

GENDERED GEOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE

A Comparative Reading of the Novels of Mariama Bâ
and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Programme of English Studies,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Arts in the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, South Africa. None of the present work has been previously submitted for any degree or examination in any other University.

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January, 2014

As the candidate's supervisor I have approved this dissertation for submission.

Dr C. Sandwith

January, 2014

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with inscriptions of gender and space in the novels of two African women writers, Mariama Bâ and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, particularly Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) and *Scarlet Song* (1986) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). The exploration of representations of gendered identity is thus integrated with an awareness of space/place. By exploring the demarcation and enunciation of space within my chosen texts, I hope to provide new perspectives on the question of gendered identities and relations. The theorizing of gender identities and relations thus gains a new orientation from its application in relation to the theorizing of space and spatiality. As many theorists have argued, space is an important aspect to consider because it is not a neutral site: it becomes invested with meanings and encodes particular values and relations of power which can be contested and negotiated. This is particularly evident when looking at questions of gender identity, roles and relations. 'Geographies of gender' are established not only in the coding of spaces as 'masculine' and 'feminine' but also in the kinds of sociality which they encourage and the power-relations they encode. If space is central to masculinist power, it is also important in the development of feminine resistance. Drawing on a range of theorists, I endeavour to pursue a gendered analysis of space/place through a reading of particular locations (the home, the street, the village) as expressive of power relations, gender identities and roles. I also consider how space/place is differently experienced and inhabited by men and women as well as how dominant constructions of space/place, which are also invested with meaning and power relations, come to be negotiated or contested.

In all four novels explored in this thesis, the home is revealed as a dominant site of inscription, a space which tends to reflect and reinforce dominant social identities and roles. In this sense, the home is often figured as a site of patriarchal and gendered oppression, a central domain in which normative definitions of gender are established and reinforced. What is also clear, however, is that way in which the home also becomes a site for the contestation and renegotiation of gender identities and roles, a place where conventional identities can be challenged and new identities explored. In this sense, the home is revealed as a major site of contestation in which the tensions between different experiences and interpretations of space based on contrasting cultural definitions of power relations, gender identities and roles are played out. If the ordering of space is an important means of securing dominant gender relations, it also provides the means for negotiation and resistance. This is reflected not only the alternative

examples of home explored in these novels but also in liberating spaces such as the school, the beach and the university. In the destabilisation and destruction of the home, the links between self and place becomes apparent as new identities are formed and conventional roles are redefined.

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Introduction

It is the intention of this research to consider representations of gendered identity in the works of two African women writers whilst integrating an awareness of space/place. By giving attention to the inscriptions of space, I hope to shed new light on the textual representations of gender. The notion of space/place is explored not only as it is represented within my chosen texts but also an informing context to be investigated. The selected texts which will be examined are Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) and *Scarlet Song* (1986), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Both authors have been identified as influential writers who address and represent the concerns of women and other gender-related issues in the African context. It is my intention to take the discussion in a different direction by offering an exploration of gendered identity through an analysis of spatial relations and textual 'mapping'. By giving attention to the demarcation and enunciation of space and place in these texts, I hope to open up fresh perspectives on questions of gendered identities and relations. The focus on literary cartographies and their significance for the construction of gender is a promising line of inquiry which ought to be given more attention.

A study of this kind is important because of the emphasis it places on the inscription of space. Whilst conducting my initial readings of the selected novels of both Bâ and Adichie, I was struck by the ways in which space/place seems to permeate the novels, a consideration which is largely omitted in the critical literature. I decided to explore the significance of space/place in relation to the representation of gender in the work of these two influential figures in the canon of African women's writing. It is exciting to explore how these two authors integrate these concepts into their novels and to consider their diverse effects. My interest in the novels of both Mariama Bâ and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie invites a comparative analysis. Here I turn to the work of Susan Andrade and the insights she provides into the value of a comparative or inter-textual reading of the texts: "all texts and especially, all works of literature, are involved in conversations with other texts – ... a productive analysis examines points of conversation as well as potential or visible differences" (Andrade, 2011: 94).

