory, merely a product of historical forces beyond writers control." Indeed, reading the African novel as "fulfillment" allows for narrative creativity and thus provokes possibility; but, reading it as "effect" submerges potential- the novel becomes merely a testament, witness to what has already happened. And Julien does note that this is the dominant mode for reading the African novel: "The advantages of former perspective for reading African novels are significant, but literary and cultural history has lent its force to the latter" ("The Extroverted African Novel" 668). It is this submerging of potential that Cole's narrator in *Everyday* seems to be grappling with- how to move African literature from "effect to fulfillment." He can see the environmental and psychological effects of writing as "effect"- in the work of the yahoo boys, in the absence of a literary literacy and most compellingly, he sees it in his own inability to write the stories he is steeped in daily. In the innumerable gestures to other texts, other homes, other worlds throughout the novel, he is advocating for forms of writing that fulfill, that speak of human agency and self-fashioning beyond the newspapers, romance novels or the Bible and various religious texts that dominate the Nigerian literary/reading scene.

The idea of the African novel as going beyond its immediate environment is a definitive characteristic in its form and content especially in these days of the constant movement of people, goods and services around the globe. It is the fact of contact that this movement generates that Griswold makes clear when she writes that it is necessary to acknowledge that the idea of a people and their culture "constituting an expressive

Gemeinschaft uncontaminated by outside influences, an image that has always been misleading, is blatantly untenable in the postmodern era of telecommunications, international culture markets, and the incessant mobility of intellectuals."[48] It is precisely the necessity of engaging with others that the narrator metaphorizes in the description of his trip to the market:

> One goes to the market to participate in the world. As with all things that concern the world, being in the market requires caution. The market- as the essence of the city- is always alive with possibility and danger. Strangers encounter each other in the world's infinite variety; vigilance is needed. Everyone is there not merely to buy or sell, but because it is a duty. If you sit in your house, if you refuse to go to market, how would you know of the existence of others? How would you know of your own existence? (*Everyday* 57)

Indeed to know the self is usually in relation to other people, other things. However, there are different kinds of contact as the narrator comes to discover during his day at the market. In one encounter, he is outed as being light-skinned and so mistaken for white - "Oyinbo" or Ibo- from Eastern Nigeria. And then he witnesses/recalls a young thief burned alive for stealing a purse (*Everyday* 57-58, 60-61). It is unclear in the narrative if the burning is occurring in the present moment, or if the narrator is imagining the occurrence after having heard the story and witnessing it at other moments; what is clear is the fact of contact with others. The influence of the contact zone, which is another way of describing the environmental conditions that enable a particular kind of connection, allows the novel to escape the regulation of institutions.

---

[48] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, 17

Julien makes the connection between her own notion of the extroverted African novel and Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "contact zone' developed in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992/2008). According to Julien, Pratt's notion of the "contact zone," which refers to the transcultural social spaces where the relationship between imperial Europe and its colonies are reconceptualized, is where the extroverted African novel exists. This social space is also a "discursive space" where "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other…"; here, "novels like colonial and colonized subjects, 'are constituted in and by their relations to each other' and characterized by 'copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices'" ("The Extroverted African Novel" 684). In the context of Cole's novel, the presence of other novels, from other cultures allow the narrator to use the written events in those books to mediate his own perception and eventual writing. Altogether, this dynamic of discourse and exchange define the particulars of "going to market," going to meet others. It is this idea of meeting others, the layers and degrees of interaction involved, that Cole's novel makes visible in its use of both writing and photography to tell its story.

Throughout the novel, the photographs sprinkled here and there seem to complement the text in some chapters and in others, seems to highlight other subjects, situations, concerns. And even more interesting, the pictures published in *Everyday's* Random House 2015 edition does not have the same pictures like the earlier version published by Cassava Republic Press in 2007. An example is in the chapter that focuses on the narrator's experiences with his Aunt and other men in the family who are trying to unload a cargo shipment of second hand goods from America. In the midst of their task, they are accosted by "area boys," described in the novel as "Unemployed youth in Lagos

neighborhoods notorious for exacting fines and seizing goods." The area boys demand money with the proverb, "*Eyin ti l'owo, awa naa gbodo l'owo.* You have become wealthy and we must become wealthy too" (*Everyday* 106-107). This use of a proverb, in Yoruba, both here and elsewhere in the novel after which it is translated into English is symbolic of what Bill Ashcroft has termed the "metonymic gap." For Ashcroft, the metonymic gap is a 'crucial feature of the transformative function of post-colonial writing' which occurs when postcolonial writers 'insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references which may be unknown to the reader.' For Brenda Cooper, who notes that metonymy has the potential to interrogate the hierarchy of dominant metaphors, it is a "useful postcolonial language device" that enables "some African writers to depict their multiple worlds and material daily realities as well as to incorporate the rhythms of other languages into their fictions" ("Language, Multiple Worlds, and Material Culture…" 247-248). In this way the novel generates its own language, as the use of metonymic allusions have the effect of destabilizing the dominance of the English language in interpretation.

While the text of the narrative is engaged in grappling with the presence of the "area boys" whose menacing demand for money creates a tense atmosphere, the photographs in each edition of the novel seem far removed from the spectacle of contact and the anxieties it has produced in everyone present including Aunt Folake who begins to cry (*Everyday* 109). In the chapter, there is a two-page photograph taken from behind a concrete wall with holes. Through the grid like decorative holes of the wall, one can see other walls on the outer edges of what seems to be a compound, a goat on the street and a car with a driver and a signboard with the partial words "Federal…" in the distance. It is

the only picture with text anywhere in the American edition of the novel (*Everyday* 2015*;* 104-105). The Cassava Republic version of the novel has the same story in the chapter, but there is a small-embedded picture of what looks like a goat between printed text on a page. It is too dark to tell for sure what animal is on the page (*Everyday* 2007; 84). Altogether, the pictures have the profound effect of not saying anything final on the narrator's experience or on Lagos, or on Nigeria as a whole. The photographs seem to generate a parallel narrative by showing rather than relying on the telling done by the narrator. In essence, the photographs have a restorative effect on the reader, an effect the narrator also attributes to good art at the end of his visit to the Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON):

> Literature, music, visual arts, theatre, film. The most convincing signs of life I see in Nigeria are connected to the practice of the arts. And it is like this. Each time I am sure that, in returning to Lagos, I have inadvertently wandered into a region of hell, something else emerges to give me hope. A reader, an orchestra, the friendship of some powerful swimmers against the tide. (*Everyday* 86-87)

Of course the narrator's response to MUSON is due to the fact that the school is organized in a manner he appreciates, unlike the National Museum. On the level of the text, the photographs seem included to provide a similar source of hope for the reader; to challenge the written text, and so highlight the idea that there are no easy answers to the conundrum that is Lagos. Therefore, Cole's narrator uses the medium of photography to uncover some of the submerged histories; the narratives lost in what Julien describes as "contexts of radically asymmetrical power and manifestly coercive processes of exchange

and globalization" ("The Extroverted African Novel" 667). In the process, he manages to institute a different kind of African novel: one that is ever more spacious and accommodating of various art forms, stories and histories essential to the formation of a global Lagos and global Nigeria.

Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag both provide ways of thinking through the use of photography in Cole's novel. In her "Photography Within the Humanities" speech delivered at Wellesley College in 1975, Sontag discusses the problems raised by photography. Sontag notes that photography is not so much an art as it is "meta-art" that "cannibalizes all art forms, and converts them into images," and thus it is a peculiarly modern form as "[i]t has the capacity to turn every experience, every event, every reality into a commodity or an object or image" (60). Her notion of cannibalization focuses on the impact of photographs on those who look at them and use them as a source of information.

In her speech, Sontag reads the aesthetic and moral dilemma that can emerge when looking at photographs of war. But in Cole's novel, where the photographs focus on the social/everyday lives of Nigerians especially, it does seem to be an effort to counter the usual images of Nigeria as there are no pictures of hungry or starving people anywhere in the novel. In this context, Sontag's assertion that photography has promoted a new kind of seeing is evident. As she puts it, "[o]ne of the great traditions in photography is taking the neglected, homely object, the corner of something, the interesting surface, preferably a bit deteriorated or decayed with some kind of strange pattern on it" (65). Sontag's descriptions of what is now considered artsy photography is exactly the way artists like Cole pose their work. One of the pictures in *Everyday* is of a

young boy, dressed in traditional clothing in a bushy environment (*Everyday* 52). At the end of the novel, the penultimate picture in a chapter discussing coffin making and end of life rituals is of two young boys in a canoe floating down the river. One can see the decay all around them, but they stand strong and tall in the canoe, with rather peaceful facial expressions. Including these homely subjects and objects, along with the detritus of daily life usually not represented in elitist literature, has the effect of removing the boundaries and invisible restrictions that can separate thereby enforcing particular power relationships in society. In this way, Cole's narrative engages the asymmetries of power especially in a world that sees Africa as violent and poor.

Since the photographs in the novel have no caption or text to indicate what one should make of them, they really do invite questions of meaning. In his response to the question, "[w]hat is the content of the photographic image? What does the photograph transmit?" Roland Barthes answers in his *Image-Music- Text* (1977) that photography transmits by definition "literal reality" that is reduced in the shift from object to image. It is "a reduction in proportion, perspective, colour- but at no time is this reduction a *transformation* (in the mathematical sense of the term)" (16-17). In his photography in the novel, Cole seems to rely on the literal realities that the images represent as counter narrative rather than allow for the writing, the words of the narrator to be the only story of Lagos.

The peculiar history of the African novel is quite informative as seen in some of the debates highlighted in this essay. One characteristic that the critics agree on is the fact that the African novel has its origins in the European novel. It is what has happened since that beginning that is in question as seen in the multigenerational critical debates about

the first novel, the first writer, the proper language of the novel etc.[49] In "The Extroverted African Novel," Julien writes that what African readers and readers outside Africa think of as the "African novel" is a "particular type of narrative characterized above all by its intertextuality with hegemonic or global discourses and its appeal across borders." In contrast to Griswold's rather generic description of what novels everywhere are like, Julien distinguishes between types of specifically African novels and the audiences for them:

> Long prose narratives by African nationals abound, but only certain texts among them are recognized and admitted to the ranks of 'the African Novel.' The bulk of these long prose narratives will be perceived as lesser novels and may be designated 'thrillers,' 'romances,' and 'detective stories.' That division, I submit, between the works deemed to be 'novels,' on the one hand, and the others deemed to be second-rank narratives, on the other, has been primarily a matter of which narratives have traveled or of what can be called their *extroversion*, 'the condition of being turned outwards'… as correlated with a number of factors: publishing house, place of publication, and explicit engagement with- or a capacity to be read as engaging- broad critical debates. (681-682)

The condition of extroversion, of being turned outwards, of travel and engaging in broader debates is everywhere in Cole's novel. Although it is not long at all, between its engagement with literary giants like the Sri Lankan Ondaatje, Nobel prize winners like the Colombian Marquez, and Swedish Tranströmer, in both the mentioning of names and

[49] See, Mukoma Wa Ngugi's *Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity and Ownership* (2018), for recent discussions of these debates and their impact of the development of the African Novel.

careful inclusions of their words (notably, there is no actual mention of the titles of works by these authors by the narrator), and the novel's publication history, it seems tailor made for Julien's notion of the extroverted novel. It is precisely this kind of distinguishing between types of narratives that the unnamed narrator engages in as he moves from one bookstore to another looking for prose, poetry and music that have traveled. While he is certainly not thinking in the frame of deciding what the appropriately framed African novel is, he seems engaged in the construction of the one that has resulted in *Everyday*.

In "One-Way Traffic: Renegotiating the 'Been-To' Narrative in the Nigerian Novel in the Era of Military Rule," Egbunike reminds us of those migrants who returned home in novels set during the Nigerian military regimes of the mid-1980s- late 1990s and how they fared. In urban novels like Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961) and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1964), the failures of individuals emphasized the failures of the nation. These novels "reflected on and critiqued the newly independent nation, explored the problematics of corruption, materialism, and urbanization" which *Everyday* does to some extent. More importantly, *Everyday* critiques a much older nation, and it does not juxtapose "the individualism and immorality of the urban with the communalism and integrity of the rural" which the 'been-to' novel does (Egbunike 219). Unlike the 'been-to' novel, *Everyday* juxtaposes the communality and integrity of the urban with the global particularly in terms of literacy as skills building; as nation building as seen in his reaction to the ideal bookshop he finds on the streets of Lagos. Throughout the novel, the narrator inadvertently learns and documents a literary and historical consciousness gathered in his exploration of the city of his childhood.

Chapter 2: Racial Literacies in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

> 'You know why Ifemelu can write that blog, by the way?' Shan said. 'Because she's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about. It's all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she'd just be labeled angry and shunned.' (*Americanah* 337-338)

African migration to the United States as occasioned by recent trends in globalization has resulted in the delineation of cultural differences between Africans from the continent and African Americans, understood as descendants of enslaved Africans. Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* explores the complicated relationship that exists between these two groups of Africans. A bildungsroman, *Americanah* is the story of Ifemelu who immigrates to America to attend college, beginning a process of re-education as she encounters the life changing and conflictual discourses of race and identity that define the worlds she moves in as both student and professional adult. Ifemelu's romantic relationships with Obinze, Curt and Blaine provide context and plot her engagement with and navigation of these conflicts. In the novel, Adichie revises the bildungsroman, the novel of education/formation, and the romance novel, the comedic novel of social integration and reassertion. In the process, she challenges the status quo through the mode of a blog in order to offer a critical pedagogy of interracial and

intraracial discourse and how African immigrants must negotiate its particulars in the West.

Much critical attention has been paid to Adichie's novel, which has generally been viewed as a novel of growth spurred by migration to the West and subsequent return to Nigeria, the protagonist's home country. In "Africa and the Black Atlantic" (2014), Yogita Goyal writes that the novel explores "how migration shapes racial identity" (xi). For Na'Imah Ford in "Black Americans and American Blacks: Transnational Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" (2018), movement in the novel works to "fasten the development" of both Ifemelu and Obinze, while reflecting and interrogating their multilayered experiences as "the 'new' African diaspora" (Fongang 55). In *Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context* (2019), Maximilian Feldner also points to character development as he argues that Ifemelu's growth occurs in several stages marked by "movement, process and change" (186). While I don't deny that the novel is about the impact of migration on the development of identity, this essay will focus on the pedagogical work that the novel accomplishes in its depiction of the African immigrant experience as one of mastering literacy in American terms.

Adichie and Racial Pedagogy:

In a 2013 interview with NPR's *Fresh Air* host, Terry Gross, Adichie describes the peculiar pedagogical nature of racial discourse in America. She recalled that during her undergraduate days, a fellow student said something about a watermelon to an African-American classmate, who became offended by the comment. Quite unaware,

Adichie says of her younger self, "I remember sitting there thinking, 'But what's so bad about watermelons? Because I quite like watermelons'" (*Fresh Air*). While she initially does not comprehend the negative historical and cultural discourses around watermelons in the United States, Adichie soon comes to understand that her classmate had become annoyed with her because she did not share the African-American's anger at the watermelon comment. As a Nigerian who immigrated to the United States, however, Adichie did not know why talking about watermelons would or should be offensive. As Gross points out, "Adichie had yet to learn fully about the history of slavery — and its continuing reverberations — in the U.S." (*Fresh Air).* Reflecting on this incident, Adichie notes, "Race is such a strange construct ... because you have to *learn* what it means to be black in America. So you have to *learn* that watermelon is supposed to be offensive" (*Fresh Air).* It is this kind of cultural learning through the acquisition of racial discourses—what I call racial literacies or race talk—along with the possibilities such learning has for African immigrants that structures *Americanah*. Through its engagement with tropes about hair, love and nostalgia ("Africa and the Black Atlantic" xiv), the novel documents how immigrants learn and practice its discourses and how the protagonist Ifemelu, because she is a literate insider and outsider, unmasks the constructed narratives of race in the United States.

Literacy in Context: Blogging in the Novel

One reason Adichie's novel works so well is because of the way it integrates fiction and social commentary, much of it drawn from personal experience; specifically, the novel includes social commentary on African immigrant lives in the encounter with

American culture in a range of contexts. According to Adichie, "I wanted this novel to also be social commentary, but I wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction."[50] In other words, there are modes of discourse more suited for fiction than for commentary, but Adichie consciously chooses to bring both forms of discourses together in this novel staging in this way the process of acquiring and practicing literacy particular to the context of this novel—the ways of knowing and being black in the diaspora. Practice in literacy refers to "cultural ways of utilising literacy" - an "abstract definition that cannot be wholly contained in observable activities and tasks" as it involves "values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships." Literacy practice in its simplest definition is about what people do with literacy: their "awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy." While these processes are usually internal to an individual, according to David Barton and Mary Hamilton, it is also a social process which connects people to each other as they include "shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (*Situated Literacies…* 7-8). In combining social media commentary in the form of the blog that exists on the internet as well as in the novel with the novel form itself, Adichie initiates a social process of connecting to others in the creation of meaningful immigrant experience thereby sharpening the effect of *Americanah*. The value of this hybrid form comes through in the reading and writing processes that define the development of the protagonist, Ifemelu, marking the novel as a bildungsroman even while revising its usual formulations.

[50] Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, and Synne Rifbjerg. "Americanah International Author's Stage" May 20, 2014. Accessed April 23, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8r-dP9NqX8

Like many bildungsromans, *Americanah* invites considerations of the author's biography or what Serena Guarracino (2014) calls "aspects of the writer's persona,"[51] in this case, Adichie's personal history of migrating to the United States as a student and the fact that the watermelon incident mentioned in her interview with Gross does, in fact, make an appearance in one of Ifemelu's blog posts. The novel is in a realist mode, further confusing what is fiction and what is provocative commentary. In the blog post titled, "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You are Black, baby," Ifemelu writes about the different cultural lessons that come with being black in America:

> And here's the deal with becoming black: You must show that you are offended when such words as 'watermelon' or 'tar baby' are used in jokes, even if you don't know what the hell is being talked about- and since you are a Non-American Black, the chances are that you won't know. (In undergrad a white classmate asks if I like watermelon, I say yes, and another classmate says, Oh my God that is so racist, and I'm confused. 'Wait, how?' (*Americanah* 222)

Ifemelu's confusion about what is racist in these conversations mirrors Adichie's and speaks to the cultural landscape of America that immigrants become subject to with migration.

In "Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change" (2007), Milton Vickerman observes that "Immigrants do not enter an America that is a blank slate on which they can arbitrarily inscribe their own racial views. Instead, they typically find

---

[51] See "Writing 'so raw and true': Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah.*" *Between,* vol. 4, no. 8, 2014, pp. 1-27. Furthermore, Yogita Goyal has pointed out that readers have "tended to accept the novel's realism as simply real and to collapse the gap between the protagonist, Ifemelu, and the author, on the one hand, and between the blog and the rest of the narrative, on the other" ("Africa and the Black Atlantic" xiii).

themselves being shaped by the Black/White framework" (145) The essential distinguishing feature of the Black/White frame of assimilation is the cultural standard established by European colonists and "associated with the ethnic core of U.S. society" (*Remaking the American Mainstream* 4). It is this mainstream core of culture that Milton Gordon points to in his seminal book *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) when he writes, 'if there is anything in American life which can be described as an overall American culture which serves as a reference point for immigrants and their children, it can best be described … as the middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, White Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins' (qtd. in *Remaking the American Mainstream* 4). Significantly, all immigrants including the descendants of previously enslaved Africans whose incorporation into American society has primarily occurred through Civil Rights Legislation over the years, are forced to have this White, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins middle-class ethnic group as point of reference in becoming American. As Vickerman emphasizes, new immigrants must contend with this cultural environment: "They have to respond to it in one way or another- whether this means accepting it, rejecting, or trying to ignore it" ("Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change" 146). Ifemelu chooses to accept her new cultural environment which informs and enables her literacy practices.

Navigating Black/White cultural frames of being impact the processes of reading and writing in particular contexts and how these processes inform particular stages of individual growth in *Americanah*. As Maximillian Feldner has noted, Ifemelu's growth is marked by "movement, process and change" (*Narrating the New African Diaspora…* 186), all of which are structured by particular reading and eventually writing protocols

that highlights the novel's bildungsroman narrative form. In the present moment narrative set in the United States, Ifemelu prepares to return to Nigeria after 13 years in America. She had come to the US on a student visa with no permission to work and by the time of her return, she has acquired a US passport and a home; she is very successful by American standards despite all the difficult challenges she has experienced as an immigrant. Through a series of flashbacks, we discover the various learning processes that have led to her monumental success and how she has changed through it all.

Shan: the Sister

An important cultural Black/White frame of being informs the epigraph that begins this chapter. In the quote, Shan, the sister of Ifemelu's boyfriend Blaine, is speaking to a roomful of people during a party that she has organized where Ifemelu is also present. The comment points to Ifemelu's blog as a space that allows her to write in a manner that African Americans, with the same skin color, cannot. To put this comment in context, Shan's memoir, currently at press when we meet her in the novel, is being challenged by the publisher for its racial honesty. The publisher wants her to complicate her writing so that it is not about race alone (*Americanah* 336). Significantly, one of her guests, Maribelle suggests that she write a novel instead in order to say the things she wants to say, a suggestion to which Shan replies, "You can't write an honest novel about race in this country. If you write about how people are really affected by race, it'll be too *obvious*. Black writers who do literary fiction in this country, all three of them… have two choices: they can do "precious" or they can do "pretentious" (*Americanah* 337). In this comment, Shan's point emphasizes Adichie's own choice in choosing to write her

novel using the frame of both realist fiction which includes a digital blog within and outside the text[52] *to say what she* wants to say about race. In the novel, another guest, Grace, suggests that Shan find a white writer as "White writers can be blunt about race and get all activist because their anger isn't threatening" (*Americanah* 337) which Shan does not directly respond to. But when Grace then suggests that Ifemelu should blog about these difficulties, Shan responds by noting that Ifemelu is not subject to the anger and dismissiveness directed at African American writers because she is an African and, therefore, not as emotionally invested as those who are from the US. The "stuff" Ifemelu writes about is "all quaint and curious to her" (*Americanah* 337); in other words, Ifemelu has nothing at stake as she is simply exploring strange objects of study.

Shan's judgment that Ifemelu risks nothing in her writing, writing that is not subject to the "anger" characterization that often qualifies African American women's writing or speech makes the point that African immigrants are perceived differently as outsiders and so judged differently in American society. Specifically, African immigrants are judged less harshly than African Americans by the dominant culture (a sentiment that actually does appear in one of Ifemelu's blog posts, "Traveling While Black" in its global variation (*Americanah* 331-332). Although she is irritated with Shan, particularly because she makes this assessment gleefully in front of her friends who have gathered to talk and dine, Ifemelu understands. She acknowledges that Shan is "fair" in her description of the opportunities that being an African immigrant has afforded her. Ifemelu thinks to herself: "It was true that race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history; it had not been etched on her soul" (*Americanah* 338). While this thought highlights a freedom from the historical chains that sutures Shan and Blaine's African American history that Ifemelu

[52] See https://www.chimamanda.com/Ifemelus-blog/

does not share, it also points to something else: it is an absence that leaves Ifemelu to develop on her own terms, choosing and defining the shape of her belonging in American society, a freedom that she pursues throughout the novel in contrast to earlier immigrant narratives usually steeped in discourses of assimilation in order to be successful.

For Shan, Ifemelu's identity is the reason for her successful bending of the rules in her writing. Adichie's identity also enables her to bend the rules of form in her own writing. Specifically, Adichie reworks the form of the novel to accommodate the kind of writing she wants to do. And her decision to use the blog form of commentary expands the writing possibilities available to her protagonist. It is in this way that Adichie revises the form of the bildungsroman- she essentially expands its limits. In "Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" (2015), Ralph Austen writes that the African bildungsroman, much like its European predecessors, is not an "ideological instrument" in the service of any particular forms of modernity. Rather, it is a "reflection on the possibilities of self-formation- through inherited culture, formal education, and more autonomous *Bildung*- within a specific set of historical contexts" (214). While Austen's essay focuses on autobiographical narratives set primarily in Africa during the colonial era, his assessment of the features of the bildungsroman proves to be useful in reading Ifemelu's own self-formation in the new context where she makes her home. According to Serena Guarracino, in "Writing 'so raw and true': Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" (2014), "Through the more and more persistent presence of blog entries in the novel, *Americanah* describes the main character's coming to writing– not to creative writing, though, but to blogging as a hybrid form that brings together storytelling, reportage, and emotional value" (14). The hybridity of the form allows for a combination

of discourses, enabling Ifemelu to navigate an inherited culture, her formal education and her own independence within the institutions represented by both culture and education. As an immigrant in the novel, she uses this opportunity to forge a new future for herself outside the mainstream White, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon model of assimilation that defines becoming American and outside the middle class strictures of her class in Lagos.

The opportunity the blog provides not only fosters Ifemelu's self-expansion while challenging the usual mode of the African bildungsroman identified by Austen, it also creates new models of community and belonging. In distinguishing between the African and European forms of the bildungsroman, Austen notes that the "African bildungsroman characteristically abandons its protagonist at the threshold between youth and the beginning of maturity, seldom making clear how this next stage will be fulfilled" ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" 221-222). One example of this abandonment in recent African fiction in the bildungsroman category is Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) where the novel ends with the protagonist Elvis on the verge of leaving Nigeria for America. It is also the same thing that happens in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) where the novel ends with Darling contemplating the death of a dog back home in Zimbabwe as Uncle Kojo announces the capture and death of Osama bin Laden. This is not the case for Ifemelu. While creating real access for her in her world as depicted in the novel in the form of Diversity Talks around the country and a Fellowship at Princeton, the blog takes her story into the virtual world where ideas of relationships and community are reformulated without the formal mechanisms of a schooled literacy and its attendant limitations.