What is immediately striking about this proposed research (especially given my interest in gender and space) are the enormous differences in the social and historical ‘spaces of writing’ in which my chosen authors are located – for Mariama Bâ, Senegal in the early to mid 1980s and for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, twenty-first century Nigeria. Questions around the gendered significance of space will thus be considered within, and in relation to, the different historical and literary contexts within which these works were produced and gained significance.

My interest in the analytical possibilities which arise from an exploration of gender and space was prompted by Rita Barnard’s study of the post-apartheid novel in *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (2007). In this study, Barnard imbues her reading of a number of canonical South African texts with an awareness of the ‘politics of place’. Of particular interest for this study is her sense of the shaping force of geographical/spatial contexts, the relationship between place and subjectivity and the ways in which certain relations of domination and subordination are inscribed in space/place. Taking my cue from Barnard’s concern with the politics of place, I give attention to cartographic practice or ‘verbal mapping’ in the novels of Bâ and Adichie. Of primary concern is to explore the relationship between the various inscriptions (and reconfigurations) of space/place relationship and the texts’ negotiation of gender identities and relations. A gendered reading of spatial relations leads to a number of inter-related concerns: first, a reading of particular spaces (such as the suburban home, the village, the street) as expressive of power relations, gender identities and roles; second, the ways in which space/place is variously experienced and inhabited by men and women; third, the gendered significance of vantage point (whether as voyeur or walker) and finally the ways in which normative constructions of space/place come to be negotiated or contested.

I will be drawing on a variety of theories in my consideration of the selected works of Bâ and Adichie, working towards an understanding of space/place and the accompanying significance which theorists have attached to questions of gender. As theorists such as Michel Foucault and Gaston Bachelard have argued, space is an important aspect to consider because it is not a neutral site: it becomes invested with meanings and encodes particular values and relations of power which can be contested and negotiated. In the light of this theorising of space as neither homogenous nor empty but inherently value-laden (Bachelard, 1969), the connections between gender and space seem particularly fruitful points of exploration since space is a crucial site for the entrenchment and

negotiation of particular gender relations. ‘Space’ and ‘Place’ are concepts which are closely related. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall define space as “a multidimensional entity with social and cultural as well as territorial dimensions” (Darian-Smith et al, 1996: 2). They distinguish between space and place by suggesting that: “[i]t is through the cultural processes of imagining, seeing, historicizing and remembering that space is transformed into place, and geographical territory into a culturally defined landscape” (Darian-Smith et al, 1996: 3). Erica Carter et al argue that space becomes place: “[b]y being named; as the flows of power and negotiation of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed” (Carter, Donald and Squires in Darian-Smith et al, 1996: 3). There seem then to be important distinctions between the notions of space and place and what is meant in reference to these terms. Space seems indicative of something larger. It is an abstract term which is usually associated with mapping and demarcation. On the other hand, place seems indicative of something which has been moulded, a concept which suggests the ways in which space is both inhabited and invested with meaning. In this sense, it has a more human scale. What is also important in relation to the present research is the way in which the notion of ‘place’ is also linked to status.

This particular analytical focus – combining spatial and gender representation in an analysis of African women’s writing – represents a significant departure from much of the existing literature on the subject and therefore is an important space to be explored. In the field of Bâ criticism, critics have tended to focus on questions of gender, power, class and identity as well as the role of the African woman writer in postcolonial Africa. Critics draw attention to the novels’ exploration of women’s agency (d’Almeida, 1986), questions of power, inequality and gender in traditional Senegalese society (Makward, 1986), as well as the contradictions and tensions which arise in the novels as a result of gender politics (Sarvan, 1988). Yet other critics have incorporated a concern with formal elements such as the use of the epistolary genre (McElaney-Johnson, 1999). Some feminist critics, such as Florence Stratton, have even questioned whether Bâ’s novels can be considered examples of ‘feminist’ writing at all (Stratton, 1994). Those critics working within the paradigm of African feminism (or ‘womanism’) tend to focus on Ba’s concern with fiction-writing as a form of activism and narration as a means of configuring knowledge (Azodo, 2003), as well as addressing issues such as exile and immigration in relation to women and self-(re) definition (Azodo,

2003). Still others are concerned with questions of identity (Ajayi-Soyinka, 2003) and the interconnectedness of gender, religion and class (Murtuza, 2003). The only critic who has included an awareness of space in her exploration of Ba's novels is Eleanor Shevlin (1997). Shevlin's reading of Bâ's novel *Scarlet Song* explores the novel's cartographic concerns and the demarcation of postcolonial space in the novel. Her broader concerns with "verbal mapping" and the fictional enactments of space have also been influential.

Questions concerning the relationship between space and gender and the significance of gendered cartographies are also largely absent from the criticism of Adichie's novels, which at this stage is still an emerging field and nowhere as extensive as that of Bâ. In responding to Adichie's novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of A Yellow Sun*, critics address questions such as the novels' portrayal of the postcolony (Oates, 2001; Marx, 2008; Nwakanma, 2008), the links between the politics of the family and the politics of the nation (Andrade, 2011) and, from a feminist perspective, the novels' negotiation of gender and patriarchal oppression (Bryce, 2008, Stobie, 2010 & 2012). As Cheryl Stobie states: "[f]rom a viewpoint that is at once traditional, religious, African and reformist, Adichie reveals deep skepticism towards absolutism, patriarchy, infallibility and a hierarchical relationship between the deity and believers, and between men and women. Instead she offers a hybrid, creative and freshly dialogic view of religion, the body, and Nigerian society seen within a global framework" (Stobie, 2010: 433). However, Adichie's gender politics – drawing largely upon a womanist approach – have been criticized by others for the way in which concerns with gender and gender politics are subordinated in favour of a national project (Cooper, 2008). Other critics have focused on Adichie's position as a 'third generation' Nigerian women writer (Hawley, 2008) and the novels' attention to shifting socio-cultural identities through the deployment of the *Bildungsroman* (Hron, 2008 and Bryce, 2008). Where Novak (2008) reads Adichie's novels through the prism of trauma theory, other critics have drawn attention to the question of women's silence, explored both as a form of oppression and as mode of resistance. Thus far, the only critic who has been sensitive to the inscription of space in Adichie's novels is Brenda Cooper (2008), who notes the spatial translations which accompany a sustained principle of narrative fragmentation in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Cooper's attention to spatial aspects or domains in this novel offers a fruitful point of departure for my own analysis. In the light of these critical preoccupations (and omissions), a reading of gender relations and identities which also combines close attention to the demarcations of space is a potentially useful addition to the

available literature. A comparative analysis of the novels of Bâ and Adichie will also fill a gap in the existing research.

In her exploration of post-apartheid novels in the South African context, Barnard states the need for a consideration of the political and cultural significance of place, especially within a country which supports a multitude of cultures as well as cultural differences. Barnard's work provides an interesting starting point for my project, given that she examines her chosen works through the framework of theories which examine the interconnections between spatial theory and power systems (Barnard, 2007: 3). Barnard also examines place/space not only as it is represented but also as an informing context, an aspect which I shall be considering in relation to my chosen literature. As previously stated, it is my intention to explore the differences in the social and historical 'spaces of writing' of my chosen authors. As Barnard puts it, this is to concern oneself with "the situatedness of textual production and consumption – the way in which writing for or from a particular location makes a difference in the form and significance of the text" (Barnard, 2007: 3). Questions around the gendered significance of space will thus be considered within, and in relation to, the different historical and literary contexts within which these works were produced and gained significance. Barnard also notes literature's capacity to "rewrite and reinvent new identities, new stories, and new maps" (Barnard, 2007: 4).