What the Blog allows Ifemelu to Do:

Ifemelu's writing begins as an attempt to understand the differences that caused her deep dissatisfaction, which resulted in the end of her relationship with the rich, white Curt. In a long email to her Kenyan friend Wambui, who has been an ally throughout her stay in America, Ifemelu describes her efforts to teach Curt about the lack of representation of women who look like her in major fashion magazines, the lack of availability of make-up choices for her skin color and the myriad other absences that define Americas treatment of it minorities. It is an erasure Curt repeats when his occasional insights into racial differences are barely discernable due to the magnitude of his blindspots. Upon receiving Ifemelu's email that is "digging, questioning, unearthing," Wambui responds with, 'This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog' (*Americanah* 298). And Ifemelu's blog, anonymous and initially named "*Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*" (*Americanah* 298) is born. According to Guarracino, the beginning of the blog, which coincides with Ifemelu's breakup with Curt, shapes "a wider moment of racial self-awareness of which the blog is the elaboration in writing" ("Writing 'so raw and true'…"14) This racial awareness and its elaboration through writing online is symbolic of Ifemelu's move into a different domain of literacy.

In situated literacy, there are various domains of literacy and they are all different from each other. According to Barton and Hamilton in *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context (2000)*, "Domains are structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned." Therefore, there are a variety of domains of activity in contemporary life, which include the home, the school, the work-place. Home is usually

identified as the "primary domain in people's literacy lives" as it is "central to people's developing sense of social identity" (Situated Literacies… 11). Work is another domain where "relationships and resources are often structured quite differently from in the home. We might expect the practices associated with cooking, for example, to be quite different in the home and in the work-place- supported, learned and carried out in different ways" (*Situated Literacies*... 11). Altogether, while activities in the domains are not random or accidental, as "there are particular configurations of literacy practices and there are regular ways in which people act in many literacy events in particular contexts," there are no clear cut boundaries. Instead, there is leakage and movement between boundaries and overlap between domains- the private home context especially is often "infiltrated by practices from many different public domains" (*Situated Literacies* … 11). In the novel, the boundaries between the novel and the blog becomes blurry as literacy practices shift from one context to the other. Citing Jodi Dean's *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive (2010),*" blogs offer exposure and anonymity at the same time: "As bloggers we expose ourselves, our feelings and experiences, loves and hates, desires and aversions"—Guarracino points to the similarities between bloggers and writers:

> Bloggers here looks like the uncanny double of the brand writer in the contemporary cultural market: they are anonymous where published authors experience extra-visibility; their writing is specifically concerned with their own "feelings and experiences" against the fiction of creative writing. These elements are all highlighted in Ifemelu's blogging experience; and the novel exalts the potentiality of critique literature exerts

> on these forms of writing by staging how it is elaborated, produced and disseminated. Without creating any hierarchies, blog writing is enfolded in the novel, hosting most – if not all – social commentary. ("Writing 'so raw and true'…" 14)

In distinguishing between the contextual effects of writing in particular spaces for writers and bloggers, Guarracino reads Ifemelu as collapsing the wall between both groups. In other words, Ifemelu makes the complicated and invisible work that bloggers do visible and valuable. By integrating blogging into her novel, Adichie eliminates issues of hierarchy based on format.

While Ifemelu's blog opens so many doors for her in American intellectual and social life, specifically white corporations and universities, the same blog alienates her from the African Americans closest to her. We have already seen Shan's opinion of the writing Ifemelu does. Even worse is Shan's brother Blaine's response. For Blaine, Ifemelu's boyfriend, the blog should be a way for her to highlight racial and economic injustices in American society. After they move in together, she takes his comments to heart and makes changes based on them whenever he reads her posts before she puts them up. When she writes a post about inner cities "Why are the Dankest, Drabbest Parts of American Cities Full of American Blacks?", Blaine tells her to include "details about government policy and redistricting." However, she takes down the post because it "sounded too academic, too much like him" and tells him, 'I don't want to explain, I want to observe.' In response, Blaine tells her, 'Remember people are not reading you as entertainment, they're reading you as cultural commentary. That's a real responsibility.

There are kids writing college essays about your blog… I am not saying you have to be academic of boring. Keep your style but add more depth.' When she insists that her blog has enough depth, he counters with, 'You're being lazy, Ifemelu.' Ifemelu meditates on the word "lazy" and how it reflects on all the differences between them as she associates the word with the way he talks about his students who don't submit assignments on time, black celebrities who are "not politically active, ideas that don't match his own" *(Americanah* 313). It is criticism that shows the vast personal and intellectual gulf between them since they see things quite differently. As she continues to think about the ways in which they are different, she remembers his reaction when she allows a white woman who asks to touch her hair in the line at a grocery store. Blaine had tensed up and asks her after, 'How could you let her do that?' and Ifemelu responds with, 'Why not? How else will she know what hair like mine feels like? She probably doesn't know any black people' (*Americanah* 314).

This incident calls to mind Adichie's Commonwealth Lecture (2012) on how realist literature instructs and delights. In her speech, she notes that for all those Africans colonized by the British whom she met in American Universities, there was a common bond although all came from different cultures. International students from India, Kenya, Jamaica, all read British literature in childhood which enabled them as émigrés in the U.S. to bond with others who had the same experience. As Adichie puts it, "We read Charles Dickens and Enid Blyton, we read of cucumber sandwiches and ginger beer, and our imaginations were bound in a common familiarity" (Commonwealth Lecture 6). For Ifemelu and Blaine, there is no such common familiarity of imagination even though Blaine is a Professor of Political Science who does comparative work across the globe

and so is quite familiar with Africa even if it is just in relation to other countries. Even their literary reading habits are quite different. Blaine likes and reads "novels written by young and youngish men and packed with *things*, a fascinating, confounding accumulation of brands and music, and comic books and icons, with emotions skimmed over, and each sentence stylishly aware of its own stylishness." For Ifemelu who reads many of these books on his recommendation, they are all sugar, no depth: they are "like cotton candy that so easily evaporated from her tongue's memory" (*Americanah* 12). All these incidents are symbolic of the fact that their relationship is doomed. They don't quite have anything in common other than skin color and this does not make a relationship.

The final nail that spells doom for their relationship occurs when Ifemelu fails to join Blaine, at Yale where he teaches, in protesting the treatment of a black guard, Mr. White. Blaine discovers that she spent her afternoon at a lunch gathering celebrating another professor after she lies to him that she had been sleeping at home. He echoes his sister Shan when he tells her in anger, 'You know, it's not just about writing a blog, you have to live like you believe it. That blog is a game that you don't really take seriously, it's like choosing an *interesting* elective evening class to complete your credits' (*Americanah* 346). As Stephanie Li puts it in her reading of this scene, "By comparing Ifemelu's relationship to race to an elective class, Blaine furthers the trope of Ifemelu's education into racial practices" (*Pan-African American Literature…* 114).

Blogging in *Americanah* enacts a deep rejection of America's ethnocentric views on race and several critics of the novel have acknowledged this fact. For Shane McCoy in "The 'Outsider Within': counter-narratives of the 'New' African diaspora in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013)," the novel remixes diasporas by

employing tropes from the "old" African diaspora in crafting a "new" one. Specifically, the novel's positioning of its protagonist as an "outsider within" is evident in her blog which "asserts a politics of representation that disrupt" the stereotypical representations of Africa and Africans while also re-imagining ideas of racial solidarity between African immigrants and African Americans (282). For Camille Isaacs in "Mediating Women's Globalized Existence Through Social Media in the Work of Adichie and Bulawayo", Ifemelu does not fit "linguistically" in American or African-American communities and so must "imagine another space" (182). Her blog is that space: an "alternate- if limited-mode of belonging" (182). And for Maximilian Feldner, "Writing a blog allows Ifemelu to claim a voice, something the immigrant is often denied, and enables her to comment on her experiences in the new society" (*Narrating the New African Diaspora…* 193). What all these critics have noticed is that Ifemelu's writing in her blog provides her with community, a form of community that is not available everywhere in American society as Shan and Blaine's criticism attests.

In their Introduction to *New Media Literacies and Participatory Popular Culture Across Borders* (2012), which explores how students' online literacy practices intersect with online popular culture around the world, Bronwyn T. Williams and Amy A. Zenger argue that technology provides access and creates agency in ways never seen. For Williams and Zenger, the acceptance that literacy is social practice, rather than a set of contextual skills has led to the need to understand "how such a practice intersects with the uses of technology for writing and reading" ("Introduction: Popular Culture and Literacy…" 6). Some of the ways new media has reshaped literacy includes the following: "new media creates opportunities for collaboration, interactivity, copying and

recomposing, publishing and distributing with a much greater ease than print on paper technologies of the past…" ("Introduction: Popular Culture and Literacy…" 6). In allowing "audiences the capacity to become users, and not just consumers, the division of labor between creator and audience member has changed" and in this way, the 'social relations of meaning making' changes completely as "knowledge and authority are more contingent, provisional, and conditional-based relationships of 'could' rather than 'should' ("Introduction: Popular Culture and Literacy…" 6). In the context of *Americanah,* the interactivity and participatory nature of the virtual world of the blog creates agency in ways that Shan and Blaine cannot quite understand. While they think that Ifemelu's blog ought to function in particular ways because she is black, the virtual world of her writing and her own distance from the racial discourses of the American landscape makes such demands impossible to engage. What happens then is what Williams and Zenger describe as a 'shift in the balance of agency' whereby we move from a "society of command and compliance to a society of reflexive co-construction" ("Introduction: Popular Culture and Literacy…" 6). In other words, Ifemelu becomes a co-creator of her world despite the entrenched models of being and success in mainstream narratives of assimilation. Through the blog, the novel makes visible the racial discourses that immigrants usually don't challenge but accept as fact and assimilate/comply with because they cannot see it.

In these blog posts that suture the novel challenging its form as well as the structure of assimilation in the wider society, Ifemelu's susceptibility to alienation grows. We see her negotiating her new community, with wonder and forthrightness that costs her intimacy with Blaine and even a relationship with his sister, as she tries to understand the

Black/White frame Vickerman underscores when he notes that immigrants must make a decision on how to live in a largely, White Protestant, Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu. In her posts, Ifemelu interrogates the complex nuances of this cultural and racial milieu, nuances that only become obvious with living in the country a long time. The blog post titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism" is a great example:

> First, class, pretty easy Rich Folk and poor folk. Second Ideology. Liberals and conservatives. They don't merely disagree on political issues, each side believes the other is evil. Intermarriage is discouraged and on the rare occasion that it happens, is considered remarkable. Third, region, The North and the South…Finally race: there's a ladder of racial hierarchy …white is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom and what's in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvelous rhyme goes: if you're white, you're alright; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back!) Americans assume that everyone will get their tribalism. But it takes a while to figure it all out. So in undergrad, we had a visiting speaker and a classmate whispers to another, "Oh my God he looks so Jewish" with a shudder, an actual shudder. Like Jewish was a bad thing. I didn't get it. As far as I could see, the man was white, not much different

> from the classmate herself. Jewish to me was something vague, something biblical. But l learned quickly…. (*Americanah* 187)

This post describes the kinds of tribalism that structure relationships in the country- class, ideology, region and race- each with a distinct set of discourses with serious implications for those who miss the lesson as Ifemelu learns in her relationships with both Curt and Blaine.

Ifemelu's blog is very successful, so successful in fact that it allows her to buy into a piece of the American Dream: home ownership. Furthermore, the blog is read not just in the virtual world; it is used in classrooms including the classroom of Blaine's ex-girlfriend who is also teaches Political Science. After meeting Ifemelu at another party to which she and Blaine have been invited, Paula talks about using the blog post "Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking about Blackness" to "push" her students "out of their comfort zone" (*Americanah* 326). In the novel, we have a long blog post that Paula reads from her phone to the other guests about the proper ways to engage with American ideas of Blackness for American Non-Blacks specifically which I will only excerpt a bit here:

> Dear American Non-Black, if an American Black person is telling you about an experience about being black, please do not eagerly bring up examples from your own life. Don't say 'it's just like when I…' You have suffered. Everyone in the world has suffered. But you have not suffered precisely because you are an American Black. Don't be quick to find alternative explanations for what

> happened. Don't say 'Oh, it's not really race, it's class. Oh, it's not race, it's gender. Oh, it's not race, it's the cookie monster.' You see, American Blacks don't WANT it to be race. They would rather not have racist shit happen. So maybe when they say something is about race, it's may be because it actually is? (*Americanah* 327)

In the singularity of her address in the post excerpted here especially, Ifemelu showcases the ways individuals contribute to the collective racial narrative, calling people to consider their own modes of thinking by drawing attention to the specificities that inform the system. As Guarracino points out, the novel is organized as "from writing to blogging- and back again" ("Writing 'so raw and true'… 13) while also engaging with "blogs as metanarrative device and how it informs the shaping of public opinion online" ("Writing 'so raw and true'… 3). These observations emphasize a merging of both public and private life that changes how readers engage with the writing.

Much like novels, blogs function in a singular, focused way in targeting specific audiences. According to Dean in *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (2010),

> Blogs don't address society writ large. They invite singular readers to consider what they have on offer. Or they just make themselves available to be found by search engines' crawlers. Unlike mass media's calling of collectives, publics, and nations into being, blogs don't unite bloggers and readers. To this extent, they are more like pencils than cinema. They remain specific in their multiplicity. (73)

Dean's point about how blogs function shows that the form of Adichie's novel disrupts usual ways of reading novels and blogs. Combining both forms of writing has the effect of expanding the experiences and emotions on offer to readers. Dean's point about blog's inviting singular readers to "consider what they have on offer" underscores what Paula is trying to achieve in her classroom when she pushes her students to read Ifemelu's blog. Simultaneously, singular reading reduces the potential of collective response, and so neutralizes the possibility of larger systemic impact that Blaine stresses in his suggestion that Ifemelu use more formal and scholarly language and examples for the blog.

Significantly, Ifemelu's success relies on the bluntness about race that Shan, as an African American is not permitted in her own signed and published writing. In fact, Ifemelu's frank discussions about race in her blogs only exist in the virtual domain as she quickly learns after her first diversity talk that the parameters of her writing online has no equal in the real world. Thus, she learns to practice situated literacy.

During her first diversity talk at a small company in Ohio, Ifemelu makes the mistake of shaping her talk in the terms that have been so successful on her anonymous online blog. In a place where, she acknowledges with worry, sundown towns still openly exist, and in front of an all-white audience, Ifemelu delivers a carefully prepared speech that begins with 'The first step to honest communication about race is to realize that you cannot equate all racisms' (*Americanah* 306). The wooden response of her audience at the end of the talk is the first indication that something has gone wrong; the second is the email she receives telling her she is a racist in all caps while advising her to be grateful she has been let into the country (*Americanah* 307). With this incident, Ifemelu instantly

learns that the audience that reads her blog and the one she talks to are two different sets of people. The audience of the diversity workshops is simply interested in the "gesture of her presence" and not in the "content of her ideas" (*Americanah* 307). Here again, her identity is the reason she is in the room in the first place, just like Shan points out. And so she begins to tailor her talks to her different audiences. During her talks she says, 'America has made great progress for which we should be very proud' and in her blog she writes, "*Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it*" (*Americanah* 307). In this way, Ifemelu's literacy practices engage with "distinct *discourse communities*, in different domains of life" (*Situated Literacies…* 11).

Central to the definition of literacy as social practice is the idea that different literacies are associated with different domains of life and situated in particular contexts (*Situated Literacies…* 8). David Barton and Mary Hamilton argue that

> Many literacy events in life are regular, repeated activities, and these can often be a useful starting-point for research into literacy. Some events are linked into routine sequences and these may be part of the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions like work-places, schools and welfare agencies. Some events are structured by the more informal expectations and pressures of the home or peer group. (*Situated Literacies…* 9)

Barton and Hamilton's assessment point to the ways in which particular settings call for particular literacies. In the case of Ifemelu, her literacy development, which is critical to her self-formation, occurs in formal and informal institutions and spaces. Her move to America is the result of constant interruptions in her university education in Nigeria,

when, during one of the school closures prompted by a strike at the university, her Aunty Uju suggests she apply to a school in America where her education will not be disrupted (*Americanah* 100). Thus the American classroom is the next stage of her formation but not in the ways that Ifemelu expects.

In the aforementioned blog post "… In America, You are Black, Baby," Ifemelu describes the process of identity formation that African or Caribbean immigrants undergo in America. For Ifemelu, this process of becoming black occurs at specific moments- hers occurs in school. As she puts it, "We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up" (*Americanah* 222). This "making up" of something to satisfy her teacher is one of the early lessons she learns about what to do in the American classroom. Soon after she starts school she notices that literacy is performed in the classroom: the students are "all flush with knowledge, not of the subject of the classes, but of how to *be* in the classes. They never said 'I don't know.' They said, instead, 'I'm not sure,' which did not give any information but still suggested the possibility of knowledge" (*Americanah* 135). In *Americanah*, institutionalized education which has to do with passing on culture, with assimilation, teaches Ifemelu "how to be." According to Vickerman, assimilation is "the process by which outsiders to a society gradually become absorbed into it so that they lose their distinctiveness" ("Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change" 150). The natural and insidious nature of this process is partly what drives Ifemelu's writing in the novel.

Ifemelu's experiences with the norms of American schooling are particularly instructive in terms of the processes of self-formation associated with B*ildung.* According to Austen, "*Bildung* is identified with independent reading and a relationship to personal mentors, as opposed to more formal and institutionalized 'education.'" In opposition to the norms of "how to be" in both Nigeria and America, the novel is primarily about Ifemelu's independent reading of people and culture and her relationship with her lovers, and the others she encounters, who are all in the role of "personal mentors." These relationships and encounters with diverse peoples form the basis of the "literacy events" that inspire her writing. According to Barton and Hamilton, literacy events are defined "are activities where literacy has a role. Usually there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context" in conversation with others. In the novel, literacy events occur in the unspoken norms of assimilation that work to coopt/integrate new immigrants. For black/African immigrants, these literacy events are usually structured around race, "how to be" as a black person, what Ifemelu comes to define in her aforementioned blog post as "becoming black." In this sense, the situated nature of Ifemelu's blog posts highlight the ways in which particular racial discourses in America can generate talk and writing where before no one has ever interrogated said discourses.

The informal aspect of Ifemelu's education occurs in the form of various kinds assimilation in non-institutional contexts. As Goyal puts it, "Each of her romances, with the wealthy white American, Curt, the earnest African American professor, Blaine, and

her childhood love, Obinze, is mediated by a set of reading protocols" ("Africa and the Black Atlantic" xiii). First, to bond better with her childhood boyfriend Obinze in Nigeria, she discovers particular forms of American literature and popular culture. In fact, Ifemelu's self-formation arguably begins with the reading lessons established in the novel, specifically the reading of American literature or popular culture long before she even arrives in the United States. In the novel, Obinze, Ifemelu's first boyfriend, tries to get her to read American literature in order to pass on his love of American culture through stories from what he describes as "proper books" (60). Obsessed with all things American, Obinze's fluency is evident in his reading habits and in the conversations he has with schoolmates on the prospect of moving abroad. While observing his interactions with their friends, Ifemelu experiences a "literacy event," a moment of discovery as noted in her own lack of knowledge on the subject of America:

> To be here, among people who had gone abroad, was natural for him. He was fluent in the knowledge of foreign things, especially of American things. Everybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines, but he knew details about American presidents from a hundred years ago. Everybody watched American shows, but he knew about Lisa Bonet leaving *The Cosby Show* to go and do *Angel Heart* and Will Smith's huge debts before he was signed to do *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. "You look like a black American" was his ultimate compliment, which he told her when she wore a nice dress, or when her hair was done in large braids. Manhattan was his zenith. He often said "It's not as if this

> is Manhattan" or "Go to Manhattan and see how things are." (*Americanah* 67)

Obinze smoothly engages with the narratives of his preferred culture via both television and literature. In her argument about how immigrant literature can help cultural integration in *Immigrants, Literature and National Integration* (2010), Chantal Lacroix notes that while culture is usually thought of as the privilege of a nation and thus local, "globalisation" as the "standardisation and homogenisation of culture" has translated into "the abolition of barriers and distance and means instant access to arts, opinions, entertainment, raw information, among other things and the leveling of cultures" (62). It is this reach of globalization that Vickerman points to in his comment that U.S media has disseminated the negative racial attitudes towards blacks worldwide ("Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change" 146). In contrast, Goyal argues that though "globally mobile…racial formations like blackness refuse to travel and translate" ("Africa and the Black Atlantic" xi). This is not to say that the negative racial depictions of African Americans don't exist or influence how Africans encounter African Americans especially after migration to the United States. It is that Obinze does not cultivate or absorb the negative attitudes towards African Americans that can surface in the television and literature he consumes while in Nigeria. And this is an observation that holds true for Ifemelu as well.[53]

[53] In *Americanah,* Ifemelu is watching *Roots* with her boyfriend Obinze and his mother in Nigeria and she sees Obinze's mother turn away from a scene where slaves are being maltreated with tears in her eyes (138). It is tears that convey that Obinze's mother is hurt by the inhumane treatment of the slaves and not that such brutality underscores the violence and disregard that continues to define black –white relationships in a contemporary America.

While Obinze is obsessed with America, Ifemelu is not so easily coopted and so interrupts the narrative of the leveling of cultures associated with globalization. Her response to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is an example:

> He gave her a copy of *Huckleberry Finn*, the pages creased from his thumbing, and she started reading it on the bus home but stopped after a few chapters. The next morning, she put it down on his desk with a decided thump. 'Unreadable nonsense,' she said. 'It's written in different American dialects,' Obinze said. 'And so what? I still don't understand it.' (*Americanah* 67)

Ifemelu chooses to be honest about the novel/culture's inaccessibility. This honesty is a trait that Obinze also shares. In "'The Strange Familiar': Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*" (2015), Caroline Levine argues that the plots of bildung and migration that structure the novel makes it ideal for "defamiliarization" as both children and immigrants "struggle to make sense of the habits that dominate the alien worlds they enter." On this note, Levine writes that what most closely unites Ifemelu and Obinze is their "unwillingness to accept habitual falsehoods- the routines of hypocrisy and posturing that organize social relations" (593). It is this unwillingness to accept falsehood or hypocrisy that drives the majority of the content on her blog once she begins to uncover an "alien" America upon arrival. Significantly, it is she who is not "interested" in American culture who eventually gets an opportunity to "school" in America while Obinze ends up in England but is later deported when he is caught arranging a marriage to become a legal resident.

Ifemelu's reaction to Mark Twain's novel is particularly interesting because it is a novel that Morrison uses in her 1994 essay "On the Backs of Blacks" to illustrate how negative race talk is a powerful "bonding mechanism" on display in American literature when the character Pap asserts that he would never vote again because Negros can vote in Ohio (*What Moves at the Margins* 148). This negative race talk is especially in play when immigrants are added to the cultural/environmental mix as Morrison argues that assimilation is complete only when the "lesson of racial estrangement" has been learned (*What Moves at the Margins* 146). In the essay, Morrison describes how this lesson operates particularly in the last scene of Elia Kazan's film, *America, America* which is "the story of a young Greek's fierce determination to immigrate to America" (*What Moves at the Margins* 145).

In her reading of the scene, Morrison notes how Stavros, the immigrant, gets a job shining shoes at Grand Central terminal. While he is working, a young black man comes into his workplace to solicit a customer, but he is run off to shouts of 'Get out of here! We're doing business here!' And the young black man goes away silently. According to Morrison, "[t]his interloper… is crucial to the mix of signs that make up the movie's happy-ending immigrant story: a job, a straw hat, an infectious smile- and a scorned black. It is the act of racial contempt that transforms this charming Greek into an entitled white. Without it, Stavros's future as an American is not at all assured" (*What Moves at the Margins* 145). Morrison's assessment is not just about white immigrants; black immigrants are also participants in this process of learning racial estrangement. As she puts it, "It doesn't matter anymore what shade the newcomer's skin is. A hostile posture towards resident blacks must be struck at the Americanizing door before it will open"

(*What Moves at the Margins* 147). In the context of the epigraph that opens this essay, Shan seems to be suggesting that Ifemelu is ascending in American society on the "backs of blacks" as she and her writing are not perceived as "angry" although she is black (*Americanah* 337). It is a suggestion that raises the question of why Ifemelu and her writing are judged differently in American society- does her writing show that she is estranged from the US black population? And following the issues raised in Morrison's assessment of immigrant integration, two critical questions present themselves: considering the nature of situated literacies, how do immigrants learn a "hostile posture" towards the resident black population and how do they know when to use it?

Morrison's essay provides some answers to these questions as do the sociologists that have pointed to the mainstream White Anglo-Saxon frame of assimilation in America at the beginning of this essay.[54] According to Morrison, the signs that make up what she describes as "the movie's happy-ending immigrant story" which features "a job, a straw hat, an infectious smile- and a scorned black" are all part the explicit insertion of "signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the hierarchy" into everyday life also known as "race talk" (*What Moves at the Margins* 145). Race talk is disseminated in popular culture that has been shaped by "film, theatre, advertising, the press, television, and literature" (*What Moves at the Margins* 145). In the way that Morrison puts this, it is clear that she reads Stavros' reaction to the black man in terms of a particular form of literacy that he has become acquainted with in his migration to America, a form of literacy integral to the process of assimilation. In other words, race talk is a system of signs and symbols actively used in

[54] Milton Vickerman in "Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change" (2007); Richard Alba and Victor Nee in *Remaking the American Mainstream* (2003).

American entertainment and education that immigrants learn and come to use knowingly for their own advancement. Here, as Lacroix has pointed out, assimilation

> implies bringing immigrants into society through a one-way and one-sided process of adaptation. Newcomers are to give up their prior linguistic, cultural and social characteristics, adopt the values and practices of the mainstream receiving society and become indistinguishable from the majority population. (*Immigrants, Literature and National Integration* 8)

So Morrison is helpful in noting that the lesson of racial estrangement is central to the norms of assimilation. However, she is wrong in suggesting that immigrants adopt those lessons without criticism or negotiation. Adichie's *Americanah* dramatizes a visible renegotiation of race talk in popular culture. And she is not the only one, as this renegotiation has followed the rise of immigrant literatures in the United States.

In her thesis on immigrant perspectives on the realities of American cultural values,[55] Alyson Massey points to the shifting attitudes of writers of modern immigrant novels over the decades. According to Massey, immigrant fiction after World War II began the call for "inclusive 'dynamic pluralism' in the US" and immigrant fiction after 1970 intensified this call with its critique of the US and its lack of support for its racially diverse immigrant population ("Revealing Your Delusions…"14). It is a trend that postcolonial African writers like Adichie, Cole, Bulawayo have followed with their own migration to the US as they challenge assimilation protocols by either dismissing it completely or falling "victim to their new American identity rather than embrace it" ("Revealing Your Delusions…"16). According to the Malaysian-born American author

[55] "Revealing Your Delusions: Perspectives on American Values in Contemporary African Fiction" M.A. in Liberal Studies. Thesis. Georgetown University, February 19, 2016.

Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, it is the "self that escapes assimilation… [that] renews American culture, making it ready for the future" (qtd. in "Revealing Your Delusions…"15).

The Relationship between Africans and African Americans: Race Talk in Action

In a significant moment in *Americanah*, one of Ifemelu's first lessons on the dynamics of intraracial relationships is that she should make friends with other black immigrants. She is told by the Tanzanian Mwombeki who is giving the welcome talk at the African Students Association Meeting (ASA) in school,

> Try and make friends with our African-American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. Always attend African Students Association meetings, but if you must, you can also try the Black Student Union… You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals… than with Americans both black and white…. (141-142)

According to Stephanie Li in *Pan-African American Literature: Signifyin(g) Immigrants in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), the similarity in racial experience fosters a "pan-African American" identity, a label that reflects diverse national origins while also "signaling a strong association with African Americans" (12). Notably, while the racial relationship is primarily in the connection between African immigrants: Li's "signal" suggests that when it comes to a relationship between members of the "New African Diaspora" and the descendants of the forcibly transported settler African American

population in America, it is merely an association which underscores Morrison's notion of racial estrangement with migration and assimilation.

The peculiar nature of the African diaspora and how its different strands relate in particular contexts is the central subject of Paul Zeleza's "Diaspora Dialogues: Can We 'Go Home Again'? In the essay, Zeleza notes that "… African diaspora in the Atlantic are multilayered, composed of multiple communities, different waves of migration and diasporization. This means that African diasporas are confronted with the challenge of how they relate not only to their hostlands and homelands but also to each other" (*The New African Diaspora* 32). In the relationship amongst migrant blacks, parts of it are thriving. For instance, in the relationship between African immigrants in America, Li has noticed the shaping of a pan-African form of solidarity whereby African immigrants from various countries form and maintain deep relationships in recent African novels. The relationship between different groups of Africans from the continent in the Diaspora is especially significant considering the steady dissolution of Pan-Africanism in the decades since the fight for Independence that brought several different African countries and others together in the 1960s.[56] In her *Pan-African American Literature: Signifyin(g) Immigrants in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), Li argues that in the recent novels of African immigrant authors like Adichie, Dinaw Mengestu, Teju Cole and others, the entrenched divisions of black and white in America often reduces African immigrants to a common racial identity that does not readily recognize differences of nation, tribe, or religion. Therefore, African immigrants find community and identity among émigrés from other African nations (11) but not amongst the native black population.

[56] See Paul Zeleza's "Pan-Africanism in the Age of Obama: Challenges and Prospects" (2011), where he describes the movement and its varieties across the globe.

Significantly, the common racial identity ascribed to Africans relies on a long and abiding pedagogical narrative of Africans as primitive, often disseminated in school via literature or in popular culture via television, which has influenced the quality of the relationship between Africans and African Americans. The narrative, which shows up in Mwombeki's comment during his talk on campus, has been the subject of African diaspora novels[57] and several critical studies. In "Questions of Identity among African Immigrants in America," the Tanzanian immigrant Msia Kibona Clark, who grew up in Ohio, tells how a young Togolese student with whom she rode the school bus in the 1980s became the object of cruel African jokes and recounts her guilt in not standing up for him. Clark notes that the boy had to listen to a "barrage of jokes" based on the TV images of Shaka running through the bush with spear in hand every morning on the way to school ("Questions of Identity among African…" 261).

In her essay describing the harrowing school experiences of African born children titled, "Seeking to be Heard: An African-Born, American-Raised Child's Tale of Struggle, Invisibility and Invincibility," the Ghanaian Mercy Agyepong also tells of a similar experience in New York in the 1990s. Her story begins with her Americanized and assimilated cousins at home who call her "African-bootie scratcher" ("Seeking to be Heard…" 158) and extends to school where she is asked by classmates if she lived in the jungle with wild animals as pets, had a pet monkey, rode on elephants, walked around naked ("Seeking to be Heard…159-160). It is a narrative that Toni Morrison also points to as part of her formative understanding of Africa. In her essay "On *The Radiance of the King* by Camara Laye" published in *What Moves at the Margins* (2008) and again more

[57] NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) also has a description of what the immigrant Darling faces in her American classroom.

recently in *The Source of Self Regard* (2019) in the essay "The Foreigner's Home," Morrison writes of the velvet-lined offering plates making their way through the Church pews on Sunday aimed at collecting funds to bring light to dark Africa in the 1930s Ohio where she grew up. The stories she heard and read about Africa portrayed a

> huge needy homeland none of us had seen or cared to see, inhabited by people with whom we maintained a delicate relationship of mutual ignorance and disdain, and with whom we shared a mythology of passive, traumatized otherness cultivated by textbooks, films, cartoons, and the hostile name-calling children learn to love" (*What Moves…* 118; The *Source of Self Regard* 8-9).

In comparing the experiences of these three women between the 1930s and the 1990s, what stands out is the similarity of the hostility and name-calling that even African children who have assimilated after migration have learned and are wont to participate in. While this hostility and name-calling is not strictly an African American phenomenon, recent African immigrants associate it more readily with African Americans, which has had the effect of creating tension and suspicion thus limiting interactions between both groups. For instance, in *Americanah*, Mwombeki tells the new students who are actually unaware of how they are perceived: "If an African American calls you a Mandingo or a booty scratcher, he is insulting you for being African" (*Americanah* 141). With Mwombeki's description, the students learn that there is the potential that they will be called either "Mandingo" or "booty scratcher" and these are words intended to diminish and offend the person at whom it is directed. It is a description that points to the radically

different worldviews between immigrants and the native population, both black and white, that makes forming new communities difficult for immigrants.

Writers and critics of the African Diaspora novel have described the challenges of migration in much detail. For Tanure Ojaide in "Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature," "While migration to the developed West is a relief from economic discomfort of Africa, it burdens the individual with psychological, spiritual, and other problems" (46). Delphine Fongang draws attention to some of those very real problems in her introductory essay to *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature* (2018). According to Fongang, relocation means that migrants have to adapt to new cultural norms, new settings and new cultural ideologies that "sharply differ from their worldview." Furthermore, these migrants often find themselves in "racially charged environments, coupled with hegemonic ideologies and structural inequities that thwart attempts at self-definition" ("Introduction: Transitional Identity and Cultural Ambiguity in Diasporic African Literature" 1). Adichie herself points to the reaction that her roommates exhibited upon seeing her during her undergraduate years: "When I first came to the U.S. to go to university almost 10 years ago, my roommates were startled by everything about me: that I wore what they called "American" clothes, that I spoke English, that I knew who Mariah Carey was. They also seemed disappointed, as if they had been expecting a real African and then had me turn up."[58] It is a reaction that causes her to give them a copy of Ama Ata Aidoo's short story collection *No Sweetness Here* (1970) to re-educate them about Africa and Africans. Only one person reads it and tells Adichie, the book is

[58] See Adichie's "An African Education in "No Sweetness Here" *NPR*. January 18, 2008. Accessed April 28, 2019. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18142470

not very "African."[59] While we can assume that Adichie's roommates are white, there may not have been a much different reaction if they were black. Altogether, the impact of race on the assimilation of African migrants is particularly important, as it has proved to be definitive in the relationship between African blacks and American blacks.

In *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (2000), John A. Arthur writes that the most socially visible aspects in the making of American society are racial status and cultural identity (72). In significant ways, ideological racism, which is defined as "the normative cultural system asserting that particular racial groups are inferior," has shaped American race relations. Ideological racism "defines the cognitive and affective contents of racial minority and majority group relationships. It structures the system of stratification, while also influencing access to wealth, power and economic opportunities." Altogether, Arthur writes that the "contents of racial relations and dominant-minority group interactions have been shaped by economic, legal, cultural, and political forces." Notably, dominant-minority group interactions have been characterized by "legal and institutional discrimination," which also impacts immigrants (*Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant*… 72-73). Legal and institutional discrimination also influences minority-minority interaction, as immigrants are an additional burden on the limited resources available in an unequal system.

To counter discrimination and create opportunities for themselves, African immigrants have consciously separated themselves from the black underclass in America's racial hierarchy. In his study of African immigrant social networks, Arthur notes how researchers have found that immigrant blacks "tend to stress their distinctiveness from American-born blacks, setting themselves apart by emphasizing their

[59] Ibid.

ethnic pride and culture" (*Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant*…78). The reason for this stress on difference is because of America's racial hierarchies, which determines where black immigrants fit into the society and how well they would succeed in a society premised on a White, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon ethnic core of values. With African Americans at the bottom of this hierarchy and black African immigrants associated with primitivity, and so next on the hierarchy, it has become competitive.

With migration, black Africans are expected to assimilate, to learn the "composite culture" (qtd. in *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant*… 69), that has been primarily defined by a White, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon mainstream. In the American context, this process of assimilation is usually framed using the metaphor of the "melting pot": '…a process in which different groups come together and contribute in roughly equal amounts to create a common culture and a new, unique society' (qtd. in *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant*… 69). But this is not true for African Americans, which is what Toni Morrison calls us to attend to in her essay, "On the Backs of Blacks" published in *What Moves at the Margins: Selected Nonfiction* (2008). As Richard Alba and Victor Nee argue in *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (2003), race has been a crucial and limiting factor for how African Americans have been integrated into American life. In contrast, the American mainstream has absorbed various European and non-European groups as long as they are white despite the differences in culture (1-16). As Vickerman puts it, "The fact is that, though many native- born Americans disliked Eastern, Central and Southern Europeans, phenotypically and culturally these immigrants were quite similar to White Americans." In other words, the African American population was too different to be absorbed; a

situation that has led to what Nathan Glazer describes as the rise of "cultural pluralism" following the Civil Rights era ("Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change" 149). In turn, this cultural pluralism has led to "multiculturalism" which Vickerman views as "anti-assimilation" as it is a "rival mode of organizing relationships between groups" in downplaying the "need for immigrants (and minorities, in general) to dissolve into the White majority." Significantly, Vickerman notes that immigrants are accelerating the "scope and intensity" of multiculturalism as they struggle to adjust to the Black/White frame. And this is the origin of what Morrison has described as "the lesson of racial estrangement" because immigrants perceive that "complete assimilation" is necessary for success in America and they envision this success in "Anglocentric terms" ("Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change 150).

The Lessons of Racial Estrangement:

In *Americanah*, it is Mwombeki's talk at the ASA meeting that begins to make visible the coded language that African immigrants use to indicate that they are different from African Americans in the pursuit of success. Ifemelu notices the drawing of boundaries when Aunty Uju tells Dike 'you are not black' when he says something to her that includes the words, 'we black folk' (*Americanah* 379). In fact Ifemelu brings up this problematic defining of the self against the native black population after Dike tries to kill himself. Aunty Uju responds that she told Dike that he is not black because she did not want him to start behaving like "these people and thinking that everything that happens to him is because he's black" (*Americanah* 380). Ifemelu also notices when Jane, her aunt's Grenadian neighbor in the Brooklyn Flatlands, says they will move to the suburbs soon

so her daughter does not start "behaving like these black Americans" which Ifemelu does not understand. And when she asks her what she means, Jane tells her she will understand in time (*Americanah* 113). At the ASA meeting in school, Mwombeki defines the relationship between recent immigrant Blacks and African Americans as being between two extremes: the African Americans who mythologize Africa and those who primitivize those from the Continent:

> The African Americans who come to our meetings are the ones who write poems about Mother Africa and think every African is a Nubian queen. … Some will ask you annoying questions about Africa, but others will connect with you. You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals… than with Americans both black and white… (*Americanah* 141-142)

This moment is also echoed in T. Obinkaram Echewa's *Studying in America: A Guide for the African Student* (1980), a manual that specifies what African students can expect in their education in America. The manual begins with what to do after gaining admission into an American university and includes instructions on everything from clearing customs to negotiating race relations once in country. It is also a moment dramatized to varying degrees in earlier African Diaspora novels like Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977). The dynamics of how relationships work between the different groups on campus that Mwombeki describes here influences Ifemelu's approach to her new community and does inform her writing when she becomes a blogger.

Mwombeki's point that the students will make friends more easily with other émigrés is part of the narrative that African immigrants and African Americans cannot get along. It is a history that Ifemelu encounters when upon first meeting her, Shan asks about the meaning of the word "Acata" (*Americanah* 320), a derogatory term that African immigrants use to describe African Americans which has fueled the division. According to Msia Clark in "Questioning Identity Among African Immigrants in America,"

> Africans and African Americans have been pitted against each other by hundreds of years of damaging propaganda, harmful media images, and destructive school curricula. Jobs, scholarships, grants, and tenure have been resources Africans and African Americans have competed for, leading African Americans to feel threatened by Africans. On the other side, Africans often arrive in the U.S. with warnings that they not socialize with Black Americans. (*The New African Diaspora* 261).

John A Arthur's *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (2000) also echoes Clark's point when he writes that black immigrants view black Americans as "lazy, disorganized, obsessed with racial images, and having a laissez-faire attitude toward family life and child raising. On their part, native-born American blacks view black immigrants as arrogant and oblivious to the racial tensions between blacks and whites" (78). To emphasize just how long this narrative has been circulating in African Diaspora literature, this sentiment is described in great detail in Ike Oguine's *The Squatter's Tale* (2000).

When the protagonist of Oguine's novel, Obi, leaves his Uncle Happiness' house to move in with his friend Andrew, he gets a tour of Oakland, California. As they drive

through, Obi notes that the streets look like places "from which hope and ambition had been wrung out":

> People neglected or couldn't afford to put a fresh coat of paint on their homes, dead and dying cars littered the sides of the streets, some of which were so empty it seemed as though everyone had been wiped out by a plague. Andrew took a long route to show me the really bad parts in West Oakland, the way a Londoner might show off the West End…I noticed the way the insides of some houses had been eaten up by a billion famished ants, leaving only outer walls, frames and roofs, the boarded-up auto repair shops covered by generations of graffiti, the empty lots on which moss was spreading, and the people, ragged and stranded, standing on pavements, sitting outside shops, staring into space. (Oguine 29)

What Obi sees and the lesson that Andrew tries to teach him is explicitly connected to the fact that inner city Oakland with its black residents is not a portrait of success in a context where what African immigrants want most of all is to succeed economically. It is a lesson that is further emphasized later by Ezendu, the surgeon husband of his friend Ego, when he tells Obi during his visit to their home: "Black Americans, he said with venom, were to be avoided completely. They were lazy, dishonest, dissolute, grasping; in short they had all the vices known to mankind and apparently not one single virtue" (Oguine 126). However, Obi notices that Ezendu especially enjoys African American music. As Obi puts it, "It seemed that these African-Americans—successful actors and musicians—did not merit Ezendu's condemnation. Or maybe their music and their films were excepted but not their persons" (Oguine 126). As Feldner puts it, "while Obi does not contradict

him, the hyperbole in his narration of this conversation shows that he does not take Ezendu completely seriously. Also, he notes with fine irony that most of the music Ezendu likes comes from African American artists such as Marvin Gaye, Ella Fitzgerald, Roberta Flack, and Ray Charles" (*Narrating the New African Diaspora…* 114).

In contrast, there is a positive circulation of African American music, literature and film in *Americanah* thus drawing attention to the critical paradox that is present when African immigrants continue to warn other new migrants against relationships with African Americans. According to Na'Imah Ford, "Historically, African American artistic expression has been exported throughout the world via jazz, blues, rock n roll, reggae, etc. with these genres' origins firmly planted in their African roots for decades" (Fongang 56). The positive effect of this export is also present in Chris Abani's *Graceland* where the young Elvis Oke is completely enamored with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and James Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man* (1965).

Yogita Goyal's assertion that "blackness" is an American phenomenon that does not "travel" in "Africa and the Black Atlantic" (xi), points to blackness as a racial construct that is negative, restrictive altogether. In effect, while particular forms of blackness do travel and provide positive representations of African Americans for Africans, blackness as negative is a peculiarly Western construct. In *The Physics of Blackness* (2015), Michelle Wright notes how blackness was dehumanized to make it easy for slaveholders to do their dirty deeds and harder for abolitionists to counter those deeds. According to Wright, in the early manifestation of Blackness as business, "African slaves were marketed as 'Negroes'- a distinctly subhuman species who possess, Thomas Jefferson remarked, 'that immovable veil of black,' thus excusing from further

consideration the accusations of inhuman practice lobbed by abolitionists" (1). Morrison points to this portrayal of black bodies as subhuman and its eventual circulation popularized in Western literature about Africa. In her essay "On *The Radiance of the King* by Camara Laye" which I mentioned earlier, Morrison writes of three invidious literary tropes disseminated in the works of Joyce Cary, Elspeth Huxley, H. Rider Haggard, that Laye's book challenges: "Africa as jungle- impenetrable, chaotic, and threatening; Africa as sensual but not on its own rational; and the essence or 'heart' of Africa, its ultimate discovery, as, unless mitigated by European influence and education, incomprehensible" ("What Moves… "130). In other words, Morrison's learns about Africa in these terms through reading the works of colonial adventurers in Africa who return home and tell these stories. Similarly, African characters arrive in the United States to discover that they must learn race talk through assimilation into the immigrant and non-immigrant black discourse communities. And how well a person learns and is able to deploy this race talk in particular contexts determines success, which is what Ifemelu in *Americanah* discovers. In other words, when characters do move to the United States, the context of the move and where they have moved to are integral to shaping their racial literacy in the pursuit of the American Dream.

Race Talk in the Novel:

In *Americanah*, race talk begins right when Ifemelu arrives in New York and quickly begins to learn the intricacies of American culture. For example, after Aunty Uju passes her medical school exams and prepares to go for a job interview, she tells Ifemelu that she would be taking out her braids as braids are considered unprofessional in the

American workplace- at least that is what she implies to Ifemelu. When Ifemelu asks if there are no doctors with braided hair in America, Aunty Uju points out, "I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (120). In the literacy and assimilation frame, what Aunty Uju is doing is to fit into mainstream American culture. According to the New London Group in "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies,"

> Corporate cultures and their discourses of familiarity are frequently more subtly and more rigorously exclusive than the most nasty- honestly nasty- of hierarchies. Replication of corporate culture demands assimilation to mainstream norms, and this really works only if a person already speaks the language of the mainstream. For anyone who is not a comfortable part of the culture and discourses of the mainstream, it is even harder to get into networks that operate informally than it was to enter into the old discourses of formality. (Cope and Kalantzis 12)

Ifemelu encounters this subtle corporate culture when the rich Curt arranges a job interview at a public relations firm where he has pull and her career counselor Ruth tells her, 'My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job' (*Americanah* 204). Where Ifemelu had wondered and laughed in the past at her Aunt's assertions that braids are unprofessional, she no longer laughs now and indeed straightens her hair, a decision that she later comes to regret as her hair falls out and she eventually has to cut it. And just to note the impact of hair on how well an individual fits into a company, when Ifemelu resigns from the job, on her own terms after her blog gains momentum, the only other black woman in the

company who is African American and works in the cafeteria, Miss Margaret asks her, 'You leaving?'…. Sorry, hon. They need to treat folk better around here. You think your hair was part of the problem?' (*Americanah* 214) And this reshaping of the self is not just about physical appearance.

Part of doing what you have to do includes reshaping language. Ifemelu notices that Aunty Uju's accent when speaking in front of white Americans becomes "nasal" and "sliding" i.e. when she says "put it back" it comes out as "*Pooh-reet-back*" and along with the changed accent emerges an "apologetic and self-abasing" persona (*Americanah* 109). As a whole, this notion of "doing what you have to do" is about assimilation, which functions in terms of lessons in cultural literacy that immigrants learn to use which Ifemelu discusses on her blog.

America's distinctiveness is not just about hair or accent but also word choice. like Ginika corrects Ifemelu when she says "rat," calling it "a mouse" (*Americanah* 128), and how people are addressed especially in terms of race. In an early incident Ifemelu witnesses Ginika and the white cashier as they try to identify the black lady who helped Ginika find her dress, defining her by the color of her skin. Hair as identifier does not work as the sales women all have the same color and length of hair, so after several awkward pauses, the cashier decides she would figure it out herself later. When they are outside the store, Ifemelu comments on the inability of the cashier to racially identify her co-worker and she asks Ginika, "Why didn't she just ask, 'was it the black girl or the white girl? And Ginika responds, 'Because this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things'" (*Americanah* 128). Altogether, what Ifemelu keeps hearing from Aunty Uju and Ginika as explanation for their behavior, for their adoption

of particular ways of being in interacting with her and others, is encapsulated in the phrase, "This is America. It's different" (*Americanah* 110, 125) This is a phrase that no one bothers to explain to Ifemelu, she simply has to learn it and practice it.

Ifemelu's lessons in cultural literacy from Aunty Uju and Ginika are a form of socialization into America's unspoken norms. As she watches her friend Ginika, Ifemelu aches to integrate. She notices that there are "codes" that Ginika knows; "ways of being that she had mastered" as being young enables her to be "flexible and fluid" thus the "cultural cues had seeped into her skin, and now she went bowling, and knew what Tobey Maguire was about, and found double-dipping gross" (*Americanah* 126). Ifemelu's desire to integrate is primarily about belonging in the ordinariness of daily American life, to be able to do whatever without thinking twice about it which the narrator describes in the following way: "She hungered to understand everything about America, to wear a new knowing skin right away: to support a team at the Super Bowl, understand what a Twinkie was and what sports "lockouts" meant, measure in ounces and square feet, order a "muffin" without thinking that it was really a cake, and say "I 'scored' a deal" without feeling silly" (*Americanah* 136). Significantly, it is not school that inculcates this desire but rather Aunty Uju and Ginika acting in concert, unknown to and unaware of each other, each plays a role in making Ifemelu feel that she does not belong and must reshape herself to fit into her new community.

It is precisely because school has proved to be inadequate in the process of socializing both new and old Americans that contemporary forms of literacy have sought to correct for this defect. Early texts on the pedagogical content of American education were framed in terms of curriculum changes aimed at cultural literacy. For instance, E.D.

Hirsh's *Cultural Literacy* (1987) points to this necessity. For Hirsh who notes the decline of literate knowledge, cultural literacy refers to a curriculum of shared information intra-generationally and inter-generationally- a common basis for communication in and between generations, shared knowledge that is critical for the kind of top tier education that would foster continuous economic expansion and social justice in America. Quoting the Harvard historian and sociologist Orlando Patterson, Hirsh agrees with him that it is necessary to understand "mainstream American culture" in terms of the imperatives of industrial civilization." As Hirsh points out, while Patterson's comments were directed at minorities who have had reason to be suspicious of what we mean by culture in America considering America's general ignorance of its racist history, "cultural literacy is not the property of any group or class, instead it is "constantly changing and open'; it is "dialectic" as each group participates and contribute, transforms and is transformed as much as any other group" (*Cultural Literacy* 11). What is critical to note in the argument is that while Hirsh does have a point in suggesting that it is necessary to have a foundation of shared education that allows for communication and continual progress, it is a particular kind of curriculum that ignores key aspects of American history i.e. racism and its salience.

Morrison's essay shows the necessity of a different pedagogy of racial discourse. And alongside this fact, there are the problems that Jonathan Kozol has pointed out in his *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (1991): the severe lack of basic resources in public schools, especially public schools in minority communities which is where immigrant children often finds themselves upon arrival.[60] Significantly, Hirsh

[60] Mercy Agyepong narrates difficult experiences in the New York Public School system in "Seeking to be Heard: An African-Born, American Raised Child's Tale of Struggle, Invisibility, and Invincibility" in

notes that while nationalism "may be regrettable in some of its worldwide political effects," the mastery of national culture is crucial to the "mastery of the standard language in every modern nation" as a multicultural education, laudable as it is, does not foster the learning of the "ways of one's own community" (*Cultural Literacy* 18). The learning of the ways of one's own community gets further complicated when considered through the lens of immigrants. The narrative of assimilation, of America as melting pot is one that sells a process of acculturation that is lopsided- one that fails to include African American lives and culture as aspirational- a fact that is evident in the narratives of African migration narratives set in the United States.

Ultimately, it is Obinze, the boyfriend in Nigeria who is obsessed with America that shows Ifemelu a portal of entry into America's culture and codes: books. And it is not just any book, but specific kinds. Obinze tells her to read "American books, novels and histories and biographies" (*Americanah* 136). He sends her a list of book in his first email at a cybercafé in Nsukka- he suggests James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. It is this reading that literally saves Ifemelu. With her new reading she discovers the power of books over Obinze and indeed, books provide a way into American culture for her:

> She read the books on Obinze's list but also, randomly pulled out book after book, reading a chapter before deciding which she would speed-read in the library and which she would check out. And as she read, America's tribalisms- race, ideology, and region- became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge. (*Americanah* 137)

Reprocessing Race, Language and Ability: African Born Educators and Students in Transnational America. Edited by Immaculée Harushimana, Chinwe Ikpeze, and Shirly Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., pp. 155-168.