In her exploration of Nadine Gordimer's novel *July's People*, Barnard describes how the individual's mapping of his/her world, previously an ordinary and unconscious act, has become an increasingly difficult and simultaneously conscious task. The relationship between self and place, particularly in contexts of social crisis and severe displacement, is an important one for this study, especially in those novels such as Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* which deal with social and personal dislocation. That the space/places which we occupy are in themselves ideologically productive is an important theme in Barnard's work: thus she explores places, such as the home, places which both shape and represent dominant social relations. This is an important insight for my own research, given that the principle site of inscription in the novels I examine is the domestic space. According to Barnard, the home is a reflection of the spatial definitions of everyday life (2007: 59). In Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, the main character Ramatoulaye is required by the dictums of a patriarchal society and her religion to stay within the house during the prescribed mourning period for a widow. Here we can observe in her appraisal of her situation that she regards this space as one which she has

nurtured as the woman of the household. Thus houses can operate as “the means by which individuals are ‘interpellated’ as subjects: the means by which individuals are trained so that they will ‘know their places’ in the social hierarchy, and so that, from these ‘places,’ they will in turn help to reproduce its structures” (Barnard, 2007: 49). In *Half of a Yellow Sun* the continually changing domestic space increasingly reflects the socio-political status of the country. Barnard also examines, in her chosen texts, the instability of places and how spatial dislodgement can lead to the breakdown of identity. This is also the case in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The contestation of spaces and the ability of discourse to both create space/place and vice versa, is another important concern (Barnard, 2007: 120).

Barnard identifies space as being multi-dimensional, and so divides space into four distinct, but interconnected categories: the physical, the psychosocial, the political-economic, and the ideological-intellectual (Barnard, 2007: 121). The physical space can be examined in relation to both architecture as well as in broader geographical terms. The physical space inhabited by the individual, defines his/her location in the world; this occurs on both the macro and the micro level. The macro level is considered through broader spatial entities such as the nation or continent, an issue dealt with explicitly in *Half of a Yellow Sun* where displacement occurs on both a national and personal level. The micro level can refer to larger structures such as buildings and rooms or, on a smaller scale, a particular arrangement of furniture (Barnard, 2007: 121-122). As Barnard makes clear, what is important to note about physical space is how it establishes points of access, and thus the power to either admit or exclude others (Barnard, 2007: 122). In addition, physical space affects all other aspects of spatiality (Barnard, 2007: 122). For Barnard, psychosocial space is ‘inhabited’ space. This term specifically refers to the sites of interpellation which can function in both liberating and limiting ways and which “determine an individual’s ‘place’ in the social and hierarchical sense of the word and thereby his or her expectations and aspirations” (Barnard, 2007: 122). Psychosocial space is thus influential in shaping identity. Political-economic space refers to state power, invoking both the space of the nation and neighbouring territories as well as the global economic systems within which state power is effected (Barnard, 2007: 122). Political-economic space provides a level of analysis in which “one may consider the effects of ... circumscribing individuals’ mobility, places of work and domicile, freedom of domicile ... and so forth. But political-economic space ... also provides a rubric under which one may consider the struggle of resistance movements to create,

contest, and appropriate” (Barnard, 2007; 122). For Barnard, ideological-intellectual space refers to “the symbolic, cultural, linguistic, and discursive framework within which social interaction is conducted” (Barnard, 2007: 122-123). It can be defined as the individual’s imagined geography and their conceptual horizons, including the individual’s awareness of their environment and of the position that he/she occupies in the power structure of their society (Barnard, 2007: 122-123). Barnard’s work is also important for the attention it gives to the capacity of language to “define space and to create an ideological world distinct from the immediate physical environment” (Barnard, 2007: 135).