In other words, while Ifemelu sees how Aunty Uju and Ginika enact performances in their interaction with members of the host community, those moments are only glimpses with no real explanation or explicit representation of how real relationships between immigrants and others is supposed be. Instead, she discovers an explanation for the "milky fog" of her daily experiences with Aunty Uju and Ginika while reading.

Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* especially shows Ifemelu how US blacks are perceived and treated by whites and other African Americans. While "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in my Mind" is a letter of exhortation to Baldwin's nephew written one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, it specifies the marginal status of the US black population and the impossibility which this status creates for community and belonging:

> Negroes in this country- and Negroes do not, strictly or legally speaking, exist in any other- are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black. White people hold the power, which means that they are superior to blacks (intrinsically, that is: God decreed it so), and the world has innumerable ways of making this difference known and felt and feared. Long before the Negro child perceives this difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. Every effort made by the child's elders to prepare him for a fate from which they cannot protect him causes him secretly, in terror, to begin to await, without knowing that he is doing so, his mysterious and inexorable punishment. He must be "good" not only in order to please his

> parents and not only to avoid being punished by them; behind their authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel… (*Collected Essays* 302)

Adichie's novel was published in 2013, approximately 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation that was supposed to make African Americans full citizens in their own country. And yet, from what Ifemelu sees in watching her aunt, her friend and how people relate with others in school, much of what Baldwin describes for his nephew still holds true. Baldwin's book makes clear the "signs and symbols" used to press blacks into the lower hierarchy in American society that Morrison draws attention to in "On the Backs of Blacks". Baldwin's essay showcases a form of schooled literacy that explains how conformity in mainstream America works which Ifemelu eventually breaks out of. Altogether, Ifemelu encounters America in the context of a schooled literacy- in institutional spaces like the classroom and in the books in the library and on the streets. However, while she encounters America in a local context in these spaces, she rebuilds it in a global context- her blog.

After a harrowing season when she cannot get a job and succumbs to a sexual transaction, her life takes an upward swing. She gets a job babysitting for the wealthy Kimberly and meets her cousin Curt, who eventually becomes her boyfriend. Ifemelu's new knowledge eventually becomes the subject of her blog posts, a career she embarks on fully after her relationship with Curt ends, a relationship that firmly establishes her in America as his influence gets her a job that results in a green card.

With immigration, Ifemelu develops reading habits that introduce her to America in terms of race. Baldwin's essays begin the process of orientation and as she reads more

of both fiction and non-fiction, she develops an opinion on race, which guides her blogging. Morrison's argument that the circulation of popular culture teaches the lesson of racial estrangement is seriously countered in Ifemelu's reading and writing in the novel. In Morrison's assessment, race talk seems ubiquitous in the world, however it is not and context is an important reason for why race talk really only circulates in American spaces. Context determines whether race talk is received as "race talk" where it functions as an interrogation of the black body or a cultural idiosyncrasy far removed and unexplained in the African context especially. In the context of *Americanah*, the learning and practice process of a social literacy of assimilation is completely turned upside down. In contrast to Aunty Uju and Ginika who manifest the mainstream norming processes of cultural literacy set in motion with migration and assimilation, Ifemelu questions the process and produces a counternarrative to America's hidden ethnocentrism, making it visible on her blog.

Chapter 3: Propaganda Literacy in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*

> *...I've had a few criticisms from people about the book, mostly in the UK - some readers have claimed they find it hard to get into the language, some have said It is just too mad, others said it is confusing, while one Zimbabwean woman once complained that the narrator of the book is not representative of Zimbabweans because he's an uneducated thug. But I embrace all these criticisms because apart from trying to learn from them, especially the one about how confusing the book can be. Some of the criticisms also make me realise how dangerous it can be to listen to readers, specifically those to do with the difficulty of the language, the excessive madness and the thuggish narrator - without these elements there would be no book to talk about.*
>
> Brian Chikwava *Malfini* Interview with Marianne Dutrion, 2013

Published in 2009, Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* is the story of a 22-year-old ex-youth militia and former Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, loyalist who is seeking asylum in London. Ironically, he does not want to stay; instead, he wants to work, get paid and return home. Unnamed in the novel, the narrator exposes the social and economic challenges experienced by an illegal immigrant who is also a criminal. In

an intense mix of Shona and Ndebele idioms, English and Caribbean creole[61], the language of the novel creates and consolidates a pan-African immigrant identity that is generative and also limited.

While the language of the novel effectively conveys the weight of the narrator's experience, it is also a weapon for manipulating his new community and the reader even as it betrays the narrator as having been manipulated himself. I want to suggest that despite these manipulations, the remixed language of the narrator's writing and his vernacular reading practices allow for his unconventional integration into British society. The novel's engagement with a diverse cross-section of British society that includes non-Africans, immigrant "lapsed Africans,"[62] and, immigrant non-lapsed Africans emphasizes a contingent kind of literacy that may be suspect but remains valid for understanding how the goals of immigrants and non-immigrants can shape the practice of literacy.

In Tendai Huchu's, *The Magistrate, the Maestro and the Mathematician* (2014) which tells three parallel stories of Zimbabweans in Edinburgh, Scotland, Chenai the daughter of the Magistrate picks up Chikwava's *Harare North* from the glass-topped coffee table in the family room and turns to the first page. What she says next is funny but also illustrative of what we have come to expect to be the proper language of African literature: 'Dad, if this guy cannae be bovvered to learn proper English, why did he write a novel' (Huchu 4)? What makes this comment hilarious is the fact that Chenai can also be said to be speaking strangely as her comment comes to us in the language of the

[61] See Marianne Dutrion, "A propos d'Harare North. Une conversation avec Brian Chikwava," 2013.
[62] In "Inescapable Predicament: Migration and Diasporic Identity in Brian Chikwava's Harare North" (2018), Delphine Fongang writes that "the narrator uses the term "lapsed African" to refer to African migrants who superficially adhere to African traditions and values. He believes their unrootedness is a malady that plagues some migrants in the diaspora, and he is determined as a "principled man" to uphold his Africanness and cultural values" (32).

assimilated: she immigrated as a child to Scotland with her parents. Furthermore, her criticism is delivered in "Scottish" English, which the narrator of Chikwava's novel will most likely say is not proper English either. Her father's response encapsulates how a majority of people read the novel:

> The Magistrate didn't have an answer. He'd seen the book in Waterstone's in Cameron Toll, whilst perusing legal texts, and had bought it on a whim. He couldn't get into it either. It appeared to have been written to deliberately turn the English language inside out. He wondered how the book had ever got published. (Huchu 4)

Indeed, the Zimbabwean Huchu's "wink" at Chikwava's novel in his own novel is an extended meditation on his own reaction. Having first encountered *Harare North* at a bookstore, Huchu thought it was "badly written." He confesses that it was on a second occasion, on a subsequent visit, that he bought the novel, read it, and saw the "genius" of what Chikwava was doing in his novel.[63] I, too, felt stumped and a little dizzy when I first read the novel. I even asked myself out loud, 'what is this?' But like Huchu, I have come to see the language as genius. However, this genius is lost on a majority of readers.

In the epigraph that begins this essay, a Zimbabwean reader tells Chikwava that his narrator comes across as an uneducated thug- a criticism that underscores not just the narrator's unschooled language but also points to his criminal identity. In the comments of literary critics, this criminal identity seems to temper what can reasonably be expected from the narrator. For literary critics like Kizito Z. Muchemwa, the narrator is "mis-

[63] Helen Cousins and Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo 'Zimbabweaness Today': An Interview with Tendai Huchu in *African Literature Today* 34, 2016 pp. 207.

educated"[64] and Yuleth Chigwedere agrees.[65] For Isaac Ndlovu, the narrator is "ill-educated," and/or "half-literate."[66] In other words, the narrator is perceived as partially educated at the very least. At most, he is a criminal who is an outright illiterate.[67] All of these readings of the narrator as literate or illiterate are directly linked to how he uses language and suggest that he is lacking a crucial quality that African migrants are supposed to have and reflect in their speech and writing: being/sounding educated.

The peril of not sounding educated is dramatized in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2012) set primarily in Britain where her protagonist, the Nigerian Deola, notes how she "plays" up her English accent, "speaking phonetics" as Nigerians call it, in order to appear intelligent (15). For African migrants, especially those who pride themselves on speaking the Queen's English, a demonstrated lack of literacy, as reflected in language use, is a sordid embarrassment. Therefore, it is no wonder that Chikwava also notes how a reader (perhaps the same reader in the epigraph above) reminded him that Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rate in Africa and "proper English" is the norm.[68] In "Zimbabwe's Global Citizens in 'Harare North': Some Preliminary Observations," Beacon Mbiba conveys this pride in his answer the question of "What kind of Zimbabwean is in the UK?":

> Zimbabwean community members are likely to have better academic qualifications than other African communities in the UK. This is largely to

---

[64] "Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities and Fracturing Economies in Zimbabwean Literature," 2011, pp. 403.
[65] "The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic Dislocation in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*," 2017, pp. 175.
[66] "Language and Audience in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*…," 2016, pp. 30, 36
[67] Sekai disses and dismisses the Green Bombers by describing them as "bunchies of uneducated thugs that like hitting people with sticks" (*HN* 8) thus echoing the words of Chikwava's referenced reader in the epigraph.
[68] Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek "The Authors in Conversation with Atta, Unigwe, and Chikwava" 203.

> do with the general investment they put in education as the route to progress as well as the higher level of literacy achieved by the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. (30)

His answer underscores the unspoken expectation that the average Zimbabwean migrant is somewhat educated and sometimes, even when they are extensively educated before arrival in the U.K., they continue their studies to acquire skills comparable with living and working in their new environment. In the case of *Harare North*, however, the narrator has no academic qualifications as his minimal education is a reflection of the decline in education policies in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, he has no interest in getting a scholarly education while in England.

As a matter of fact, the narrator's main education comes from being trained in guerilla warfare as a member of former President Robert Mugabe's Green Bomber[69] youth militia. Furthermore, he comes from a poor family as he borrows the money for his trip. Mbiba's point that "migration to the UK is an expensive exercise afforded only by those from middle and upper class families who happen to be better educated as well" ("Zimbabwe's Global Citizens in 'Harare North'…" 30) does not apply to the narrator at all. So while he does not meet the criteria of the ideal immigrant going out the gate, the narrator also makes no effort to become the ideal immigrant.

With plans to return to Zimbabwe after making enough money to pay his debts, the narrator does everything possible to avoid becoming an exemplary immigrant while in Britain. So, the narrator's language in the novel is highly suggestive of a larger frame

---

[69] Yuleth Chigwedere notes that "'Green Bombers' was a pseudonym given to the youths who were trained in life skills by the Zimbabwean government in youth camps across the country. They were also instilled with a sense of patriotism and national identity. They were popularly called 'green bombers' because of the green military uniforms they wore during training" ("The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic Dislocation in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*" (2,15)

contesting the usual immigration discourses surrounding African migration to the West; discourses dominated by those who educated, middle class or rich, adaptable and easy to assimilate or at least willing to assimilate. Still, it is language that functions as bridge, a way to integrate in the new environment even while maintaining roots in Zimbabwe.

Chikwava's unnamed narrator, ex-member of Mugabe's Green Bomber youth militants who were used to silence members of the political opposition, is definitely a thug, but he is not uneducated: he can read, write, do sums and communicate effectively-often in ways centered on accomplishing his own goals. His reading and writing habits, writing that has generated this story we are now reading, is what makes the narrative postmodern. He comes to England well versed in the vernacular and official conventions of immigrant life, fully aware and not ever really stumped like first time immigrants usually are which is obvious in his behavior at the beginning of the novel:

> No one bother to give me proper tips before I come to England. So on arriving at Gatwick airport I disappoint them immigration people because when I step forward to hand my passport to gum-chewing man sitting behind desk, I mouth the magic word- asylum- and flash toothy grin of friendly African native. They detain me…. (*HN* 4)

The narrator tells immigration officials what he thinks they want to hear in order to get into the country and he does. After being held briefly in detention, he is released to his cousin's wife Sekai.

The novel is not linear: the narrative shifts constantly between the past and the present in an unveiling of the narrator's background, and family life symbolized by his commitment to finishing *umbuyiso*, the traditional rites of passage for his dead mother in

Zimbabwe. The events that led to his being in Britain, his plans for the present and hopes for when he returns to Zimbabwe does emerge, but only with careful reading that attends to the narrator's process of engaging with his present status as illegal immigrant and a virtual nobody in his new environment. The narrator has a diary, which he writes in occasionally; in fact, he has plans to write a book with his friend Shingi and publish it (we can assume the story of *Harare North* depends on this diary). He also writes letters to various people at home, including his former military Commander Mhiripiri, the reason he had to leave home. The narrator eventually discovers the Commander in a Brixton park at the same time he understands that the Commander betrayed him. There are also emails and texts reprinted in the text of the novel which show the narrator's engagement with his own family and friends at home and abroad, and also with his friend Shingi's family, after he is attacked and fatally injured towards the end of the novel.

Britain's Migration Policy and the Immigrant Novel

Chikwava's novel pokes at a critical node in immigration discourse: who/what kind of person is being let into a country and whether they will fit into the host society? Especially in the West, Britain in this instance, questions about the ability to integrate are often at the heart of immigration. As Michael Perfect writes in *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism: Diversity in the Millennial London Novel* (2014), *Harare North* is a "politically risky novel to write" as its very title suggests that London has been colonized by Zimbabweans and being taken over by migrants (177). This fear of potential foreign colonization is at the center of recent turmoil over immigration in Britain.

In noting the complex moral questions developed in the novel, Perfect argues that the novel portrays London as "incredibly hostile, rather than welcoming to outsiders" (*Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism* …178). It is a hostility that has since become formalized in Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) in 2016. Prior to 2016, British commentators on the political right argued that Britain's "willingness to accept migrants both risks traditional British culture being somehow diluted and prevents people born in Britain from getting jobs" (*Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism* …158). Writing on Britain's 2005 General Elections, Chantal Lacroix also reports on the one sided negative portrayal of immigrants in *Immigrants, Literature and National Integration* (2010). Lacroix notes that during the elections as has often been the case, the battle lines focused on who could be toughest on immigrants and other foreigners entering the country. At the tie, the incumbent Labour Party "announced strict rules on immigration, blurring distinctions between asylum seekers, labour migrants and family migration in the process. For their part, the Conservatives threatened to pull out of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees" (*Immigrants, Literature and National Integration* 1-2). As Lacroix argues, amidst all this, there was little mention of immigrant contribution to the economy nor Britain's increasing need for younger workers in the face of an ageing workforce. Instead, "foreigners were said to steal jobs, drain the national welfare system, dilute Britain's national culture and act as a hindrance on social cohesion" (*Immigrants, Literature and National Integration* 2). Yet, despite the negative commentary on what impact immigrants may have on British economy, culture and identity, the contributions immigrants make and the ways they themselves are impacted by or take hold of the culture, economics and identity of their new home remain constant.

In 2007, politicians like the British Prime Minister at the time, Gordon Brown and others who justified immigration did so in economic terms by noting the high contributions of the average migrant tax payer (*Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism* …158).[70] In "Zimbabwe's Global Citizens in 'Harare North': Some Preliminary Observations," Mbiba corroborates Brown's assertion in the point that Zimbabweans have been making great contributions to their new community as they have "stretched the limits of social diversity into areas previously shunned by most black communities. They have invested in themselves, especially through education and training…[they] also boost the British economy through tax contributions" (37). However, despite the huge amount of migrant tax contributions to the British economy especially, Brexit is a consequence of the idea that migrants exacerbate domestic economic problems and also pose a danger to British cultural identity. Although this recent turn against immigrants is primarily directed at European migrants, African migrants are also implicated in the extension of immigration quotas that emerged with Mugabe's infamous land redistribution act of 2000 and his return to power in 2002 which was condemned by the Britain government.

To be able to integrate, in other words, merge, blend, fuse with the habits and behaviors of the host society has been essential to narratives about migration. According to Lacroix, while "integration" means "joining different parts into one entity", practical interpretation and social connotation can vary considerably as terms like "assimilation" and "multicultural society" can be used as "synonyms or descriptions of a successful

[70] Perfect also notes that in 2007, before the publication of Harare North, the Gordon Brown led Labour government published a joint study carried out by the Treasury, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions which concluded overall, immigration "boosts economic growth by six billion pounds each year" (158).

integration policy." So all forms of cultural behavior "ranging from completely giving up one's cultural background to preserving unaltered patterns of behaviour, are often captured by the term 'integration' (*Immigrants, Literature and National Integration* 6). The wide ranging definition of integration that Lacroix emphasizes fosters a reading of the narrator's actions in Britain as falling within the continuum of "preserving unaltered patterns of behaviour." And considering the fact that even when migrants adopt the language and habits of their new communities, they are still perceived as strangers/foreigners, as it happens to a Zimbabwean migrant interviewed by Mbiba,[71] it is just as well that the narrator prefers to maintain his ideas of himself as opposed to changing and finding that while he may be unrecognizable not just to himself, but to the society at large.

In the move from Africa to Britain in contemporary African literature, novels like Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2012), Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Tendai Huchu's *The Magistrate, the Maestro and the Mathematician* (2014/2015) and migration focused stories like "Something Nice from London" and "My Cousin-Sister Rambanai" in Petina Gappah's short story collection *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), all point to characters integrating themselves in their new communities in a variety of ways. Oftentimes, integration occurs in ways that compromise the character's identity, this is what happens to the gay writer Bandele who rejects his African/Nigerian background in

[71] Beyond the legal immigration conditions that plague many immigrants of having to prove authorization to be in the country, Zimbabweans in Britain "often experience exclusionary forces that operate in the job market. These have to do with unwritten codes of practice, preferences and behaviours. A respondent captured this feeling using a combination of proverbs and emotional recollections: 'My life here has taught me that you have to understand the British… To know what is happening to you, you have to understand their language. When I say language I do not mean English. I do not mean that you have to know how to speak English. Of course you do. What I mean is … that language which is not written, the signs and symbols, which they use to communicate among themselves. When they don't want you to know, they will always find a way to exclude you.'

Atta's *A Bit of Difference* and is still rejected by the British literati to which he so badly wants to belong; which is what Chikwava's narrator refuses for himself. In his refusal, he makes it necessary to ask and answer this question: what happens when integration consists of maintaining one's identity?

To maintain his sense of self, the narrator refuses to do certain jobs which leads to dependence on Shingi, his friend. Although he needs to work in order to get the pound sterling equivalent of "US$5,000" (*HN* 6) in order to go home and be a free man again, one job he refuses to do is BBC, shorthand for "British Bottom Cleaner":

> 'BBC graft for £8 per hour. Immediate start, and it's in Croydon.' That's what Aleck tell us. He is trying hard to head us in BBC direction and Shingi is drooling now. 'The fly that land on dollop of poo is the lucky one,' I tell Aleck. 'The one that land on honey is in big trouble. That's the tricky thing about living in Harare North. But some of us, we have to ask the question: you want to do something- what is better, to try doing it your own way and risk finding small success, or to do it in undignified pooful way and find big success?' Both Shingi and Aleck get the score quick and stop all this BBC talk. Me I am principled man." (*HN* 65)

Despite the increased income associated with BBC work, his principles mean that the narrator cannot get past the shame associated with the "bum wiping" that this occupation is linked to back home in Zimbabwe. However, his "squat" mates, Aleck and Shingi who are also Zimbabwean immigrants, will do anything to make money. And the narrator does not mind sponging off Shingi even if his income is from BBC work, as long as he is not doing the work himself. The importance of working for immigrants is such that

though the Magistrate in Huchu's novel, for example, stays at home while his wife works and provides for the family because his education and prior legal career in Zimbabwe means nothing in Scotland, he soon gives into the pressure. The Magistrate becomes a caregiver for the elderly in a Nursing Home in order to contribute to his household.[72] In contrast, the narrator in *Harare North* refuses to care for the elderly under any circumstance.

The narrator is so well acquainted with the expectations of immigrants he proceeds to give Shingi and their "squat" mate, the teenage mother Tsitsi lessons on how to show they have culture in order to fit into British society. Following Shingi's mispronunciation of the band name of the "Red Hot Chili Peppers" as "Red Hot Piri-Piris" when asking a street vendor for directions, the narrator gives a lesson on why it is important to get a hold of culture:

> It is important to use your eyes, your ears and mouth if you is wanting to catch culture, I teach them. Look, listen and taste. Listen to the music that them people here is listening to, and be careful about them names of the bands that you is listening to. I also write all this in my diary last week, after we have spend long time reasoning about learning culture, we have hear about them Red Hot Chili Peppers playing at the Brixton Academy…It important to pay big attention to some of them subtly things. I know how these things work. Also keep the native way down in the hole because if he jump out he can cause disorder and then no mother is safe in all of Harare North. "Don't say, to them English people, "How can I get to Animal Something?"' when you want to say, 'How can I get to Elephant

[72] *The Magistrate, the Maestro and the Mathematician*, Parthian, 2014/2015.

> Castle?' Enough of that even if you are mother", me I tell Tsitsi. "Otherwise, we send you back home." We talk heaps about how we now have to start getting familiar with them clothes labels if we want to acquire proper culture. All them names like Tommy, Diesel, Levi, iPod, Klein and all them such kind of people that stick they names on people's clothes." (*HN* 147)

I have quoted at length here to signal the close attention the narrator is paying to his environment in order to fit in appropriately, like a chameleon. To fit into cosmopolitan British life and so avoid repatriation to the homeland, the narrator tells Shingi and Tsitsi that they all need to learn names accurately- the names of music bands, places, clothing. For Tsitsi especially, she has to name the place she wants to go to accurately when asking for directions. Asking questions in a general way conveys that she is unsophisticated and so does not belong. For the narrator, it is important to fit in, his life as a soldier in the Green Bombers has taught him the need to assimilate well enough to pass scrutiny, as scrutiny can lead to discovery and potential death.

In contrast to the protagonists in the other novels in this dissertation, Chikwava's narrator is barely literate in comparison. However, he is literate enough to know that writing has power, stories have power and language can be used to empower and dispossess. As he puts it in the opening of his story,

> The story I tell the immigration people is tighter than thief's anus. Me I tell them I have been harass by them boys in dark glasses because Iam youth member of the opposition party. This is not trying to shame our government in any way, but if you don't spin them smooth jazz numbers

> then immigration people is never going to give you chance to even sniff first step into Queen's land. That is they style, I have hear. (*HN* 4)

His awareness of the strategic uses of the appropriately told story is captured in this first encounter with immigration officials upon arrival at Gatwick Airport. The narrator "spins jazz numbers" to avoid immediate deportation so he can work to get the $5000 he need to get out of trouble back home. This spinning of jazz numbers is a metaphor for the lies the narrator tells immigration officials in order to be allowed to enter the country. His smooth and unruffled delivery of the story that he is a member of the opposition being hunted by Mugabe's Green Bomber militia is taken so seriously by the immigration officials that after a brief detainment, he is released to relatives with the potential to be granted asylum (*HN* 4). Meanwhile, he is exactly one of those persons used by the Mugabe regime to torture people into compliance, a background he proudly confesses to his "squat" mates much later in the novel. He tells them he has been a Green Bomber, one of the boys of the "jackal breed" (*HN* 125). Altogether, spinning a multitude of "smooth jazz numbers" becomes a major motif for the narrator's conduct as illegal immigrant.

Brian Street's admonition on the treatment of those considered "illiterate" because they don't practice literacy conventionally is instructive in considering the strategies that the narrator brings to his situation. According to Street, although illiterates are presumed to lack all the qualities of literates, "to be able to think less abstractly, to be more embedded, less critical, less able to reflect upon the nature of the language they use or the sources of their political oppression" (*Social Literacies…* 21), it would be a mistake to imagine that they are "backward" or "ignorant." In the case of the narrator, his education up to secondary school is largely unremarkable- it merely equips him to become a shoe-

doctor - an occupation he promptly leaves when he finds new purpose with the youth militia. It is in the youth militia that he reinvents himself and we can certainly assume that it is also where he has honed the language that informs his life story in the novel.

Vernacular Literacy:

In describing the language of his novel to Dutrion, Chikwava's highlights a process of combining languages to produce what is arguably one of the most eccentric stories in African literature. The mixture of Shona/Ndebele idiom translated into English, Zimbabwean contemporary street language/slang and Creole from the Afro-Caribbean is due to the author's familiarity with the works of Sam Selvon, Zora Neale Hurston and Jean Rhys. Against limited perceptions of pidgin or what we describe in the vernacular as "bastardized English", Chikwava believes Caribbean Creole languages to be rich and extensive:

> While pidgin English, or broken English, is a stunted language that is used mainly used by traders or labourers who don't use it as soon as they get to their homes, Creole is a full language that has developed to express a broader range of experience at all levels of social intercourse and is not the poor cousin to English in the same way that pidgin or broken English is. (Brian Chikwava Interview with Marianne Dutrion, 2013)

What is most interesting about Chikwava's "melting pot" of language is the fact that he mixes languages not just from different cultures with a common colonial ancestor, he also includes the languages of two different ethnic groups from his own country, Zimbabwe.