Barnard’s exploration of the politics of space in post-apartheid literature invokes a much larger body of theoretical reflection concerned with space/place and the power encoded in spatial sites. Foucault’s concept of ‘disciplinary space’ and spatial ordering as a means of securing dominant power-relations is especially important. In an interview with Paul Rabinow (During, 1993), Foucault addresses certain aspects of his approach to space, showing his concern for space, life-practices, values and discourses (1993: 161), particularly the argument that space is ordered in such a way as to secure dominant power relations. This notion that spatial sites are encoded with specific values which govern social relations is especially important for my reading of Bâ and Adichie. Of equal importance is Foucault’s concern with ‘lived’ or heterogeneous space, space which is “laden with qualities” and defined by an ensemble of relations (Foucault, 1994). Within heterogeneous space there is the notion of emplacement which is defined by a set of relations (Foucault, 1994: 178).

In my analysis I will also keep in mind Foucault’s argument that no space/place is inherently liberating or oppressive, as there are always possibilities of either (1993: 162). I also extend Foucault’s argument by pointing to the ways in which the understanding and use of space is always culturally specific. Considering the social situations depicted in some of the novels under discussion, what emerges is the centrality of communal space. For my purpose, what is important to understand are the specific social relations and power dynamics which are encoded in these kinds of spaces and their implications for gender.

Considering that the domestic sphere is the principal site of inscription in the various novels, it is important to note Foucault’s thoughts on architecture. Here, Foucault observes that architecture is an element of support which can also be an instrument of allocating space – it allows a certain

number of people access and circulation as well as encoding the relations within the space (1993: 169). Thus, architecture is an element of space in which social relations occur, and in which certain site-specific effects can be observed. In another essay, “Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology”, Foucault makes a distinction between place and space by referring to space as roughly formed by the interconnections of places (1994: 176). What is also useful is the distinction Foucault makes between the private and public space, between the family and social space, between cultural and utilitarian space and between the spaces of leisure and the spaces of work (1994: 177).

Another of Foucault’s insights which will be an important departure point in relation to this research is ‘heterotopic’ space. The term heterotopic space denotes the kind of space which exists in tension with dominant social orderings. It also refers to a space of fluidity and change, a space where conventional identities are unfixed and re-imagined. As Marietta Rossetto states, “[a] heterotopia is what we as individuals interpret it to be: it can be a space for reconstituting the self, rewriting the scripts of identity and placing the self within a context” (2006: 446). Further, heterotopias are liberating spaces “with the potential to provide a place for renewal and enhancement of self-esteem” (Rossetto, 2006: 446).

My work is also informed by Michel de Certeau’s meditations in “Walking in the City” (1993) in which he presents a theory of, or ideal for, the city and incorporates a sense of how space is negotiated and appropriated by ordinary people in the everyday practice of their lived space. This theory is of particular use in that it allows for an exploration of the ways in which space is configured in a variety of spatial practices, whether it is ordinary practitioners walking the city from within, or viewing it from above as a voyeur. What de Certeau offers is “a theory of everyday practices, of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city” (1993: 157). As he puts it, “spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life” (de Certeau, 1993: 157).

De Certeau’s work in “Walking in the City” has been influential in recent cultural studies both as a tool for semiotic analysis and as a creative essay, and it is through this double mode that we can observe the value of the everyday within the larger power structures which govern our lives (1993: 151). In this essay, de Certeau makes a distinction between the observer and flâneur, the walker and the voyeur. Whilst the flâneur is a ‘leisured observer’, the effect of the voyeur figure in the literary text is to distance the reader from the imagined context. The ordinary practitioners of the

city are the walkers, those situated below the line of visibility; according to de Certeau, their situation renders them unable to read the text they walk and they make use of space they cannot see – “they write (walk) without being able to read” (1993: 153). Further, the walker “individuates and makes ambiguous” the ‘legible order’ given by planners (de Certeau, 1993: 151). This is especially evident in the novel *Scarlet Song* in which the main character, Ousmane, maps the district he is walking in, thus individuating his experience of the city.