In the novel, examples abound of what Yuleth Chigwedere describes as "linguistic miscegenation" in the indigenization of English by mixing it with both Shona and Ndebele in her essay, "The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic Dislocation in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2017)." For Chigwedere, the narrator's use of "semantic oddities" like "likkle sausage dog" for little dog to describe Sekai's poodle reflects an "Ndebele mother-tongue influence in the pronunciation of the word." Other examples of "semantic oddity" occurs at the level of sentence-structure in the the wrong subject-verb agreements such as 'they is.' There is also the use of "they" instead of the possessive pronoun 'their' as evident in the phrase 'mothers in they tracksuits'… as well as the unusual use of adjectives, as in the expression 'loud looks'…" ("The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic Dislocation…"171). Following Chantal Zabus who notes that African writers often remix with English in an effort to textualize "linguistic differentiation and convey[ing] African concepts, thought patterns, and linguistic concepts through the ex-colonizer's language"[73], Chigwedere writes that "Chikwava uses Shona syntax and morphology within his narrative as a stylistic innovation that transcends the normative use of the English language. Additionally, he makes use of both Shona and Ndebele idioms" ("The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic Dislocation…" 171). These two ethnic groups, the Shona and Ndebele, have a history of several bloody political and cultural confrontations, most recently they have clashed in the conflict over the land redistribution policy of the Mugabe administration. So it is paradoxical that Chikwava puts his newly developed language in the mouth of a Shona criminal loyal to President Mugabe whose is also ethnically Shona. However, the young man is also

[73] *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel. Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English.* Rodopi*,* 1991, 23.

writing this story from Britain, a seemingly "neutral" location that seems to authorize the narrator's language use.

Significantly, Chikwava himself suggests that he used the language in the novel to convey the narrator's alienation from his environment. In answer to Marianne Dutrion's question about why he abandoned standard English in his novel, Chikwava tells her,

> Standard English would not have adequately conveyed the otherness and alienation of the narrator. The lesson I got from writing the novel is that with any piece of fiction, the standard language has to be modulated to suit the narrative depending on factors such as cultural location, historical location, psychological or even political location etc of the story. In this case I had to consider such factors and came to the conclusion that this was the reason the first draft, which was in standard English, did not feel right when I read it. As you will understand, the writing process can sometimes rely more on intuitive decisions more than reasoned ones. (Brian Chikwava Interview with Marianne Dutrion, 2013)

And it is the narrator's otherness that is at the center of critical explorations of the novel. For example, Muchemwa's "Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities and Fracturing Economies in Zimbabwean Literature" (2011), explores particular uses of the vernacular to obfuscate meaning and ideas even as the dense and allusive language highlights complex changes in identity (404). Isaac Ndlovu's "Language and Audience in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*…" (2016) argues that Chikwava's satirical use of language and its stylistic brokenness complicates the utilitarian view of reading literatures in English where reading novels helped to foster mastery of the language.

Ndlovu writes that the novel underscores the "prejudiced perceptions and expectations of the novel's potential Western readership"- readers who are able recognize and laugh at the use of "broken English" while being implicated by that laughter which exoticizes the other who uses such language (31). For Chigwedere, Chikwava deforms the English language, creates his own version of pidgin, to capture the narrator's socio-cultural idiosyncrasies authentically ("The Wretched of the Diaspora…" 172). All of these responses emphasize how the language of the novel defines the narrator's mental and physical alienation in his environment and his subsequent response. While he may be alienated, I believe that the narrator is looking to connect with specific communities at various moments in the novel in ways that will be profitable hence the outlandish behaviors on display in the novel. In an extension of previous criticisms, I want to suggest that the postmodernist form of the novel and its "broken"/ alienated language emphasizes both the personality and the different kind of education that has shaped the narrator's approach to integration in his new community.

As C.L. Innes argues in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (2007), the issue of language is one of the most hotly debated topics in postcolonial literature. While the debate has often had to do with choosing between the "imposed colonial language"- English or the writer's "native language or mother tongue" (*The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures* 97), in the African novel, language has an overdetermined quality because of its association with literacy and therefore ideas of civilization and progress. Specifically, the history of colonialism and its attendant erasures of African languages as the appropriate language of literacy is a dominant theme in African literature.

Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiongo's positions on the African language debate are some of the most famous. While Achebe's measured take in 'The African Writer and the English Language' (1975)[74] is countered by Ngugi's famous treatise against the continued prevalence of English in African schools and Universities captures the very strong feelings against the dominance of the English language in African communities in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), individual African writers have continued to make their own choice in deciding a language for their writing. As Innes points out, the choice a writer makes to use a particular form of language and literary form "signifies a choice of audience" which becomes "part of the message of the poem or prose" as it attests to the validity of the choice even when it is rejected by those "who cannot or will not accept those forms of speech as viable poetic or communicative alternatives to their own" (*The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures* 105). The value of Innes' assertions on the creation of a particular audience is a critical one in consideration of the choices that Chikwava has made in his construction of a protagonist.

In the aftermath of former President Mugabe's land redistribution policy in 2000, there has been worldwide condemnation that is not sympathetic to former youth militia members. Therefore, the "dual celebration and rejection inherent in the choice of a form of language implies a rejection of the absolute standards of the colonizer and asserts that the people with whom the poem identifies are not only fit subjects for poetic expression but also the source of a poetic language" (*The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial*

[74] Achebe's position is that the English language would be able to carry the weight of his African experience though it would have to be "new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings." 'The African Writer and the English Language' in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Heinemann, 1975, pp. 62.

Literatures 105). Thus, the language of the criminal narrator protagonist of Chikwava's novel is fit for study.

Weaponizing Vernacular Literacy:

The first literacy event that shapes the narrator's experience and interpretation of the world occurs indirectly after the lesson he gives while "punishing" a farm supervisor as a Green Bomber youth militia. According to the narrator, his commanding officer, Comrade Mhiripiri gives him this task because he knows "heaps of history." Before punishing the traitor, the narrator gives a history lesson to both the farm supervisor, his Green Bomber peers and the reader of course. This punishment results in the death of the farm supervisor. We are never explicitly told that he is killed but like the many metaphorical contortions in the novel, it is soon made clear that "punishment" is death: "The winds is blowing through the nation and making trees swing in every direction but the police only want to know how one leaf fall from tree. What kind of style is that? Because of life of one traitor" (*HN* 20). As Muchemwa points out, "style" in the novel functions as aesthetic discourse that "celebrates hatred and forecloses debate; it foregrounds thuggery and reveals how it has been honed as method of survival" (Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities…" 403). Afterwards, the narrator learns from Comrade Mhipiriri via phone text messages that the police want him for his role in the "death" of the farm supervisor. So he eventually flees to England to escape the wrath of the police (*HN* 20).

Shirley Brice Heath introduced the concept of the literacy event in her early ethnographic study of black and white communities in the Southern Unites States in

Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms (1983). This concept deeply influenced Street's development of an ideologically based literacy practice. Heath defined literacy events as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes" (qtd. in *Social Literacies*… 12). Extending Heath, Street inserted literacy events within larger, social, cultural and ideological frames that would include folk models of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them. In noting the social, political and historical matrix that informs literacy events, Street emphasizes the "relations of social power that envelop them" (*Social Literacies* 9-13).

The importance of Street's work for African literature lies in the fact it enables a more involved version of literacy in underscoring the importance of context and relationships in the practice of literacy. In contrast to Jack Goody and Walter Ong's idea of autonomous literacy that sees writing as a separate, detached medium of communication that objectifies and preserves speech for transmission over time, and even altering it in the case of David Olson (1968, 1982 and 1988), Street's notion of an ideologically based social literacy practice is about the ways people take hold of knowledge at a particular time, with a consciousness of the environmental context in which that knowledge exists and how they retool it for their own purposes. In this way, they actively define the terms of their own existence whether rightly or wrongly. One avenue of knowledge is local or vernacular knowledge.

According to Street in *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education* (1995), most cultures are aware of literacy and therefore have their own local literacies or modes of reading and writing. For

instance, children have learned to read a sophisticated mix of scripts that include images, writing and speech. Islamic societies have a variety of reading and writing activities developed in connection to either religion or commercial activity. And others have indigenous writing systems that are used for specific purposes i.e. "letter writing, sermons, or love notes." The failure to incorporate these various modes of reading and writing has resulted in people being seen as illiterate and so literacy programs are often shown to "begin from scratch." Street notes that even the eminent Brazilian educator Paulo Freire operated from this point of view. Recent research however is now focusing on the ways people "take hold" of a particular literacy; how they "absorb literacy practices into their own oral conventions, rather than simply mimic what has been brought" (*Social Literacies*... 20). This incorporation of new literacies into existing models explains the unnamed narrator's language of storytelling that mixes both the oral and the written in conveying his perspective throughout *Harare North*. For example, after his stint in prison, the narrator visits the doctor and gets a written hospital report of his HIV status in what is symbolic of the second literacy event in his life. He hides the piece of paper reporting he is HIV negative in his suitcase, and throughout the novel remains quite paranoid about being found out because he erroneously believes that he has AIDS.

The narrator's description of how he came to join the youth militia known as the Green Bombers shows his sense of indebtedness to the group and subsequent inability to criticize his superiors. From a poor background with a bare bones education up to secondary level, becoming a Green Bomber is a rare opportunity that offers the narrator a chance to move up in his community:

> If you is back home leading rubbish life and ZANU-PF party offer you job in they youth movement to give you chance to change your life and put big purpose in your life, you don't just sniff at it and walk away when no one else want to give you graft in the country even if you is prepared to become tea boy. Me I know what I have to do when the boys come to take me in they van: the people's shoes, broken belts and all that kind of stuff, I toss them out onto the pavement, give my stall one kick and it fall over easy. That's it! Me I jump onto the van as it speed off. I'm free. That's how new beginnings start. My life have found big and proper purpose. (*HN* 17)

I have quoted this at length to underscore that for the narrator, joining the youth militia becomes an act of patriotism that will influence his literacy development and subsequently his approach to life in Britain which will represent a literal step down from his new found purpose in life. I will certainly argue that the dominant language of the novel, "that is they style I have hear", "I am a principled man" etc. is due to his experience in the military and a form of vernacular literacy.

Building on Street's work in focusing on the social practice of literacy at the local level outside formal institutions, David Barton and Mary Hamilton note that in making sense of the world, people "draw upon and create areas of local knowledge or *vernacular knowledge* (*Local Literacies* …242). These areas of local knowledge foster experts in particular aspects of life or community living that others can rely on as the need arises. The making of these experts depends on vernacular literacy practices that consist of, draw on and contribute to vernacular knowledge learned informally and rooted in everyday

experiences and purpose. Learned informally, usually in the space of the home unlike the training received in school or institutional contexts, vernacular literacies are honed in everyday usage, "learning and use are integrated in everyday activities and where literacy remains an implicit part of the activity" (*Local Literacies*... 251-252). The narrator's experiences in the military informs not just his language but his complete approach to life in Zimbabwe and he travels with his particular form of vernacular literacy to Britain and uses it to insert himself in his new community.

Kizito Muchemwa suggests that Mugabe manipulated language so successfully, he was able to defy his critics and hold on to power. According to Muchemwa, Mugabe and other politicians in his administration used vernacular forms of language to insert themselves in communities:

> ZANU-PF and its current president have a fondness for vernacular expression when naming political agendas and defining periods. This use of the vernacular to imply an autochthonous discourse captures the paradox of their policies and actions. It escapes translation and hides the discordant and destructive. It also reflects a fascination with words, their sounds and the possible meanings and actions that flow from them. Each linguistic shift reflects the cultural flavour of the moment and invokes autochthony in the contest over symbolic and material resources. ("Polarising Cultures… "405)

It is no wonder that the narrator basically remixes a number of languages to get his point across. Much like Mugabe uses language to certify his belonging to one tribe or another, the narrator's remixing of Shona, Ndebele, English and Caribbean Creole has the effect

of reaching out to significant portions of the African diaspora in Britain. At once pulling in and withdrawing, the narrator resists familiarity; resists translation.

The narrator also suspects knowledge, especially book knowledge, in a reaction that can be traced directly to his experiences in the military. During his first week of "learning political orientation and history of the liberation struggle at the Green Bomber camp" the narrator comes to understand that books should be treated with skepticism. According to the narrator, in his interaction with Comrade Mhiripiri,

> I ask if we is going to learn about Mao's Likkle Red Book and he laugh with other commanders and pat me on the head saying we will learn Likkle Red Book when enemy of the state have been scattered and it's time for poems. Look at history, he always say if you push him, the path of many of us is set by few fat bellies with sharp horns and hard hoofs; they gore and trample you the moment they know you see through they cloud of lies. And you think you can fight them with poems?" (*HN* 92).

The narrator's understanding of books as poetry that is not useful for survival is actually a tactic developed by the Mugabe regime to foster its own narrative of history and thus develop particular power relations in the community. And it is impossible to deny the alienating effects of books that has been so well documented in Tsitsi Dangaremgba's *Nervous Conditions* (1988).[75]

[75] In a famous scene in the novel, after Tambu, the protagonist gains admission to Sacred Heart, a white secondary school in colonial Rhodesia, her mother sees it as serious problem: "Tell me, my daughter, what will I, your mother say to you when you come home a stranger full of white ways and ideas? It will be English, English all the time. He-e Mummy this, He-e Mummy that. Like that cousin of yours" (184) in reference to Nyasha who has introduced Tambu to the world of books and who eventually suffers a nervous breakdown. Nyasha was certainly not able to fight back with "poems."

The fact that books cannot be trusted is central to the narratives surrounding the land redistribution scheme of the Mugabe regime in both the real world and in the world of the novel. In the real world, the efforts to recover land stolen by colonial British settlers which started with Cecil Rhodes British South Africa Company in 1890 has failed. Beginning with independence in 1980, multiple agreements between Zimbabwe and Britain, Zimbabwe and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and even constitutional amendments by the President to restore land and other resources have all failed leading to both economic and political crises. In other words, writing has not helped to keep people honest. On the contrary, writing has fostered dishonesty and perpetuated lies on occasion. This historical legacy has directly led to the Third Chimurenga, the revolution to get farmlands into the hands of blacks, that occurred in the 2000s, the revolution that resulted in the narrator killing the farm supervisor.

In the novel, the narrator tells his own vernacular version of the story, a version that heightens the injustice of how whites seized 90% of land in the country: in the 1890s "British fat stomach grab our land, pegging farms by riding horse until it drop dead…that just mark only one side of the farm boundary and that's where the corner peg go" (*HN* 19). However, while the narrator tells his own story of Zimbabwean land loss, the captured man who has been a farm labor supervisor all this life also tells his own- the farmer he worked for, bought the land. But the narrator challenges his story:

> How do you say that you buy land that was never sold by no one in the first place unless you like buying things that have been thief from someone? 'What kind of style is that me I ask him and he start filling us to the brim with gallons of bookish falsehoods that is stronger than overproof brandy and of course that get us drunk

> and soon we start dancing around him and singing revolutionary songs. (*HN* 19-20)

For the narrator and his colleagues, history as deployed in the Mugabe land distribution program which views white farmers as thieves is on their side and the history recorded in books, invariably written in favor of the colonialists, cannot be trusted.

In "Rule by Historiography: The Struggle over the Past in Contemporary Zimbabwe," Terence Ranger writes that in August 2001, the Zimbabwe government instituted youth militia camps that were supposed to be the basis of a compulsory National Service scheme. The main function of the camps, such as the Green Bomber Camp, was to teach 'Patriotic history'. According to Ranger,

> Not only had universities and colleges become 'anti-Government mentality factories', but parents and teachers generally had failed to pass on the inspiration of the liberation struggle. Now, therefore, the revolutionary spirit would skip a generation. As *the Herald* reported on 28 January 2002: 'The Government will soon make youth training compulsory for all school leavers to instill unbiased history of Zimbabwe.' The youth were recruited as warriors into the 'Third Chimurenga'…They became a militia available to discipline their own parents; to attack MDC supporters; and to intimidate teachers and other educated civil servants in the rural areas. (*Versions of Zimbabwe*... 221)

In fact, according to a report on militia training by the Solidarity Peace Trust, all training materials at the camp consisted solely of ZANU(PF) campaign materials and political speeches. Material that is "crudely racist and vilifies the major opposition party in the country." A youth militia history manual that is "historically simplistic and racist and

glorifies recent ZANU(PF) National Heroes along with the land resettlement programme…" called 'Inside the Third Chimurenga' and used to teach a particular type of patriotism in the youth camps (*Versions of Zimbabwe*... 221-222). The effect of this version of patriotism that the narrator learns in the camp is what propels him to view all criticisms of Mugabe as propaganda while in London (*HN* 8). As Muchemwa puts it,

> The boys of the jackal breed are throwbacks to the generation of the 1960s I referred to earlier as 'born of violence'. The language they use is a continuation of the paradoxes of that earlier era. 'Freedom' in the 1960s articulated both violence and autonomy in vernacular expressions such as 'I will give you freedom', 'I will start freedom'. This deliberate conflation of political violence and freedom has frequently characterised the narrative of Zimbabwean identity. The language of boys of the jackal breed is also reminiscent of the sexism and xenophobia embedded in the narrative of Zimbabwean identity. The narrator's sexist language in *Harare North* is particularly reminiscent of the misogynist agenda of unreconstructed nationalists who view women as trophies. ("Polarising Cultures… 404)

The significance of these relations of power in the development of literacy programs like that central to teaching and learning at the youth militia camps can hardly be understated. Street argues that the transfer of literacy from a "dominant group" to those with "little experience of reading and writing, involves more than simply passing on of some technical surface skills." Instead, the recipients of new literacy experience the culture and politico-economic structures of those bringing it as "more significant than the impact of

the technical skills associated with reading and writing" (*Social Literacies*… 15). This significance is due to the fact that the changes brought by literacy often "strike deep at the roots of cultural belief," at the roots of communal conventions of relationships, behavior etc. The ideology at work here is one that exploits the cognitive control that a dominant literacy can generate and how it can be used against others from the same community who are in the opposition. The shifts associated with the transfers of literacy between recruits like the narrator and the self-serving members of the regime in power "are located at deep, epistemological levels, raising questions about what is truth, what is knowledge and what are appropriate sources of authority" (*Social Literacies* 15). Mugabe and his loyalists like Comrade Mhiripiri enact a force of authority that becomes appealing to the narrator so that his language and identity become inextricably tied to his conception of himself as a military man, not afraid or shaken and driven by principle. And this becomes the only version of himself suitable for life in Britain.

In *Harare North*, Chikwava's narrator is intent on creating alternative ways of thinking and perceiving his new identity as illegal resident in London without losing his sense of self, first as Zimbabwean and second, as a Green Bomber. To do this, he uses language that is self-conscious in its understatement and use of euphemisms. Writing of his decision to leave home and migrate to London, the narrator tells of his experience in prison:

> I don't want to leave the country because I have not visit Mother in two years. But I have to go because me I know what Chikurubi Maximum Prison is like; I have been there before and it is full of them people that carry likkle horrors such as them sharpened bicycle spokes and they want

> you to donate your buttocks so they can give you Aids; if you refuse then bicycle spoke go through your stomach like it is made of toilet paper and you is bleeding inside all night and have no chance of making it to the morning. No one can want to go there again. Life is not fair me I know after they hold the spoke to my heart. (*HN* 21)

Although he did not want to leave home, the narrator had to for fear of being returned to Chikurubi Maximum Prison where he was assaulted. In this understatement of his experiences in the prison, the narrator quietly underscores the terror he felt. However, though he never says explicitly that he believes he has caught AIDS from this stint in prison where other prisoners held a spoke to his heart, it becomes apparent in the hints he drops throughout the novel. The report of his HIV status becomes the second "literacy event" that drives his conduct in London.

Vernacular Literacy in the Community

The narrator's HIV result is so tucked away in the sometimes obfuscating language of the novel that it is almost like the narrator does not want to "skin his skunk" or "air his dirty linen in public." In the essay, "To Skin a Skunk: Some Observations on Zimbabwe's Intellectual Development," Stanley Nyamfukudza discusses the dangers of hiding behind language. Nyamfukudza writes that Zimbabweans habitually avoid discussing embarrassing topics by keeping serious issues private via separation. The ChiShona idiom, "*kuvhiya kadembo*… refers to a process when two or more people detach themselves from the larger group to talk over a matter, which for any number of reasons discretion advises it may not be politic to discuss in public." Rather than maintain

this thin separation of interests, Nyamfukudza argues for the need to actually address problems in private, instead of pretending it does not exist in public.

AIDS is one such disease that no one wants to talk about as illustrated by the narrator's behavior. As Nyamfukudza puts it in his survey of communal discourses in Zimbabwe, "The health scene also abounds in untold truths. Hypocrisy, denial and lies surrounding the response to HIV and AIDS are an example of the humbug that often determines the fate of millions of people" ("To Skin a Skunk: Some Observations on Zimbabwe's Intellectual Development" 22). The narrator's understanding of his negative HIV status as a bad thing is because of the way his discourse community talks about the disease, or more accurately, refuses to talk about the disease as seen in the points made by Nyamfukudza above. For the linguist James Gee, "Discourses with a capital "D" is

> Composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities…Discourses are all about how people "get their acts together" to get recognized as a given kind of person at a specific time and place. (*Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* 152).

For the literacy theorist Gunther Kress, discourses are "systematically organized sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension what it is possible to do and not to do) with respect to an area of concern of

that institution, whether marginally or centrally" (*Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice* 7). For Lesley Bartlett and Dorothy C. Holland in "Theorizing the Space of Literacy Practices," literacy practices are linked to the discourses in which they are situated (11). So if the narrator's community perceives and discusses diseases in a particular way, he will do the same even if the behavior is to his own detriment especially in new contexts.

The narrator's belief that he has HIV and that his friend Shingi also has the disease, is strictly because they have both been in prison (*HN* 71). As he never discusses his situation, the fact that he afraid for himself and often feels hopeless is only revealed in the refrain of an idiomatic expression that he uses to make sense of the abrupt changes in the course of his life as described in the novel and so direct his own expectations: "Life make you think that you is frying bean sprouts and then out if nowhere you wake up and find that you is frying wire nails" (*HN* 17). And indeed the narrator's attitude is directly linked to the forces that have shaped him.

The narrator's ability to "spin" tales and benefit from those tales occurs precisely because of what he knows about being an immigrant in Britain therefore giving lie to the notion that he is illiterate. While he may not have been reading books on how to conduct himself in his new community, as he cheekily puts it, "No one bother to give me proper tips before I come to England… So on arriving at Gatwick airport I disappoint them immigration people… (*HN* 4)," he ends his point by noting that he has learned crucial lessons from listening to the fate of other migrants with the words, "That is they style, I have hear" (*HN* 4). In fact, these words are a constant refrain in the novel alongside, "I

have hear all these kinds of stories," a phrase the narrator uses to emphasize the straight and narrow rules of his stay in London:

> The first thing you should know when you live in Harare North: if people tell you something cost X, remember to allow 25 per cent for them things that have been hide… Another thing: always push for them more favors because if you don't then you don't get nothing…The third thing never listen too much to propaganda from people like Sekai telling you that our mother's village is going to be take over by mining company that belong to some minister. You always know more than you believe in but always choose what you believe in over what you know because what you know can be so big that sometimes it is useless weapon, you cannot wield it proper and, when you try, it can get your head out of gear and stop you focusing. Soon you lose the game and end up dying beyond your means in Harare North, leaving behind debts and shabby clothes. I have hear all these kinds of stories." (HN 43-44)

These three principles function as guide for how the narrator will conduct himself in order to achieve his dreams despite being an illegal immigrant. The last lesson especially is critical as he views any information that contradicts what he believes to be true as propaganda and so defines the limits of his literacy practices in his new environment. He is very intent on not becoming lost like those "lapsed"[76] immigrants in the stories he has

[76] *In Search of the Afropolitan: Encounters, Conversations, and contemporary Diasporic African Literature* (2016), Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek write the narrator's use of the word "lapse is such that "'…you can lapse' up and 'lapse' down, it seems, in terms of class. The word 'lapse' comes from the Latin *lapsus*, meaning error and it carries many connotations, such as discontinued, declined, expired, invalid, and non-practising. We must understand this term, then, to mean that the narrator sees lapsed Africans as having made a mistake, or an error of judgement, by reneging on their Africanness, their roots. By declining their Africanness, they have also given up 'practising' their origins in a principled manner. A

heard. These are words that continually mark the narrator's interest in making sure we understand that he is making conscious choices throughout the novel.

The elliptical language of Chikwava's narrator marks his identity as ex-militia prone to violence and hardly rehabilitated. While he tries very hard to keep his military background a secret, he can barely resist soaking the property of Paul and Sekai in petrol before moving in with Shingi in Brixton. This is because Sekai tells him that President Mugabe is a "stubborn old donkey" who will chase away all the people in the villages if he finds emeralds or diamonds (*HN* 41). And throughout his narrative, his perception of himself as a principled military man is contrasted with what he sees as the easily shaken and flighty behavior of the civilians that surround him. Eventually, he loses his cool with Aleck when he begins to criticize Mugabe (*HN* 121-125). So for the people around him, he cannot be trusted. But for him, they are a critical part of his self-identity, he measures himself against them to keep his goals and vision in view. And when the community disintegrates, the final straw being when Shingi gets stabbed in the alley, the narrator begins to unravel both mentally and physically.

According to Street, "Where, for instance, there were rules in oral communication about not thrusting oneself forward, not offending others, but still getting your own way through subtle self-effacing uses of language, then the introduction of writing often leads to similar conventions being used for letters, political documents or love notes. Similarly, linguistic and political self-awareness is often expressed through subtle forms of speech making and oratory in which participants express the difference between the surface message and inner meaning in various coded ways." In other words, "indigenous peoples

---

principled man, as the narrator insistently claims to be, refuses to lapse, refuses to make this error of judgement… Principled men maintain a middle position, as the 'original native'" (274-75).

have their own literacies, their own language skills and conventions and their own ways of making sense of the new literacies being purveyed by the agencies, the missionaries and the national governments" (*Social Literacies*... 20-21). And this is what the narrator puts into practice when he describes his approach to the choices available to him in Britain as illegal immigrant.

It is this making of conscious choice that defines Street's idea of a social practice of literacy. In the seminal *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984), Street asserts that the conventions of the autonomous model of literacy at the center of the work of Jack Goody and Walter Ong disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions integral to its presence in society. In contrast, New Literacy Studies suggests that "in practice, literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another with different effects of the different literacies in different conditions." Specifically, Street's own counter to the autonomous model, the ideological model which is particularly interested in how power influences literacy practice, insists that "literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being" (1). Street's argument underscores how background and community, what James Gee calls as "discourse community", influences our narrator's approach to his sojourn in Britain.

In his conversation with Dutrion where he notes that the language of his novel came together after "having read the likes of Sam Selvon, Zora Neale Hurston and Jean Rhys" (Brian Chikwava Interview with Marianne Dutrion, 2013), Chikwava's mention of

Selvon is instructive. Unlike Rhys and Hurston who are exemplars for crafting language in novels situated in Caribbean and black discourse communities respectively, Chikwava's singular reference to Selvon's novel which focuses on the lives of the "Windrush" generation of Caribbean immigrants who arrived London on the SS Windrush in 1948 especially points to artistic literary reconstructions of language to navigate, negotiate and narrate immigrant experience at particular moments in history. Infact in his novel, Chikwava seems to have taken to heart the argument that "while the English language brought by the colonizer can convey intellectual concepts and denotative references, only the mother tongue spoken in childhood and in the home carries the emotional weight and connotations that are important to poetry and prose" (*The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures* 98). Like Selvon[77], Chikwava started his novel by writing in Standard English. However, he eventually changed his mind on the appropriateness of the language for his character. The alienation the narrator feels is captured in his narration of how he gets the news of his HIV status of which he asks "Who has ever hear of good news that is negative? Negative result: but you don't throw it away. It's proof that life is not fair…" (*HN* 212).

And just like Selvon who came to the understanding that standard English would not adequately convey the nuances of the thoughts, desires and experiences of his characters, Chikwava also comes to the same understanding. However unlike Selvon who has a third person narrator in his novel, Chikwava has a first person narrator who perpetually invokes second person references that implicates the reader. On one occasion, in response to what he perceives as Sekai's disrespect of the President he served in her

[77] See Susheila Nasta "Introduction" Sam Selvon*: The Lonely Londoners*, Penguin Books, 2006, pp. v-xvii and Helon Habila "Out of the Shadows." *The Guardian,* March 16, 2007. Accessed 7 September 2017.

criticisms of the Mugabe government over the phone, he tells the reader, "The president can come out to whip you with the truth…Comrade Mugabe is powerful wind; he can blow snake out of tall grass like it is piece of paper-lift it up into wide blue sky for everyone to see. Then when he drop it, people's trousers rip as they scatter to they holes" (*HN* 8-9). During another incident where his "squat" mate Aleck also criticizes Mugabe by noting that he burned houses and raped women, the narrator asks if he saw the Mugabe do any of those things. And then he says:

> Fine. Maybe you think Bob is evil but that's just your opinion… And that's all it is. Mine is not just an opinion; I earn it. I earn it through what I have see, I earn it through what I know now. And you will never know who I am unless you have been where I have been. Never. Me; me I don't allow myself to be given lecture by them people who, while life was tossing me about like some straw, they was flicking *rapoko* grain at they grandfather's beard and listening to them old fables and old jazz numbers. You see me hiding under the same roof as you and you think that we is all the same folk. Me? Me and you being same same? (*HN* 124-25)

This kind of direct address to the reader engages what Madhu Krishnan describes as irruptions into the second person, a shifting referent, following Brian Richardson[78], which makes it difficult to pin down who or what the narrator is referring to therefore foregrounding the "contingency of performativity" (*Contemporary African Literature in*

[78] In *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fictio*n, Richardson argues that the "defining criterion of […] 'the autotelic' is the direct address to a 'you' that is at times the actual reader of the text and whose story is juxtaposed to and merge with the characters of the fiction. […] Its unique and most compelling feature […] is the ever shifting referent of the 'you' that is continually addressed. […] This intensifies one of the most fascinating features of second person narrative: the way the narrative 'you' is alternately opposed to and fused with the reader" (30-32).

English… 48), in the novel. According to Krishnan in *Contemporary African Literature in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications* (2014), throughout the novel, "you" is not precise because it serves as "an interpellating hailing of the reader, a socio-political commentary on post-2002 immigration or as a reflection of the narrator as a dissociated voice, lost in an encroaching madness" (48). However despite the uncertainty of reference in the narrative address in the novel, the disassociated voice of the narrator is vivid in the interpellative hailing of the reader and the symbiotic relationship that emerges signaling the readers engagement and assent to the narrative.

In the end, the narrator's move to Harare North, another name for Britain among Zimbabweans in the homeland[79] which speaks to the special relationship between Zimbabwe and Britain, a name that marks Britain as an extension of the African country, does not work for him. In "The Making of Zimbabwe's New Diaspora," JoAnn McGregor writes that the exceptional place of Zimbabwe in the British public sphere has been produced through "the legacies of Rhodesian settler colonialism and the struggles for national liberation… [therefore,] the special relationship between the two countries helps to explain why events in Zimbabwe make headline news in Britain for days on end…" (2). As Chikwava's novel suggests, not only do events in Zimbabwe make headline news in Britain, as seen in the Prologue to the novel where the British *Evening Standard* reports that the country has run out of toilet paper: Britain is also the land of opportunity for Zimbabweans seeking sanctuary or economic relief regardless of skill or ability. However, success depends on integration which the narrator avoids consciously. Despite the special connection that Britain has with Zimbabwe, it is a limited connection and bravely, the narrator charts his own course using both what he knows and what he

[79]Mbiba, "Zimbabwe's Global Citizens in 'Harare North': Some Preliminary Observations," 26.

learns in his new environment. But it is simply not enough. He undercuts his own goals by choosing a path to success that only he has formed despite the interconnected nature of his language.

Chapter 4: Local Literacies in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

This chapter examines how a variety of literacy practices outside familiar institutional contexts work in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. In this novel, the schooled literacy that considerably shields and maps the lives of characters in immigrant novels (novels about the lives of African immigrants in America in this instance) like Ike Oguine's *The Squatter's Tale* (1999), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Taiye Selassie's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods*, Inc. (2014), Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2017) is absent. Bulawayo's novel is quite different in the context of African migration stories generally as these stories are usually about adults in foreign countries where they have gone in pursuit of higher education and/or work. All of the novels listed here, except Teju Cole's *Open City,* have protagonists who have acquired significant levels of education in their native countries before moving abroad for professionalization- in other words they are much older than Darling is when she arrives in Michigan. Darling's age and the challenges of her formative experiences place the novel firmly within the genre of the Bildungsroman.

Bulawayo's novel follows the general form of the Bildungsroman in its story about Darling. The novel begins with Darling's childhood in Zimbabwe which is framed by the loss of her home during former President Robert Mugabe's 2005 Operation Murambatsvina[80] and the gradual dispersal of her family in the face of unemployment,

[80] According to Polo Belina Moji, the literal meaning of Operation Murambatsvina, translated by the Zimbabwean government as 'Operation Clean-Up' actually means 'Operation Clean Out the Filth'. And the Anthropologist Joost Fontein has noted that the tension "between official pronouncements about the need to 'restore order' by reasserting formal planning procedures etc. and the reality of the arbitrary and often

economic difficulties and political violence. It is well understood that novels about migration from one context to another, locally and globally, often result in a change in identity. Indeed, this is what happens to Tambu, the protagonist in that other famous Bildungsroman, Tsitsi Dangaremgba's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), which is set in colonial Zimbabwe -Rhodesia. In fact, as Joseph Slaughter[81] and Ralph Austen[82] point out respectively, *Nervous Conditions* dramatizes Tambu's development in terms of a formal education that includes the reading of other Bildungsromane, from Britain, the colonial metropole specifically. In contrast, when *We Need New Names* begins, the protagonist Darling is at a stage where formal schooling has stopped due to the instability in her community.

While *We Need New Names* is not a Bildungsroman in the traditional sense, as suggested by the European notions of the Bildungsroman characterized by a "strong sense of individualism and introspection" ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman…" 216), or even completely in line with the African version which features an individual's initiation into modern society as a reader, most likely of other *Bildungsromane*[83], the novel is about Darling's development on two continents. The novel explores Darling's life and experiences with her friends and family in a Zimbabwean shanty-town ironically named Paradise and her later move to America which generates its own peculiar challenges and sometime triumphs. It documents a process of becoming fraught with the difficulties of childhood in a Zimbabwe marked

---

violent destruction of good-quality although unplanned housing" left whole areas of Zimbabwean cities under a pile of rubble that has culminated in the rapid increase of shanty towns ("New names, Translational Subjectivities…"185).

[81]*Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. Fordham UP, 2007.

[82]Austen, "Struggling with the African Bildungsroman"

[83]Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.…,* 285.

with failure in the political and economic spheres in its first half; in its second half, Darling's growth must engage and distinguish between an imaginary America and its reality when she migrates.

The Bildungsroman and Migration:

Early in the novel, Darling comments that her teachers have moved. As she puts it, "I don't go to school anymore because all the teachers left to teach over in South Africa and Botswana and Namibia and them, where there's better money, but I haven't forgotten the things I learned" (*WNNN* 33). The movement of her teachers is indicative of the larger trend where a professional class of Africans are not just moving to other African countries, but also out of the continent completely. The exit out of the continent is such that more African-born Africans have been migrating to the United States annually since 1970 than were sent during the 400-year period of slavery. So much so that "in 2005 the African Union declared its African Diaspora the 'sixth region' of the continent." As of 2010, the World Bank estimated that 30.6 million Africans live outside the homelands with 4 percent in the United States and United Kingdom ("Africa and its Diasporas" 629). This exodus raises critical questions about the short and long term impact of migration on continental development, and how to maintain links between the homeland and the diaspora.

We Need New Names grapples with the problem of the exodus in how it invites a reassessment of the learning opportunities available to African children on the continent and beyond. For example, though Darling says she remembers what she has learned in school, and these lessons no doubt shape her, it must be acknowledged that there is a

serious decline in school pedagogy with the migration of talent. Furthermore, there are great limitations to the informal lessons of storytelling and other communal acts of teaching and learning with the long term absence of parents looking for work, alongside the chaos of a disorganized community. The consequence of this unstable environment is that Darling acquires new literacies in spaces other than the school. Outside the school, her education occurs first in Paradise, where she learns to read the world, specifically America, and later, in Detroit, Michigan where she learns to write and in some ways "right" this world using local forms of literacy acquired in processes of informal learning and sense making.

Earlier novels detailing the migration of Africans to the West, which emerged during the independence period of the 1960s to the 1980s, historically focused on the getting of an education to improve the self and the return home to participate in nation building. Those who returned became the new bourgeoisie and were described as "been-tos," a social category and perception that stressed their increased knowledge and power in society alongside their alienation from it. In contrast, the 21st century is defined by the outward migration of Africans towards Europe and America to establish permanent residency. It is a move that has led to the development of new literacy practices unlike what has been in existence. For example, "been-tos" acquired new literacies[84] that have been central to understanding the development of the African Bildungsroman. In the critical analysis of "been-to novels" where the protagonists return with new knowledge aimed at changing their communities, the focus has been on the conflicts between

[84] In "One-Way Traffic: Renegotiating the 'Been-To' Narrative in the Nigerian Novel in the Era of Military Rule," Louisa Egbunike writes that "In the West, the been-to developed a Janus-faced consciousness and a revised understanding of nationhood and patriotism, which would often create tension between himself and his local community," 218.

traditional knowledge and modern knowledge. In contrast, the attitudes and migratory patterns of Darling's generation of Africans requires a different kind of reading and writing- an exploration of the meaning and effects of such movements for the travelers, their host societies and the societies they have left behind. This is especially true because return may not be an option. The need for alternative modes of reading and writing is critical because migration out of the continent remains ongoing.

The genre of the Bildungsroman reveals how individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, from home to community to nation, developing new skills and personalities in the movement from stage to stage. In "Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends" Tobias Boes notes how various critics have presented the movements and transitions central to the genre. For example, Mikhail Bakhtin in "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism," argues that "the *Bildungsroman* presents to the reader 'the image of *man in the process of becoming*' and situates its protagonist on the threshold between different historical eras" (Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*…" 236). And for Franco Moretti in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), "the defining characteristic of the novel of formation is to be found not in the protagonist's organic or accretive growth, but rather in his youth" (Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*…" 236). For Moretti, German and English novels of formation operate under a 'classification principle' and "value stable resolutions and definite endings; the return of the protagonist into the social fold is celebrated as an assertion of organic society." In contrast, French novels "are governed instead by a 'transformation principle' which "privileges change in its own right" as "narrative resolutions are ultimately unmasked as

meaningless and idiotic" (Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*…" 237). Finally, there is Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* which presents the Bildungsroman as "a product of the 'dual' social revolutions (French and industrial) that occurred around 1800. Unlike Moretti, however, he finds the roots of the genre in the rise of the nuclear family and particularly in the new pedagogic strategies with which mothers home-schooled their children" (Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*…" 237). Alongside Kittler's analysis of the works of Rainer Maria Rilke, and readings of other modernist authors, he also "examines how new communications technology such as the typewriter or gramophone, and new discursive modes such as the psychoanalytic exchange influenced personal formation" at the beginning of the twentieth century (Emphasis in original; "Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*…"237). What is notable in this brief overview of a few discourses central to the Bildungsroman is how the genre enables an integrated reading of the individual in relation to the social context of development at different historical moments. In other words, the genre relies on and thrives on change. It is crucial to note that African adaptations of the genre merge all of the singular characteristics each critic has associated with specific cultural manifestations. But it is usage with a difference.

In "Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" Ralph Austen explores the ways in which postcolonial African writers have used the term to their advantage in exploring school based individual development. According to Austen, the original German sense of the word "Bildungsroman" in reference to "self-formation" has principal elements that include "'unprescribed reading' and 'self-education'" (218), features that the genre shares

with the autobiography.[85] Austen's exploration of African "bildung" narratives set in the colonial era includes Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* (1964), and Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981), all of which are autobiographical. His analysis engages with the nature of self-formation outside the comfort of home as each protagonist follows the bright lights of colonial opportunity located in the school. According to Austen, the basic plot of the Bildungsroman usually occurs as follows:

> A boy grows up in a provincial town of a colonial territory to parents with a degree of European education. He attends a European school that causes him considerable pain but also experiences a combination of initiation into his grandparents' culture and a set of visits to his ancestral village. Eventually he departs, with considerable trepidation about where he belongs but high expectations, for more advanced education in a larger city and/or the European metropole. ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" 214)

This is a very familiar plot in colonial autobiographies and Bildungsroman novels. And though these novels usually focus on male children, Austen also reads Dangaremgba's semi-autobiographical *Nervous Conditions* which addresses the role of institutionalized education in shaping autonomy. Other female Bildungsroman novels that follow the same plot includes Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985) where the school is also central to the habits of form and etiquette that results in Annie going to Nursing school in England by its end. In all these accounts of the Bildungsroman, from Bakhtin to Austen,

---

[85] Apollo Amoko also makes this point in "Autobiography and Bildungsroman in African Literature" in *The Cam-bridge Companion to the African Novel*, edited by Abiola Irele. Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 195–208.

individualism, autonomy, and personalized learning are definitive features. All of these features are crucial to the narratives of progress and subsequent alienation that have emerged from Bildungsroman narratives in various literary traditions.

Critical analysis of postcolonial fictions like Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) as Bildungsroman has yielded new alternatives in the study of the postcolonial African Bildungsroman because of its representation of "collective ties."[86] For José Santiago Fernández Vázquez, *The Famished Road* challenges the original European form of the Bildungsroman as 'politically incorrect' for postcolonial writers, since "it authorizes imperialism in its representations of both the empowered Western individual and the exotic colonial other." Austen writes that Fernández Vázquez sees the frequent use of the genre by non-Western authors as symbolic of 'the desire to incorporate the master codes of imperialism into the text, in order to sabotage them more effectively'" ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman…" 217). In "The Non-Identical Anglophone Bildungsroman: From the Categorical to the De-Centering Literary Subject in the Black Atlantic," Jarad Heath Fennell's succinct summary of the differences between African and European forms of the Bildungsroman draws attention to how ideology affects narratives of postcolonial self-formation in an important way:

> The Bildungsroman operates as a generic category in that the subject develops through forging connections between itself and its surroundings even as these surroundings become complicated through movements from

[86] Although he finds it limited, Austen highlights the work of Jose Santiango Fernandez Vasquez who suggestively insists that Okri's novel attacks the individualist ethic of the Bildungsroman and the double consciousness of the protagonist in the magical realist mode of the novel eliminates the "illusion of a unified self" ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman…" 217). Austen's point is due to the fact that magical realist mode of Okri's novel destabilizes the development of a coherent self that usually emerges with schooling.

> simple, vertical relationships (e.g. family, heritage) to complex, horizontal relationships (e.g. peers, schooling, professions, social groups). The disruption between the operation of the genre in England prior to the close of the nineteenth century and how its structure and symbols are employed in the post-colonial novel occur when there is an awareness of the ways that contradictory dominant ideological forces are imposed on the developing subject and interfere with its identity and agency. Self-formation in these novels thus becomes incomplete or contingent upon negotiation between an ambivalent subject that desires coherence and agency, belonging and freedom. (22-23)

The school as the space for shaping and regulating successful manifestations of an individual's self-formation is one place where the definitions of success within is not necessarily the same outside. Success, as seen in the themes of the Bildungsroman, is presented as the triumphant mastery of school pedagogy that results in advanced education i.e. Dangaremgba's *Nervous Conditions* where Tambu's consuming quest for education ends with what she feels is her full admittance into society. Her admittance is symbolized in her prestigious scholarship to Sacred Heart, a white secondary school run by nuns, at the end of the novel. In contrast, mastery of the school curriculum causes her cousin, Nyasha, to become psychotic.

In *We Need New Names*, there are new forms of initiation into Western culture with migration. For Darling especially, her initiation into a society of readers occurs in different kinds of institutional contexts: in the activities of daily life in the slum that is Paradise, in the shadow of Budapest (the wealthy white suburban neighborhood close to

Paradise), international NGOS, the building of malls by the Chinese and later, in various suburban communities in America. Bulawayo's novel demonstrates how contemporary immigrant writing is reshaping how we think about literacy in unprecedented ways.

In the novel, the usual markers of literacy, books, schools and teachers, associated with the genre of the Bildungsroman are absent. So, there is a reading of different kinds of written texts including signs on various materials. In the novel, the dominance of the television is both an access point for learning and also for sense-making, which is how people figure out how to solve practical problems as needed. The novel straddles two continents and two cultures so Darling's perceptions of the United States and other Western nations is not from formal learning institutions such as schools or even books but rather informal learning in a social context marked by scarcity and unpredictability. Without access to formal learning, Darling and friends capitalize on an aspect of social literacy: vernacular literacy characterized by sense-making that initiates them into community life. With the absence of initiation rites and rituals that marked life transitions in earlier African novels, the children create their own rites and rituals. And beyond Zimbabwe, Darling's use of the informal strategies of sense-making helps her with problem solving and transforms her life in America into one of success.

Structurally, the novel lends itself to questions about reading and writing. Divided into two distinct parts- a first half that covers Darling's life in Zimbabwe and a second half on her life in Michigan- it does not have punctuated dialogue alongside a mixture of English and isiNdebele words with no distinction between words or a glossary. This architectural equivalence in language without the punctuation that separates speech from narrative interjections or signaling the narrator's introspective thought or even

distinguishing between languages promotes an intensive engagement of the writing and sharpens the narrator's child point of view. For example, when Darling recounts an incident where she watches her new cousin, TK, playing a game in his room, the language is a mixture of English and isiNdebele:

> Once I went up there to see what he was doing and I found him just sitting on his bed with that thing on his lap and *tobedzing* and *tobedzing* and *tobedzing*, bullets and bombs raining on the screen. I said, What are you doing, and he said, Can't you see I'm playing a game? and I said, What kind of game do you play by yourself? And he said, Get the fuck out. I will not be friends with TK; he shuts himself up there like he lives in his own country by himself. He doesn't even speak my language and says I talk funny. (*WNNN* 155)

This mixture of language and use of caps to distinguish dialogue is a dominant trope in the novel that highlights the refusal to distinguish between English as reading/writing language and isiNdebele or any translation of sounds etc. as speaking language only. It also brings to mind what Ato Quayson defines as the "deterritorialization of English" where English is simply one of the many languages on the African landscape,[87] as well as Gunther Kress' argument about how children transform language in comparison to adults. It also points to Carli Coetzee's argument in "*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits for Producing Contradictions," that the parts of the novel coded in isiNdebele has the effect of drawing "an intimate circle around those who understand" while excluding those who do not understand which in this instance is TK.

[87] Ato Quayson African Literature Conference Keynote Address, May 2018.

Literacy:

Following Brian Street's *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education* (1995), David Barton and Mary Hamilton have argued that literacy practice works in two ways: one that is individual and internal in terms of what people do with literacy, and another which is social. Here, practice refers to "cultural ways of utilising literacy" that encompasses but is also beyond "observable activities and tasks" (*Situated Literacies* 8). Furthermore, when literacy practices change, new ones are "frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making" (*Situated Literacies* 8). The process of informal learning and sense making is an aspect of vernacular literacy. In *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community* (1998), Barton and Hamilton write that vernacular literacy practice has its origins in everyday life; and because it is informal, it exists outside the formal regulation of dominant social institutions like the school, the church and the courts. Rooted in everyday experience, vernacular literacies are learned at home and emerge from people's upbringing, therefore there are no rules and roles shift depending on context and use. Following the work of Shirley Brice Heath in *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (1983), Barton and Hamilton note that unlike school literacy practice that is divided by subject, discipline and specialisms, vernacular literacy learning and use are "integrated in everyday activities" with literacy as an implicit part of the activity (*Local Literacies*… 247-252). Altogether, vernacular literacy practices are hybrid practices that draw on different domains of reading and writing that are not particularly supported or institutionally regulated in society.

According to Barton and Hamilton, there are six domains of hybrid practice with particular implications for vernacular literacy. The first domain of vernacular practice is about life organization seen in the daily writing that takes place in the home i.e. notice-boards for appointments, letters and diaries. The practice of personal communication includes writing cards and letters to friends while the hyrid practice of private leisure refers to the kinds of reading people do based on intensity and enthusiasm. The fourth hybrid practice is about documenting life in the keeping of records like birth certificate, school reports, photos, albums etc. And the fifth is the practice of sense making which refers to how people conduct their own research and reading to gain practical expertise. For instance, devotional reading of religious and inspirational texts, learning aimed at solving problems outside one's expertise etc. Finally, there is the practice domain of social participation which is about how people use literacy in the social activities of clubs, political and social groups such as newsletters, raffles, design posters, meeting notes etc. As Barton and Hamilton point out, while these literacy domains may start from individual lives, groups like households, families, and neighborhoods, communities use them to communicate and interact with members and others outside (*Local Literacies*… 248-252). Individual forms of literacy have marked African education since colonialism; in fact individual forms of literacy have challenged community oriented forms of learning.[88] However, these daily and informal uses of vernacular literacy do foster reading and writing in alternative discourse communities like Paradise.

Darling feels homesick while contemplating the snow outside her new home in Michigan. Her homesickness invariably results in thoughts of warmer climes and the

[88] See Neil ten Kortenaar's "The Coming of Literacy: *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe, a chapter in *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

remembrance of a scene from the first part of the novel set in Paradise where she squats in the bushes with her friends and a passerby, Mukoma Charlie, sees them. What Mukoma Charlie says next underscores the sorry state of affairs for the children: "You are the most unfortunate children this broken bottle has ever seen. When it was still a country you all would be at school doing some serious learning so you would grow up and be somebodies, but here you are, squatting in the bush, guavas ripping your anuses" (*WNNN* 162). This association between formal schooling and becoming "somebody," is a narrative quite familiar to the children. There is a moment when the children are roaming around Budapest and Stina tells the others that his teacher taught them they need an education to make money. Bastard responds, "I don't need any kaka school to make money…" (*WNNN* 15). Even if Bastard did want to attend school, there is no such opportunity. So the children must participate in a vernacular pedagogy that will foster their becoming.

New learning is linked actively to setting in the novel. The narrative begins with Darling still in Zimbabwe, and in the first chapter titled "Hitting Budapest," Bulawayo foregrounds the opposite environments that structure the various lessons the children must learn. At first view, Darling and her friends have left their homes in the slum, Paradise, to get food in Budapest. Paradise is a squatter settlement that features homes that Darling describes as "tiny shack after tiny shack crammed together like hot loaves of bread" (*WNNN* 28). As a slum, Paradise exists on the margins of Zimbabwe. In fact, it is notable that at no point in the novel is the country Zimbabwe mentioned. However, we can surmise accurately from the real versions of events fictionalized in the novel that it is set in Zimbabwe. Events include the circumstances that resulted in Darling and her

family moving into Paradise following government mandated destruction of their neighborhood. And there is also the disruption and violence that attended former President Mugabe's agrarian reforms and take-over of white farms in 2000.