My research also takes its cue from the work of feminist geographers Linda McDowell (1999) and Doreen Massey (1994) and their concerns with the gendered implications of space. Following these writers, I consider the ways in which space and place are conceptualized and represented in the novels under discussion and explore, in particular, the social relations and gender dynamics which are encoded in particular places. In another important collection, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose continue the focus on the “spatial politics of difference” (1994) by bringing together a diverse array of writing by feminists, all of whom see “space as central both to masculinist power and to feminine resistance” (1). Geographies of gender are established not only in the coding of spaces as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ but also in the kinds of sociality which they encourage and the power-relations they encode.

Linda McDowell (1999) draws attention to the way in which socially-constructed concepts of femininity and masculinity vary over time and space; she also makes an important point about the gendered experience of place, specifically the way in which women’s and men’s experience of place may differ. As a feminist geographer, McDowell examines how the changes in recent decades of migration and travel, concepts of borders and boundaries, as well as place and non-place have affected the links between people and the places they occupy, processes which both transform and disrupt these links. This displacement results in being “condemned to the limbo of not belonging” (McDowell, 1999: 2). Importantly, women may also feel displaced as a result of changing economic, social and cultural circumstances. These various movements upon which McDowell places emphasis are fruitful departure points for an exploration of place. Whether the movement is physical or not, it more often than not is intertwined with a renegotiation of gender positions and relations. Thus, the premise put forth by McDowell, and which is a contributing concern to this research, is how material changes affect an understanding of the “links between place and identity” (1999: 2).

It is important to note the power relations behind the construction of the boundaries of place, these boundaries defining both social and spatial sites of inclusion and exclusion as well as locations or sites of experience. In McDowell's use of scale, she refers then to the "criteria of difference not so much between places as between different *kinds* of places" (Smith in McDowell, 1999: 4). However, scale can also be applied to the locality of a home or neighbourhood, which itself is bound by rules or power relations which keep others out. Place is "defined by the socio-spatial relations that intersect there and give a place its distinctive character" (McDowell, 1999: 4).

Feminist scholarship focuses on the construction and importance of sexual differentiation as both an organizing principle and an axis of social power. It also considers this differentiation to constitute a part of subjectivity "of an individual's sense of their self-identity as a sexed and gendered person" (McDowell, 1999: 8). There is a need to investigate the relationships between gender divisions as they relate to spatial divisions to uncover their mutual constitution and examine their apparent naturalness. In this regard, we need to consider how and to what extent men and women's experiences of place differ, and how this in itself is a social constitution of both gender and place. Constructing a geography or geographies of gender "calls attention to the significance of place, location and cultural diversity, connecting issues of sexuality to those of nationality, imperialism, migration, diaspora and genocide" (Pollock, cited in McDowell, 1999: 12). The spatial division of public and private also plays a pivotal role in social constructions of gender divisions. The idea that women have a particular place is established in a range of institutions, such as family in private space.

Doreen Massey (1994), whose views on women and space have also been influential, is concerned with the profound ways in which geography and gender are mutually implicated in the construction of the other, specifically how space and place, which are themselves gendered, influence the cultural formation of gender and gender relations. In my study, the cultural understandings of the term 'woman' and the cultural practice of place will also be of central concern, specifically looking at which values are encoded in specific sites, and how these are resisted or negotiated.