With a bird's eye view of the slum from the top of the hill Fambeki, Darling notes Paradise is "all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry" with shacks that are the "muddy color of dirty puddles after the rains " (*WNNN* 36). In contrast, Budapest where the children have gone to look for food to assuage their hunger is like another country, "big, big houses with satellite dishes on the roofs and neat graveled yards or trimmed lawns, and the tall fences and the Durawalls and the flower and the big trees heavy with fruit that's waiting for us…" (*WNNN* 6). For Isaac Ndlovu, in "Ambivalence of Representation: African Crises, Migration and Citizenship in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*," this juxtaposition heralds the dominant appositional mode of the narrative with Zimbabwe as failed state and the United States and Europe as stable. In other words, "Just as the children are compelled to sneak out of Paradise and raid Budapest for food, desperate Zimbabweans of all ages also migrate in large numbers to economically stable nations. However, when tramping the streets of Budapest, Paradise's poverty marks the bodies of Darling and her friends as the stereotypes about Africa also stubbornly cling onto Africans in developed foreign lands" (141). In other words, the mobility and fluidity of language, of style, of affiliation that characterizes the afropolitans of Taiye Selasi's "Bye-Bye Barber,"[89] does not exist here.

When we meet Darling and her friends leaving Paradise to "hit" the neighborhood of Budapest for guavas it is portrayed as abnormal- a crossing into new and different

[89] "Bye-Bye Babar." *The LIP Magazine*, March 3. Accessed June 11, 2019. http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76.

territory where the children should not be- in fact, later in the novel, their presence is questioned by a guard they meet during a "prowl" for guavas to steal near the end of the season (*WNNN* 106-113). On this first trip, a memorable encounter occurs with a visiting barefoot white Zimbabwean woman wearing an earring shaped like the African continent. The children pause to talk to the woman, who throws away the pizza she has been eating without asking the children if they are hungry, and asks them to pose for pictures. After arranging the children for the picture, the woman tells the children how to participate in the picture. However, Darling hesitates as she ponders the potential consequences of their actions using a story she heard from her grandmother, Mother of Bones:

> Good, good, now say *cheese*, say *cheese*, *cheese*, *cheeeeeeeese*- the woman enthuses, and everyone says *cheese*. Myself, I don't really say, because I am busy trying to remember what cheese means exactly, and I cannot remember. Yesterday Mother of Bones told us the story of Dudu the bird who learned and sang a new song whose words she did not really know the meaning of and who was then caught, killed, and cooked for dinner because in the song she was actually begging people to kill and cook her. The woman points at me, nods, and tells me to say *cheeeeeese* and I say it mostly because she is smiling like she knows me really well, like she even knows my mother. I say it slowly at first, and then I say, *Cheese* and *cheese*…and we are all singing the word and the camera is clicking and clicking and clicking. (*WNNN* 11)

I have quoted this incident at length here to draw attention to Darling's thoughts and reactions even as she is singled out in the group photograph and encouraged to act as

required. Although Darling is dimly aware of the consequences emphasized in Mother of Bones' story, she eventually succumbs to the woman's invitation to say "cheese." In terms of character development, it makes sense that Darling participates in the making of this sign even as she tries to comprehend its meaning in an oral context different from the one in which she heard the story that warns her against repeating words she does not understand- the earlier story occurs in Paradise, and now she is in Budapest. But she chooses her response based on her interest in what is happening in the moment despite feeling certain cognitive dissonance.

Darling's response of cheese while trying to remember the lessons of a tale heard the day before also points to the social factors that Gunther Kress argues are central to understanding the form and meaning of messages that are "written, drawn or otherwise" especially for children in *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy* (1997). In noting the contrast between speech and writing, Kress differentiates between representation (What I want to say, show, mean which focuses on the maker of signs, of language) and communication (How I can get across to you what it is that I want to say, show, mean which focuses on the audience). Kress writes that the requirements of communication are such that the participants in an act of communication should make their messages understandable, so forms of expression should be transparent. And the requirements for representation requires that the maker of the representation, the sign, choose the best, most plausible form for the expression of the meaning of what is to be represented. Kress's points bring up the key differences in the method of the story that Mother of Bones told the children, and their current pose for their pictures to be taken by a stranger. Obedience to the request of the stranger highlights the fact that each speech

context has a different value for the children. From the way Darling describes being propelled to say cheese, Kress's point about the organization of speech emphasizes the power of the present moment: "Informationally, elements of greater prominence are made distinct from those of lesser prominence through pitch variation" (*Before Writing*…14-15). In other words, the mouthing of the word "cheese," its forceful expulsion and the insistence of the woman photographer for the children to imitate her means that Mother of Bones' story does not have its intended impact on the children as it is a narrative intended to make them wary of strangers. It is a moment that highlights the limitations of oral narratives in an era of globalization where the present has more force than the past.

Importantly, this is not going to be the last time that Darling participates in "singing a song" or doing things to which she does not know the meaning while she is in Zimbabwe. Her actions symbolize an unconscious transparency that is attuned to her eventual move to America. Therefore, the moment signals the need for a different type of reading, in contrast to the metanarrative where the local and transnational are conceived as being in opposition to each other i.e. what Coetzee describes as a "dynamic theorization of the relationship between the local and the transnational" whereby 'two imagined sites of reading function like a pipeline with multiple points along its length, and constant (but not consistent) flows backwards and forwards" ("*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits…" 133). So instead of deriding Darling's desires and this unguardedness, her participation becomes a kind of investment in an alternative future where saying cheese is not unusual.

With the absence of schooling, a variety of texts exist in Paradise. These texts include writing on T-shirts distributed by NGOs that the children notice i.e. Cornell,

Google, BBC, CNN. That the children are wearing these words which refer to businesses and locations far outside their purview points to a version of the flow between points on the pipeline Coetzee describes using Ato Quayson's reading of slogans, signboards on, information on buildings etc in his book *Oxford Street, Accra* (2014). For Coetzee, Quayson's reading of the "discursive ensemble of the relay between the transnational and the local" is such that the local is not inferior to or made secondary by the transnational ("*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits…"133). Rather meaning is created in the movements and currents between both spaces and gives rise to a process of globalization that is neither "demon" nor "angel" but instead a "conduit for producing contradictions" ("*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits…"133). Coetzee notes that the references generated by these texts "unsettle the reader, and act as textual markers of the process of reading… coded instance of the conduit of contradictions" ("*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits…"140) that is globalization. Other texts include signboards like that of the local healer, Vlodza, who advertises healing for all of life's ills including bad luck with getting visas to USA and Britain with payment in "Forex only" (*WNNN* 29), the Bible, Election Posters with the word "Change" on it which the children don't understand, games like "Find Bin Laden," "Country-game" drawn on the ground, re-enactment of a scene from ER. According to Coetzee, these games are disruptive of the opposition construed between the local and the transnational. Citing Karin Barber's notion of "entextualization" whereby a text is defined as the "idea of weaving or fabricating-connectedness, the quality of having been put together, of having been made by human ingenuity," Coetzee argues that a text is only coherent because of the human effort to organize signs in a

manner that it is interpretable ("*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits…"140). It is a point of view that is useful for understanding the opportunities that these texts produce for Darling although a lot of the meaning generated in connection only comes later and when she is in America. As Polo Belina Moji points out, the particulars of these texts are quite revealing as they emphasize the "gritty reality beneath the fantasy of migration, namely the global economic inequities that govern the permeability of the local space" ("New Names, Translational Subjectivities…184). While Darling is not aware of this gritty reality, as readers, we are aware; and indeed the extent of our awareness does depend on where we are on Coetzee's transnational "pipeline" of literacy and information.

As post reflection in the aftermath of the narrated events, the novel is Darling's attempt to make sense of her childhood using literacy practices that fit into the vernacular mode. The multiplicity of informal learning strategies- dominated by the knowledge of American celebrities and celebrity culture along with the distinct absence of the storytelling and adult guidance that dominates coming of age African novels in general- simply shifts her into the global space. It is a novel that gives new meaning to Arjun Appadurai's assessment of the workings of globalization in the world while pointing to the need to rethink its usual iterations in the African context.

We Need New Names dramatizes the circulation of people, images and goods that was the concern of Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996). While Appadurai's book explores how media and migration rely on imagination to construct modern subjectivity, it also makes critical points about the development of a postmodern literacy, particularly the ways that people adopt the ideas

and images they encounter from other places in the world while at home even as migration has become normalized. His assessment, which goes beyond Benedict Anderson's earlier argument on the dominance of print capitalism in the development of mass literacy, explores the changes in human relationship brought on by the primarily unidirectional flow of goods, services, and ideas both with and without human interaction that now characterizes the 21st century. His concept of '-scapes' provides insight into the irregular landscapes of the world and the ways these multiple worlds, which are "imagined," are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of peoples and groups spread around the globe (*Modernity at Large* 33). These '-scapes' include

> *[E]thnoscapes,* that is, the international flow of human beings in search of work or pleasure; *mediascapes,* or the 'repertoire' of stories and images circulated through literature, television and electronic texts, and the local people's response to these versions of reality; *technoscapes*, or the movement of high-speed technology and multinational companies across national boundaries in a manner that ignores those boundaries; *financescapes*, meaning the rapid movement of capital around the world; and finally, i*deoscapes*, referring to the global circulation of ideologies and oppositional discourses….[90]

In identifying the increase and simultaneity in the global movement of people and ideas in this multiple 'scapes,' Appadurai captures the performative aspects of globalization. But the hypervisibility of this performance often obscures how people who live in these "imagined worlds" are able to contest and subvert both the "official mind and the entrepreneurial mentality that surrounds them" (33) thereby enacting change for

[90] Stephanie Newell, *Ways of Reading,* 10.

themselves. In contrast to Francoise Kral who argues that Appadurai's formulation romanticizes migration and fails to attend to the "hierarchies, inequalities and power struggles" of globalization as there is no "sense of participation and agency, a sense of direction,"[91] I think Appadurai raises the possibility of this potential when he writes that

> There is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*. Terrorists modeling themselves on Rambo-like figures (who have themselves generated a host of non-Western counterparts); housewives reading romances and soap operas as part of their efforts to construct their own lives; Muslim family gatherings listening to speeches by Islamic leaders on cassette tapes; domestic servants in South India taking packages tours to Kashmir: these are all examples of the active way in which media are appropriated by people throughout the world. T-shirts, billboards, and graffiti as well as rap music, street dancing, and slum housing all show that the images of the media are quickly moved into local repertoires of irony, anger, humor, and resistance. (Appadurai 7)

People are adapting these global texts in their own *local spaces* (emphasis added) as individuals, on their own terms despite the ideologies and communities these products may be associated with at their points of origin. Of course the manner of that adaptation depends on what resources they have at their disposal which is Kral's key point against Appadurai.

A model of this adaptation is present in the first part of the novel which is set in Zimbabwe. As journalists take pictures of her and her friends, Darling uses Paris Hilton's

[91] *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature* 90.

attitude towards the paparazzi as text. From watching Hilton on TV, she has learned that at a certain point, pictures are invasive and dehumanizing especially when she notices the cameras focusing in on their tattered clothing, near nakedness and her underage friend's pregnant belly (*WNNN* 55). And indeed the selectivity of people across the world in how they make sense of the global in their local spaces speaks to how Darling too will self-select. But what will her self-selection and adaptation mean in terms of community discourses in Paradise and later when she moves to America? A lot of the texts which are integral to specific events in Darling's childhood in Paradise also show up in America thereby advancing Barton and Hamilton's points on the situated and interactive quality of literacy. For instance, while working as Mr. Elliot's housekeeper, she sees his daughter wearing a T-shirt with the Cornell logo on it which she immediately thinks of as "Bastard's Cornell T-Shirt" (*WNNN* 269). By this point in the novel, she has become aware of the gritty reality of her life in America as illegal immigrant who cannot afford the kind of education that Cornell offers.

Reading the "big baboon of the world" in Paradise: Play as Informal Learning and Sense-Making in the Novel:

> "If I'm lucky, like today, I get to be the U.S.A, which is a country-country; who doesn't know that the U.S.A is big baboon of the world?" (*WNNN* 51)

Literacy practices are best understood in the context of human relationships in groups and communities.[92] Thinking about *We Need New Names* in terms of how the activities of reading and writing are directly or indirectly connected to the social world of the novel raises two distinct questions: what kinds of literacy practices do particular events in Bulawayo's novel engender? And what does Darling's experience of these events communicate about the shape and structures of literacy in her life and in her community? Together, individual and social models of literacy practice make for sharply integrated ways of reading and writing the world and when the social aspect is missing especially, which is what happens when Darling moves to America, it undercuts literacy.

In describing and illustrating the space of childhood meaning making in his *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy*, Gunther Kress argues that as participants in a world that already has been formed, children may be perceived as copying the ways in which adults make signs, communicate etc. However, this would be wrong. Instead, children transform the things around them, "in entirely minute and barely noticeable ways" (Kress 94). For instance, when a 31/2-year-old child is climbing up a steep hill with his family and finds it difficult and says, "this is a heavy hill," a transformative view of meaning making holds that the child means to say "this is really hard, it takes a lot of effort to walk up here." Here, the child has transformed the meaning of heavy: "*heavy* has a new meaning for him; it is *no longer* the word it was before. In his own use he has transformed it, *conditioned by the practical experience in which he had to make the sign*" (Emphasis in original; Kress 94-95). Consider this model then in view of how Darling reports Sis Betty's use of the word "baboon" during an encounter with NGO officials who have brought supplies in asking the children to behave: "What are you

[92] Barton and Hamilton, *Local Literacies*…, 6-7.

doing, masascum evanhu imi? Liyahlanya, you think these expensive white people came all the way from overseas ipapa to see you act like baboons? Do you want to embarrass me, heh?" (*WNNN* 56) and how she uses it in describing her preferred position while playing country-game with her friends.

Country-game involves the drawing of two rings on the ground and cutting it up into pieces that represent various countries, which the children define based on perceived power and wealth. "Country-country" like the U.S.A is considered the "big baboon of the world." Other country-countries that are not quite in the same league as "big baboon" includes Britain, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, France, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Russia, and Greece; countries where life is "at least better" are Dubai, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania; and none of the children wants to be "rags of countries" which includes Congo, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Haiti, Sri Lanka, or even their own country Zimbabwe which is marked by "terrible hunger and things falling apart" (*WNNN* 51). Notably, China, which is in the process of building a mall that the children go to is nowhere on these lists- because they perceive China as being a "red devil" that eats people to grow "fat and strong" (*WNNN* 49-50). For Darling who "feels like it's my country now because my aunt Fostalina lives there, in Destroyedmichygen" (*WNNN* 51), America is hers.

Beyond the fact that her aunt, who is also her mentor, lives in America, it is America's "big-baboon" status as a country above all others that fuels Darling's voluntary subjectivity. Like she says in the epigraph that begins this section, "If I'm lucky, like today, I get to be the U.S.A, which is a country-country; who doesn't know that the U.S.A is big baboon of the world" (*WNNN* 51)? The metaphor portrays America

as largest primate in the animal kingdom of countries with fierce, overpowering and protective qualities that make it desirable. Darling's embrace of this status actively engages the transformation she perceives America can create while ignoring the fact that the same qualities point to unseemly behavior when American NGOs come to Paradise to distribute care packages.

So Kress proposes a new way of appraising how children learn and thus prepare for the world as they don't read or write in the same way as adults. In fact, the novel is a testament to this fact as Bulawayo sees her novel as her own attempt at "bearing witness" (NoViolet Bulawayo Interview with Sophy Kohler 2013). Over and over again, what Darling and her friends make of their situation is not presented in terms of their ability to necessarily read the alphabet. Rather, understanding is measured by how well the children read other peoples interpretations and responses to the situation.

For instance, although the children help neighborhood activists Bornfree and Messenger put up Election Posters in Paradise with the words "Change" on them they don't understand what the word means. However, they can feel the excitement and hear the energy and life in the voices of the adults around them. The enthusiasm of the adults in the community leads the children to surmise that something positive is astir. So they too become excited but anxious at what this new atmosphere will bring for them (*WNNN* 60-64). In another incident, the girls practice an abortion. Citing the American serial show ER, Sbho teaches the children to massage Chipo's pregnant belly and suggests new names for herself, Darling and Forgiveness in their playing at being doctors. Specifically doctors who will remove a pregnancy that has affected their friendship negatively and to prevent their friend from dying as they have overheard adults discussing childbirth as

death sentence (*WNNN* 80). To accomplish their task, Forgiveness, now Dr. Cutter, straightens a hanger and tells the others that she overheard her sister discussing removing a pregnancy with a hanger that is inserted into the stomach and the hooks used to pull out the baby (*WNNN* 87). With Darling as Dr. Roz and Sbho as Dr. Bullet, the children are in the midst of debating the painfulness of the procedure when a female neighbor MotherLove comes upon them and stops the potential tragedy. Basically what these female pre-teens know about female sexuality is from television and neighborhood gossip- all situations without ways to make meaning of what they are hearing.

Despite this gap, it would be a mistake to think that the children are completely ignorant. Notably, their forms of sense-making, in play, in competition all betray a form of socially embedded literacy. This chapter which shares the title of the novel eponymously illustrates what Moji describes as the "permeability of the local space to global influence" even as it "configures translation as movement from a space characterized by lack to a televised land of plenty" ("New Names, Translational Subjectivities …" 183). In what Moji describes "globalized fantasy" of the known and unknown, the children's actions show their attempts at becoming local experts in following the script of the televised and highly curated action. Therefore, Sbho, Dr. Bullet tells her friends what she knows, "This is what they do in ER' as they begin massaging Chipo's pregnant belly (*WNNN* 84) and what is unknown in the comment 'I wish I had a stethoscope, Dr. Bullet says, which I don't know what it is' (*WNNN* 86) as she puts her ear to Chipo's belly.

In yet another instance, the children visit the Chinese construction site where a mall is being built for shops like 'Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace…" to ask for a bag of

goodies, including fortune cookies they call "zhing zhongs" (*WNNN* 48). Much like Kress would say, Moji points out that "the representation of the children refutes the notion of an 'untainted 'original subjectivity." Instead, [t]hey are 'porous' beings, who absorb and make their sense of the combined influences that surround them through fantasy- *ER*,- and the creation of a translational 'glocal' language- *zhing-zhongs* ("New Names, Translational Subjectivities …"185). Another critical incident which highlights the role of play, of sense-making when the children don't understand occurs after the funeral of Bornfree, an opposition activist brutally killed by the ruling administration. After watching the funeral proceedings from the margins, the fringes of the cemetery Heavensway, the children re-enact the scene of the men who came for Bornfree and the reaction of the adults watching without doing a thing to save the young man, especially Bornfree's mother, MaDube who screams but cannot help her son and no one else does either (*WNNN* 142-145). It is a harrowing re-enactment witnessed by two BBC reporters who ask the children what kind of game they have just been playing to which Bastard replies, "Can't you see this is for real?" (*WNNN* 146) Indeed Coetzee echoes Kress when she writes that these games should not be interpreted as copies, "recycled goods from elsewhere." Instead they should be regarded as "references and texts… unmoored from their original contexts, and their meanings are determined precisely by …fluidity and restlessness" ("*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics…" 141). Reading the novel in the context of a generation born after Zimbabwean Independence, a generation described as the "Born free Generation" (NoViolet Bulawayo Interview with Sophy Kohler 2013), who have come of age in an era of deep postcolonial crises, these games

are critical ways for the children to make sense of an adult world that does not account for or recognize their presence.

Children are "thoroughly experienced makers of meaning" who employ various media to both represent and communicate their thoughts and ideas (*Before Writing*… 8). Children do "painting, drawing, building and play of various kinds" and also write. But because schooling focuses on a "single medium of lettered representation: literacy," these other forms of communication are treated as mere expression of children's feelings, desires and emotions (*Before Writing*… 9). While Darling is not as young as the children Kress observes and analyses in his work, the fact of her childhood innocence in the face of various global scripts, and her responses alongside her friends, is a reminder that she is not completely versed in lettered literacy. Her naiveté, evident in both the form, imagery and language of the novel, points to a pattern of sense-making. It is a form of sense-making that is now occurring through the mediation of writing where we as readers become acquainted with the preteen Darling and her perception of the world.

In America, Darling uses this habit of sense-making via reading the people she interacts with and the way they interact with others to learn a new script. While watching her Aunt/mentor Fostalina experience significant humiliation while trying to order underwear over the phone from a Victoria's Secret catalogue customer service representative, Darling comments on how she taught herself to speak in an American manner. She watches TV shows that include *Dora the Explorer*, *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob*, *Scooby-Doo*, *that's so Raven*, *Glee*, *Friends*, *Golden Girls* and others, with a goal of "just listening and imitating the accents" (*WNNN* 196). And then she also learns that there are key words that will allow her to "pass" successfully in conversing with

Americans: “I also have my list of American words that I keep under the tongue like talismans, ready to use: *pretty good*, *pain in the ass*, *for real*, *awesome*, *totally*, *skinny*, *dude*, *freaking*, *bizarre*, *psyched*, *messed up*, *like*, *tripping*, *motherfucker*, *clearance*, *allowance*, *douche bag*, *you're welcome*, *acting up*, *yikes*” (*WNNN* 196). I agree with Coetzee who reads Darling's description of what she hears in the satire of the novel as “angry and judgmental of American society and its inability to ‘hear’ a different variety” (“*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics…” 136-137) of English. Relying on television shows to increase her knowledge of American culture helps Darling to intentionally become one of those listeners who can now “eavesdrop” on the “unheard” referents of American conversations and so participate even if she does not speak.

In *Rethinking African Cultural Production* (2015), Frieda Ekotto and Kenneth Harrow complicate Appadurai's argument by noting how people are moving into the rich countries that have presided over the capitalist flows of goods and services in one direction- towards the poor countries. In expanding Appadurai's argument to reflect recent changes in Africa's cultural productions, they argue that there are new epistemologies emerging in the bidirectional “flows” of workers, students, elites between both rich and poor countries. All these people “carry with them the language to articulate the narratives of their home countries and cultures in their newly adopted spaces, and as they transport entire cultures, religions, and epistemologies, they use this knowledge to transform the countries into which they enter.” In other words, the new conditions of globalization have gone beyond the usual subject positions embedded in the terms exile, hybrid, creole or diasporic (3, 8). All terms once associated with positions of fear, lack,

and ambivalence which Darling does not necessarily feel, she registers new speaking and writing idioms for the 21st century.

Despite Darling's triumphs, a kind of misreading that focuses on the devaluation of an indigenous social order has affected the reception history of the novel. For instance, there is the famous critique of the writer, Helon Habila, whose *Guardian* review of *We Need New Names* argues that the novel enacts an African "aesthetic of suffering" and performs Africa for the world which serves an exploitative European imaginary ("Review of *We Need New Names*" 2013). Ndlovu focuses on the paradox of the novel in its representation of Africa when he argues that while the novel satirizes the stereotypical depictions of Africa, it also engages those stereotypes in a narrative dominated by chaos, squalor and suffering. A third critique draws attention to the way the novel participates in a transnational community illuminating multiple African literacies for American audiences. In "Awkward Form and Writing the African Present," Ashleigh Harries writes that the novel reads as if it is two stories conceived for a creative writing class where the first part is driven by the "content demands of 'writing what you know' as the member of the group bringing the high cultural pluralism…" and in the second part where Darling becomes American immigrant, Bulawayo "tethers her 'Africa' ('write what we expect you to know') to the American context ('write your American everyday')."[93] For Harris, this structure makes the novel awkward and unsatisfying. The writer Uzodinma Iweala echoes Harris' critique in his *New York Times* review of the novel. He writes that the

[93] "Awkward Form and Writing the African Present," *The Salon* 7: 3–8.

more Darling becomes American, the less vibrant the language of the novel in its second half.[94]

Significantly, other scholars point to the new narratives that the novel brings to the fore about the joys of engaging the contradictions of community between home and abroad. In "New Names, Translational Subjectivities: (Dis)location and (Re)naming in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*," Moji argues that subjectivity and translation are key concepts in Bulawayo's novel. In this essay, subjectivity not only refers to how a collective or individual human subject experiences the world, but also how it is named or names itself" (181). Moji's assertion that postcolonial theory links subjectivity to W. E. B Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, "through which the Black subject experiences a white world – one simultaneously seeing the world and seeing one's self from the perspective of others" ("New Names, Translational Subjectivities …" 181), is key to how Darling fashions herself in accordance to how she perceives she is being perceived by others. Consequently, Bulawayo's novel engages in "kinship, rituals of naming and memory" that uses multiple sites of meaning and affiliation to create a perpetual process of subjectification that resists stasis ("New Names, Translational Subjectivities …" 190). For Coetzee who uses Chinua Achebe's famous line that no one should be fooled that African writers use English as they will do "unheard of things with it" as foundation in her essay, Achebe's point references not only the rise of the novel in Africa, but also the "innovative and adaptive uses made of English by its speakers on the African continent" ("We Need New Names..."132). For Coetzee specifically, there are readers who are aware of the multiple currents of English in

[94] "Difficult Terrain." Review of *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo. *New York Times*, June 7, 2013.

Bulawayo's novel. These readers who can hear the "'unheard of' things in the text" are also keenly "aware of the more tone-deaf 'transnational' readings" which they incorporate in their own contextual readings thus generating greater pleasure for themselves.

Taking all these critical voices as a whole, it is clear that the individualism which emerged during colonialism and very much defines the postcolonial era, does not negate African collectivist values in novels about self-development. As Austen argues, the genre of the Bildungsroman, in its classical European form, advances a model of individualist development and sociopolitical integration that is beneficial to the collective aspect of African values and how Africans view themselves and position in the world. Both the African and "canonical" forms of the European Bildungsroman represent the idea and perhaps possibility of individualistic development through autonomous reading and mentorship that must always address larger social contexts. In the African context, this often means that the protagonist is surrounded by and may be submerged in "an indigenous social and cultural order that is devalued and feared by, or simply unknown to, much of the reading audience" ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" 228). And though Austen cautions that "such literary moves do not indicate an incapacity for or even an ideological antipathy towards individualism in African societies" ("Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" 228), critics can sometimes read African novels in this mode. Ultimately, African writing and criticism does function in a cultural milieu of individual, community and continental value that immigrant literature simply serves to expand.