There are many levels at which space, place and gender are interrelated: their construction as culturally specific ideas as well as "the overlapping and interplaying of the sets of characteristics and connotations with which each is associated" (Massey, 1994: 2). "Space" can be used to refer to

structuralist systems or the space of identity; place can refer to “one’s place in the world” (Massey, 1994: 1). Central to this paper is the idea that space must be conceptually integrated with time, a concept which arose to reflect how space cannot be viewed as an independent dimension, but “as constructed out of social relations” (Massey, 1994: 2). In other words, social phenomena in space are not the issue, but how social phenomena and space are constituted out of social relations which are dynamic: “spatial is social relations ‘stretched out’” (Massey, 1994: 2). In this conceptualization of the spatial, we can assume that there are simultaneously a multiplicity of spaces which are “cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism” (Massey, 1994: 3). This is because space in terms of social relations is experienced and interpreted differently by people in various positions in it (Massey, 1994: 3). Thus, the spatial organization of a society is important to the production of the social and is not merely a result of it (Massey, 1994: 4). Massey suggests that if we instead consider space within the context of space-time and as formed out of social relations then we can view a place as an articulation of the relations at a particular moment (1994: 5). Further, Massey states that “the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple”, allowing for negotiation (1994: 5). Thus Massey offers a consideration of place as “constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that ‘beyond’” (1994: 5). Attempts to establish boundaries and secure an identity of place can be considered as “*attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time*” (Massey, 1994: 5, italics in original). However, these sites are continuously contested spaces.

Massey is concerned with the ways in which the conceptualization of space and place are also tied up with gender (1994: 6). She argues that gender relations are a variable construction of different spaces/places and that it is these geographical variations which emphasize how gender relations are socially constructed (1994: 178). As Massey states, identity can be constructed as an articulation of social relations in which a person or group is involved, or extended to the concept of place. Building on this, Massey suggests that women’s mobility, which she considers in terms both of identity and space, is a contested space of subordination in some cultural contexts (1994: 179). Massey reflects on the control of spatiality and identity, and refers to the culturally specific distinction between public and private which has attempted to confine women to a domestic space and thus assert a social control on identity: “[t]he construction of ‘home’ as a woman’s place has, moreover, carried through into those views of place itself as a source of stability, reliability and

authenticity. Such views of place, which reverberate with nostalgia for something lost, are coded female” (1994: 180). Thus, spatial control can be a crucial element in constituting gender in varying forms (Massey, 1994: 180).

As Graham Huggan (1990) and others have argued, the representation and reconfiguration of space are also a central concern in postcolonial literature. It is important to note that, in the work of both Bâ and Adichie, the spaces which they inscribe have the interesting historical precedent of being colonial spaces. Here, it is worth noting Huggan’s argument that postcolonial writers’ use of the map (unlike that of colonial authority) is “not as a means of spatial containment or systematic organization, but as a medium of spatial perception which allows for the reformulation of links both within and between cultures” (1990: 124-125). The use of cartography can thus be regarded as part of the wider attempt to “write back”, given the prominence of colonial cartographic activities as a means to assert control. Taking up the question of postcolonial cartography in relation to the literature, it is important to consider how spaces/places are imagined and from what perspectives, as well as the inscriptions and demarcations of space which permeate the novels. Thus, the conceptual maps provided in the novels can be perceived as providing a framework for a critique of colonial discourse, in order to inscribe a new space.

Feminist literary theory is concerned with the impact of gender on both the writing and the reading of the text. There are a variety of competing strands within feminist literary theory; most feminist critics, however, take as their starting point a critique of the dominant patriarchal culture. Many early feminist critics in the Western tradition – such as Elaine Showalter (1977, 1979, 1981), for example – place emphasis on the place of women writers in the literary canon, whilst simultaneously searching for a feminist theory or approach to the text against male-dominated models. The feminist approach is thus often both political and revisionist, encompassing debates which claim that gender determines everything, to just the opposite: that all gender differences are imposed by society, and that gender determines nothing. At least one of the advantages of a feminist approach is that it counters the fact that women have previously been underrepresented in the traditional literary canon; a feminist approach to literature also provides the means to redress this problem. However, there are also various disadvantages which can accompany this approach: literary criticism may become overtly political and subsequently overlook the merits of work it considers “patriarchal”; the argument for a distinctly ‘feminine’ style of writing can relegate women’s literature

to a different status and, as a result, prevent its inclusion in the literary canon. My engagement with the various theoretical approaches outlined above will enable me to focus and sharpen an existing body of feminist theorising in relation to the two authors in question. In this way, the theorising of gender identities and relations gains a new orientation from its application in relation to the theorising of space and spatiality. In considering the complex interactions between gender and space, I also hope to open up new possibilities and frameworks for the reading of the novels of two influential women writers.