In the current atmosphere of immigration anxieties in the United States, perhaps because the "melting pot" ideal of assimilation has not erased cultural differences, the us vs them debate has at its center the question of what constitutes the shared cognitions of ideologies and identities for various groups as they engage with the great American experiment. Contemporary immigrant novels like Bulawayo *We Need New Names* engage with this conversation in showing how literacy can make the world, can create new forms and communities of interaction. Specifically, Bulawayo's novel points to the possibility of a socially embedded model of literacy that specifies multiple linguistic and community connections: equally taking on the complications of African poverty as well as the power of American culture amidst the multilayered textures of globalization.

Conclusion: Literacy for the Twenty-First Century

"Immigrant Literacies: Language and Learning in the African Diaspora Novel by Twenty-First Century Anglophone African Writers" has been concerned with the state of literacy within the African continent and beyond with migration as represented in a selection of novels written in English. In the novels I have explored in this dissertation, characters often collide with norms, ideas and cultural practices they don't know or understand in the course of developing new relationships and communities in the effort to settle down after migration. Using the work of New Literacy theorists such as Brian Street, David Barton and Mary Hamilton where they define literacy as socially embedded and revolving around the event of written texts, the four novels that engage with this idea of context driven literacy are Teju Cole's *Everyday is for the Thief*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names.*

In analyzing these texts as well as the literacy skills that characters adopt in any given situation, I argue that socially embedded forms of literacy in one setting profoundly affects performance in another. For this reason, the cultural competencies in one community that reveal themselves in language and behavior are adapted and reformulated in the writing, reading and speech of the characters when they move to new communities. Ultimately, it is how each character embraces or neglects to adapt prior modes of learning and communication that determines success or failure in a new setting. Changes in literacy and learning function quite differently in each novel thereby illuminating different aspects of the migrant experience. In all cases, however, my analysis leads to

the conclusion that immigrant writing is actively committed to reducing cultural isolation and the misunderstanding that can result from it.

For the Nigerian migrant who is Cole's protagonist in *Everyday is for the Thief*, the dense multiplicity of stories in his native Lagos are simultaneously enthralling and frustrating. After living in America for 15 years, the narrator's encounter with these stories in a variety of contexts and his inability to engage with them in writing reveals the limitations of conventional forms of reading and writing to capture his experience within Nigerian communities upon return. Unable to write, the narrator chooses a different mode of engagement: photography. He explicitly chooses to photograph the stories he cannot write while traveling from place to place and so uses images to exceed the limits of written language. In Adichie's *Americanah*, the main character Ifemelu grapples with entrenched cultural discourses that influence how migrants and African Americans in the black community communicate and relate with each other. Turning to blogs, Ifemelu (and Adichie) draws out and lays bare the many stereotypes that get in the way of honest interpersonal and intercultural engagement between members of the same racial community.

The Zimbabwean Chikwava's brilliant but troubled narrator in *Harare North* discovers that there are limits to organizing literacy to further one's own goals alone. While the narrator benefits from the stories of others who have migrated to Britain and returned home to Zimbabwe with tips and lessons from their experiences of entering Britain successfully, he fails to get employment where he can earn the money that motivated him to move in the first place. Unable to mentally assimilate the stories currently at hand in his new community so he can adapt them for both his own use and

the advancement of his community, the narrator filters his reading and writing through his past life and experiences in Zimbabwe. He uses this past to organize his life in the present Britain with devastating consequences as he is wandering the street at the end of the novel presumably now mad. And in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* which is instructive in its mapping of cultural and economic forms of globalization, visual texts and media influence and shape the literacy practices of children who have largely been left to fend for themselves both in Zimbabwe and in the United States. Darling, the protagonist in the novel, is flexible in adopting new literacy practices that foster her own growth in her new community.

While my focus has been on literary texts, my findings resonate with recent studies of African migrant experiences as they are related to issues of literacy. In *Reprocessing Race, Language and Ability: African Born Educators and Students in Transnational America* (2013), African migrants tell many stories of their difficulties in American classrooms, difficulties that range from being unable to read or write at the expected levels to being ostracized in the community for being foreign. In examining the reality of life for African immigrant children in US schools, Omiunota N. Ukpokodu notes that there are critical disparities that leads to academic underperformance and underachievement. In "African Immigrants, the 'New Model Minority': Examining the Reality in U.S. k-12 Schools" (2018), Ukpokodu describes how the circumstances of voluntary migration and involuntary migration can impact literacy. According to Ukpokodu, while voluntary immigrant families that originate from countries with relative stability like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya are "likely to be educated and to have the tools to navigate their new society and the education system," involuntary African immigrant

families and students i.e. refugees and asylees, from "war-torn and conflict-ridden countries" like Sudan, Liberia, Rwanda, even Zimbabwe in the period of Chikwava's novel studied here, are "less likely to be educated and to have the skills to navigate their new society and the education system" (72). Ukpokodu's research points to the fact that in policy-making and in classroom education, it is crucial to recognize the background of immigrants and incorporate that background in teaching and learning, a point that is emphasized in the novels I have studied here. Such recognition will further reduce isolation while making it easier for immigrants to become functioning members of their new communities.

This project has generated many more questions than it could answer and so there is much to be done. One such area of research is the role of gender and sexuality in shaping literacy practice. I have noticed a pattern of differences in male and female approaches to reading and writing in the texts I examined in this dissertation. For example, Cole's unnamed narrator and Chikwava's unnamed narrator, who are both male, primarily engage in formal processes of reading and writing in their narratives. While Cole's narrator is reading signs and literary texts throughout his journey in Lagos, Chikwava's narrator is reading newspapers, writing a diary and writing letters in what seems to be an imitation of the formal writing world in order to advance his identity as a principled man of culture in Britain. In contrast, the female protagonists of Adichie's *Americanah* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* seem to split their literacies between the formal and informal depending on context. In fact, Ifemelu and Darling respectively read formally, but write informally. Ifemelu consciously chooses to blog informally to illuminate and clarify the invisible narratives that shape racial discourse and its impact on

mainstream and minority cultures in the United States. And though Darling reads television and forms of visual media as she educates herself, instances of writing represented in the novel occur during play, during violent takeovers and in conversation with her friend Marina in the form of texts. I would like to explore whether the difference between the male and female narrators is consistent and what that difference—if it exists—could suggest about the significance of gender and sexuality.

Other future research projects with potential include examining the distinctions that African Diaspora writers seem to be drawing between global and local literacies. In distinguishing between types of literacies, these writers also assign value to those literacies while indicating how they shape identity and community. The African male characters in Cole's novel and in Adichie's novel engage in global aesthetic reading practices that seem to nurture a desire for new kinds of community and forms of relationship. For these characters, the usual postcolonial narratives of center and periphery mean little as they take stories from all over the world and inhabit the spaces of those stories as if they own them. In becoming global citizens, the choices these characters make eschew simple north to south narratives of consumption. Their literacy practices complicate and expand postcoloniality in the twenty-first century beyond notions of colonizer and colonized thereby inviting new insights.

Ultimately, in representing the lives of African migrants in terms of how they build relationships using literacy, Cole, Adichie, Chikwava and Bulawayo have made it possible for others, Africans and non-Africans, to uncover language and learn to negotiate new cultures and new ways of being in the world.

Bibliography

Achebe, Chinua. *Arrow of God.* 2nd ed., Heinemann, 1986.

---. *The Education of a British-Protected Child*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

---. *Home and Exile.* Anchor Books, 2001.

---. *Hopes and Impediments.* New York: Doubleday, 1989.

---. Interview with Bill Moyers. *A World of Ideas,* Sep. 29, 1988.

---. *Morning Yet on Creation Day,* Heinemann, 1975.

---. *Things Fall Apart.* Anchor Books, 1994.

Adenekan, Shola. "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature in a Digital Age." *Matatu* vol. 45, no.1, 2014, pp. 133-15. *ProQuest Literature Online*. Accessed 18 April 2019.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "An African Education in "No Sweetness Here" *NPR*. January 18, 2008. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18142470. Accessed 28 April 2019.

---. *Americanah.* Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

---. "The Danger of a Single Story," *TedGlobal,* July 2009.

---. "The Small Redemptions of Lagos." *Ifemelu's Blog*. https://www.chimamanda.com/Ifemelus-blog/. Accessed 27 March 2019.

---. "To Instruct and Delight: A Case for Realist Literature." *Commonwealth Lecture*, 2012, http://commonwealthfoundation.com/wpcontent/uploads/2012/12/Commonwealth_Lecture_2012_Chimamanda_Ngozi_Adichie.pdf. Accessed 25 March 2019.

Agyepong, Mercy. "Seeking to be Heard: An African-Born, American Raised Child's Tale of Struggle, Invisibility, and Invincibility" in *Reprocessing Race, Language and Ability:*

African Born Educators and Students in Transnational America. Edited by Immaculée Harushimana, Chinwe Ikpeze, and Shirly Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., pp. 155-168.

Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Our Sister Killjoy*. Longman, 1977.

Amoko, Apollo. "Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, edited by Abiola Irele, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 195-208.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso. 1991.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Arnt, Susan. "Euro-African Trans-Spaces? Migration, Transcultural Narration and Literary Studies. *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, edited by Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff & Daniela Merolla, Rodopi B. V., 2009. 103-120.

Arthur, John. *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*. Praeger, 2000.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in post-colonial literatures*. Routledge, 1989/2002.

Atta, Sefi. *A Bit of Difference*. Interlink Books, 2012.

Austen, Ralph. "Struggling with the African Bildungsroman." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2015, pp. 214-231.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bartlett, Lesley and Dorothy C. Holland. “Theorizing the Space of Literacy Practices.” *Ways of Knowing*, 2002, pp. 10-22.

Barton, David. *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*. Blackwell, 1994.

Barton, David and Mary Hamilton. *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community. Routledge, 1998.*

---. “Literacy Practices.” *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context,* edited by David Barton, Mary Hamilton & R. Ivanic, Routledge, 2000, pp. 7–15.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination.* Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1981.

---. “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel).” *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays.* Translated by Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1986.

Barber, Karin. “African Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism.” *Research in African Literatures* vol. 26, no. 4, 1995, pp. 3-11.

---. *The Anthropology of Texts*, *Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Literature in Africa and Beyond.* Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Battestini, Simon. *African Writing and Text*. Legas, 2000.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Boes, Tobias. "Modernist Studies and the Bildungsroman: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends." *Literature Compass,* vol.3 no.2, 2006, pp. 230-243.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts.* Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.

Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Little, Brown and Company, 2013.

---. Interview by Sophy Kohler. *Aerodome Words &People,* 2013. http://aerodrome.co.za/outside-voice/ Accessed 13 June 2018.

Caminero-Santangelo, Byron. *African Fiction and Joseph Conrad*, State University of New York Press, 2005.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The World Factbook: Zimbabwe. www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html. Accessed 25 June 2017.

Chigwedere, Yuleth. "The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic Dislocation in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*," *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 2017, pp. 169-182.

Chikwava, Brian. *Harare North*. Vintage, 2010.

Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Howard University Press, 1983.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. "The Newly Black Americans: African Immigrants and Black America." *Transition: An International Review,* 113, 2014, pp. 52-71.

Clark, Msia. "Questions of Identity among African Immigrants in America." *The New African Diaspora*, edited by Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu, Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 31-58.

Clark, Vèvè A. "Developing Diaspora Literacy: Allusion in Maryse Conde's *Heremakhonon.*" *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, 1990, pp. 303-319.

Clifford, James. “Diasporas.” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1994, pp. 302-38.

Coetzee, Carli. “*We Need New Names*: Novel and Reading Publics as Conduits for Producing Contradictions.” *Multilingual Currents in Literature, Translation and Culture.* Edited by Rachael Gilmour, Tamar Steinitz. Routledge, 2018, pp. 132-149.

Collins, James and Richard K. Blot. *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Cole, Teju. *Every Day is for the Thief*. Abuja, Cassava Republic Press, 2007.

---. *Every Day is for the Thief*. Random House, 2015.

---. *Open City*. Random House, 2011.

Cooper, Brenda. “Language, Multiple Worlds, and Material Culture in the teaching of African Migrant Fiction.” *Teaching the African Novel*, edited by Gaurav Desai. The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. pp. 246-258.

Cope, Bill, and Mary Kalantzis, editors. *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures.* Routledge, 2000.

Cousins, Helen and Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo “‘Zimbabweaness Today’: An Interview with Tendai Huchu.” *African Literature Today* vol. 34, 2016, pp. 207.

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Ayebia Clarke, 1988/2004.

Dean, Jodi. *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Polity Press, 2010.

Dirlik, Arif. “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism.” *Critical Inquiry* vol. 20, no. 2, 1994, pp. 328-56.

Dutrion, Marianne “A propos d'Harare North. Une conversation avec Brian Chikwava,” *Malfini* Interview, 2013.

Echewa, T. Obinkaram. *Studying in America: A Guide for the African Student*. Amadi Press, 1980.

Edwards, Justin. "Postcolonial Travel Writing and Postcolonial Theory." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing*, edited by Robert Clarke. Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 19- 32.

Egbunike, Louisa Uchum. "One-Way Traffic: Renegotiating the 'Been-To' Narrative in the Nigerian Novel in the Era of Military Rule." *Matatu* vol. 45, no.1, 2014, pp. 217-232. *ProQuest Literature Online*. Web. 18 April 2019.

Ekotto, Frieda, and Kenneth W. Harrow, editors. *Rethinking African Cultural Production.* Indiana University Press, 2015.

Emenyonu, Ernest. *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Oxford University Press, 1978.

Fagunwa, D. O. *Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunters Saga.* Translated by Wole Soyinka. Random House, 1982.

Feldner, Maximillian. *Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context* Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Fennell, Jarad H. *The Non-Identical Anglophone Bildungsroman: From the Categorical to the De-Centering Literary Subject in the Black Atlantic*. 2016. University of South Florida, PhD dissertation.

Finnegan, Ruth. *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa.* James Currey, 2008.

Focault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed., Vintage Books, 1995.

Fongang, Delphine. "Introduction: Transitional Identity and Cultural Ambiguity in Diasporic African Literature." *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature*, edited by Delphine Fongang, Lexington Books, 2018, pp.1-10.

---. "Inescapable Predicament: Migration and Diasporic Identity in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*." *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature*, edited by Delphine Fongang, Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 27-38.

Ford, Na'Imah. "Black Americans and American Blacks: Transnational Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*." *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature*, edited by Delphine Fongang, Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 55-70.

Fraser, Robert. *Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script*. Routledge, 2008.

Gandhi, Leela. *Affective Communities: Anti-Colonial Thought*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Gappah, Pettina. *An Elegy for Easterly*. Faber and Faber, 2009.

Gee, James. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses.* 4th ed., Routledge, 2012.

Gehrmann, Susanne. "Cosmopolitanism with African Roots. Afropolitanism's Ambivalent Mobilities." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol.28, no.1, 2016, pp. 61-72.

George, Olakunle. "Achebe's *Arrow of God*. *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2005, pp. 344-62.

---. "The Oral-literate Interface." *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel,* edited by F. Abiola Irele. Cambridge University Press, 2009. 15-30.

Gikandi, Simon. *Reading the African Novel*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987.

---. "Theory, Literature and Moral Considerations." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 32, no. 4, 2001, pp. 1-18.

---. "African Literature and the Colonial Factor." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature,* edited by F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 379-397.

---. "On Afropolitanism." In *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore,* edited by J. Wawrzinek and J. Makokha, Rodopi, 2011, pp. 9–11.

Goyal, Yogita. "Africa and the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2014, pp. v-xxv.

Griswold, Wendy. *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria.* Princeton University Press, 2000.

Gross, Terry. 'Americanah' Author Explains 'Learning' to be Black in the U.S. *Fresh Air*. 27 June 2013. www.npr.org/2013/06/27/195598496/americanah-author-explains-learning-to-be-black-in-theus. Accessed 15 Jan. 2019.

Guarracino, Serena. "Writing 'so raw and true': Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Between,* vol. 4 no. 8, 2014, pp. 1-27. Directory of Open Access Journals. doi:10.13125/2039-6597/ 1320. Accessed 18 Feb. 2019.

Gunner, Liz. "Africa and Orality", *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature,* edited by F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 1-18.

Habila, Helon. "Out of the Shadows." *The Guardian*, March 16, 2007. Accessed 7 September 2017.

---. "We Need New Names by NoViolet Bulawayo Review." *The Guardian,* June 20, 2013.

Hallemeier, Katherine. "Literary Cosmopolitanisms in Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* and *Open City.*" *A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2/3, 2013, pp. 239–250.

Harris, Ashleigh. "Awkward Form and Writing the African Present," *The Salon* 7: 3–8.

Heath, Shirley Brice *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms.* Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Huchu, Tendai. *The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician: A Novel.* Parthian Books, 2014/2015.

Innes, C. L. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Irele, F. Abiola. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora.* Oxford University Press, 2002.

---. "In Praise of Alienation." *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987,* edited by V.Y. Mudimbe. University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 201-224.

---. "Introduction: Perspectives on the African Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel,* edited by F. Abiola Irele. Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 1-14.

Isaacs, Camille. "Mediating Women's Globalized Existence through Social Media in the Work of Adichie and Bulawayo." *Safundi*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2016, pp. 174-188.

Iweala, Uzodinma. "Difficult Terrain." Review of *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo. *New York Times*, June 7, 2013.

Jeyifo, Biodun. "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory." *Research in African Literatures* vol. 21, no. 1, 1990, pp. 33-48.

Johnson, David F. "The Politics of Literacy and Schooling in Zimbabwe" *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 48, 1990, pp. 99-106.

Julien, Eileen. *African Novels and the Question of Orality.* Indiana University Press, 1992.

---. "The Extroverted African Novel." *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture,* edited by Franco Moretti, vol. 1, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 667-700.

Kortenaar, Neil ten. *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy: Reading and Writing in African and Caribbean Fiction.* Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. Crown Pub., 1991.

Král, Françoise. *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Kress, Gunther. *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy.* Routledge, 1997.

---. *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice.* Oxford University Press, 1989.

Krishnan, Madhu. *Contemporary African Literature in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Lacroix, Chantal. *Immigrants, Literature and National Integration*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Lazarus, Neil. "Great Expectations and after: The Politics of Postcolonialism in African Fiction." *Social Text*, vol. 13/14, 1986, pp. 49-63.

Levine, Caroline. "'The Strange Familiar': Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, Winter 2015, pp. 587-605.

Li, Stephanie. *Pan-African American Literature: Signifyin(g) Immigrants in the Twenty-First Century*. Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Macaulay, Thomas. "Minute on Indian Education." *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 374-375.

Marechera, Dambudzo. *House of Hunger*. Heinemann, 1978.

Massey, Alyson. *Revealing Your Delusions: Perspectives on American Values in Contemporary African Fiction.* 2016. Georgetown University, M.A. in Liberal Studies Thesis.

Mbembe, Achille "Afropolitanism." *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, edited by S. Njami and L. Durán, Johannesburg Art Gallery, pp. 26-20.

Mbiba, Beacon. "Zimbabwe's Global Citizens in 'Harare North': Some Preliminary Observations." *Skinning the Skunk – Facing Zimbabwean Futures*, edited by Mai Palmberg and Ranka Primorac, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2005, pp. 26-38.

McCoy, Shane A. “The ‘Outsider Within’: Counter-narratives of the ‘New’ African Diaspora in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013).” *Journal of the African Literature Association*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2017, pp. 279-294.

McGonegal, Julie. “Postcolonial Metacritique: Jameson, Allegory and the Always-Already-Read Third World Text.” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* vol. 7, no. 2, 2005, pp. 251-65.

McGregor, JoAnn. “Introduction: The Making of Zimbabwe’s New Diaspora.” *Zimbabwe’s New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*, edited by JoAnn McGregor and Ranka Primorac, Berghahn Books, 2010, pp. 1-33.

Moji, Polo Belina. “New Names, Translational Subjectivities: (Dis)location and (Re)naming in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2015, pp. 181-190.

Morrison, Toni, editor. James Baldwin’s *Collected Essays*. Library of America, 1998.

---. *What Moves in the Margin*: Selected Nonfiction. Edited and with Introduction by Carolyn C. Denard. University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

---. *The Source of Self-Regard*: Selected Essay, Speeches, and Meditations. Knopf, 2019

Mudimbe, Valentin Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge.* Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and James Currey, 1988.

Muchemwa, Kizito. “Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities and Fracturing Economies in Zimbabwean Literature.” *Social Dynamics* vol. 37, no. 3, 2011, pp. 394-408.

Muponde, Robert and Ranka Primorac, editors. *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*. Weaver, 2005.

Nasta, Susheila. Introduction. *The Lonely Londoners*, by Sam Selvon, Penguin Books, 2006, pp. v-xvii.

Needham, Anuradha Dingwaney. An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo. *The Massachusetts Review*, Spring 1995, pp. 122-33

Newell, Stephanie. *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Ndlovu, Isaac. "Ambivalence of Representation: African Crises, Migration and Citizenship in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names.*" *African Identities*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2016, pp.132-146.

---. "Language and Audience in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009)" *English Academy Review*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2016, pp. 29-42.

Nyamfukudza, Stanley. "To Skin a Skunk: Some Observations on Zimbabwe's Intellectual Development." *Skinning the Skunk – Facing Zimbabwean Futures*, edited by Mai Palmberg and Ranka Primorac, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2005, pp. 16-25.

Obiechina, Emmanuel *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Odamteen, Vincent. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. University Press of Florida, 1994.

Oguine, Ike. *A Squatter's Tale.* Heinemann, 2000.

Ojaide, Tanure. "Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature." *World Literature Today,* vol. 82, no. 2, 2008, pp. 43-46.

Okonkwo, Christopher. "'Coming to America': Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale* & the Nigerian/African Immigrant's Narrative." *African Literature Today,* vol. 27, 2010, pp. 130–44.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family*. W. W. Norton, 1982.

Patel, Shailja. *Migritude*. Kaya Press, 2008.

Perfect, Michael. *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism: Diversity in the Millennial London Novel.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

Quayson, Ato. "Africa and it Diasporas." *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Graham Huggan, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 628-647.

---. "From Nation-and-Narration to the Diasporic Cultural Economy and Scientific Utopias: Notes Toward a Literary History of African Writing." African Literature Conference, 25 May 2018, Marriott Wardman Park, Washington, D.C. Keynote Address.

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

---. "Postcolonialism and Postmodernism." *The Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz & Sangeeta Ray, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 87-111.

Ranger, Terence. “Rule by Historiography: The Struggle over the Past in Contemporary Zimbabwe.” *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture,* edited by Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac, Weaver, 2005, pp. 217–43.

---. “The Uses and Abuses of History in Zimbabwe.” *Skinning the Skunk – Facing Zimbabwean Futures*, edited by Mai Palmberg and Ranka Primorac, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2005, pp. 7-15.

Richardson, Brian. *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction. Ohio State University Press*, 2006.

Sachikonye, Lloyd. “Strains and Stresses in the Zimbabwean Education System: An Interview with Fay Chung, Minister of Education and Culture.” *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 48, 1990, pp. 76-81.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1993.

Salih, Tayeb. *Season of Migration to the North.* Translated by Denys Johnson-Davis, Heinemann, 1966.

Selasi, T. “Bye-Bye Babar.” *The LIP Magazine*, March 3. http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76. Accessed 11 June 2019

Schulze-Engler, Frank. “Transcultural Modernities and Anglophone African Literature.” *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, edited by Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff & Daniela Merolla, Rodopi B. V., 2009, pp. 87-102.

Slaughter, Joseph. *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law.* Fordham University Press, 2007.

Sontag, Susan. "Photography Within the Humanities." *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, Routledge, 2003, pp. 59-66.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Harvard University Press, 2012.

Sterling, Cheryl. "Can You Really See through a Squint? Theoretical Underpinnings in Our Sister Killjoy." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* vol. 45, no.1, 2010, pp.131-150.

Street, Brian. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1984.

---. *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education*. Longman, 1995.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). List of UN Member States by Adult Literacy Rate 2015. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_literacy_rate . Accessed 25 June 2017.

Tuchscherer, Konrad. "Recording, Communicating and Making Visible: A History of Writing and Systems of Graphic Symbolism in Africa." *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*, edited by Christine Mullen Kreamer, Mary Nooter Roberts, Elizabeth Harney, and Allyson Purpura. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 2007, pp. 37-53.

Tutuola, Amos. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm Wine Tapster in the Dead's Town*. Faber and Faber, 1952.

Ukpokodu, Omiunota N. "African Immigrants, the 'New Model Minority': Examining the Reality in U.S. k-12 Schools." *The Urban Review*, vol., 50, no., 1 2018, pp. 69–96.

Veit-Wild, Flora. *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature*. Hans Zell Publishers, 1992.

Vickerman, Milton. "Recent Immigration and Race: Continuity and Change." *Du Bois Review,* vol.4, no.1, 2007, pp.141–165.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann, 1986.

Wa Thiong'o, Mukoma. *The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity, and Ownership*. University of Michigan Press, 2018.

Wilentz, Gay. "The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*." *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature,* vol. 15, no.1, 1991, pp. 159–73.

Williams, Bronwyn T. and Amy A. Zenger, editors. *New Media Literacies and Participatory Popular Culture Across Borders.* Routledge, 2012.

Willinsky, J. *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*. University of Minnesota Press. 1998.

Zabus, Chantal. *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone*

Novel. Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English. Rodopi*,* 1991.

Zeleza, Paul.T. "Diaspora Dialogues: Engagements between Africa and its Diasporas." *The New African Diaspora*, edited by Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu. Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 31-58.

---. "Pan-Africanism in the Age of Obama: Challenges and Prospects." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2011, pp. 34-44.