Chapter 1: *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Bâ is a well-known and critically-acclaimed writer who addresses and represents the concerns of women and other gender-related issues in the African context. My analysis of Mariama Bâ's first novel, *So Long a Letter*, departs from established Bâ criticism by investigating and critically examining the textual inscription of gendered identity through an analysis of spatial relations and textual 'mapping'. By tracing the connections between the representations of gendered identity and the textual demarcation and enunciation of place/space, it is hoped that fresh perspectives on questions of gendered identities and relations will be brought to the fore. In this regard, I pay attention not only to the novel's inscription of feminine roles but also the textual representation of men and masculinity. The central protagonist and narrator, Ramatoulaye, emerges from a particular historical and personal conjuncture and spatial location, a position which permeates the narrative voice of the text. An analysis of the textual inscriptions of space and gender in the novel will take this perspective as its starting point.

Mariama Bâ was born in 1929 in Dakar, Senegal. Raised a Muslim in a traditional household, she soon became aware of the inequalities between the sexes arising from tradition, an awareness which would later become paramount in her writings. Bâ was a promising law student in school and would later excel at a teaching college, becoming first a teacher and then an educational inspector. Bâ later married, and then divorced; she was left to care for her children alone: this story of betrayal and loss is a reoccurring theme in her writing. A modern contemporary woman, Ba was an avid supporter of education, as is evident by her career choice as both a teacher and educational inspector. She was also an advocate of women's rights, and actively spoke out against the disadvantaged position of women, and especially married women, in Senegalese and African society (Stratton, 1994; McElaney-Johnson, 1999; Azodo, 2003). Bâ wrote two novels shortly before her death in 1981; she also published academic essays, such as "The Political Function of African Written Literatures" ("La fonction politique des littératures Africaines écrites") (1981), an essay which countered what she perceived to be the failure of African liberation movements and struggles. According to Edris Makward, while Bâ never overtly questioned the fundamentals of the Islamic

faith, her position “stemmed deliberately and convincingly from a dynamic conception of society, a strong belief in social and political change and progress” (1986: 272).

As previously stated, amongst Bâ’s major concerns is the unequal relationship between men and women in traditional Senegalese society and the place of women in Africa more generally. Questions of gender, power, class, tradition and modernity are thus central to Bâ’s work. Many of these issues have been explored in the existing critical literature. For representative examples, see d’Almeida (1986), Makward (1986), Sarvan (1988), Stratton (1994), Azodo (2003), Ajayi-Soyinka (2003) and Murtuza (2003). The only critic who has explicitly taken up the question of space/place in her exploration of Bâ’s novels is Eleanor Shevlin (1997), whose concerns with “verbal mapping” and the fictional enactments of space have been influential.

According to Charles Sarvan, “[t]he cultural significance attached to the fact of a person being female changes not only from country to country, but, at any given time, *within* it” (1988: 453), a point which is a central concern for this research as it considers the different spaces and time frames of the chosen novels. Bâ herself reiterates this point in *So Long a Letter*: “Africa is diverse, divided. The same country can change its character and outlook several times over, from north to south or from east to west” (1981: 42). An investigation into Mariama Bâ’s novels thus first requires an understanding of the cultural and historical context of Senegal, specifically Dakar, the city which provides the main setting for the action of the novel. The spaces inscribed in the novel have the historical precedent of being part of a French colony, a position which was reversed in 1960 when Senegal gained its independence. As a postcolonial text, Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* conforms to one of the central concerns of this type of literature, that of the representation and reconfiguration of space (Huggan, 1990). In this way, it can be seen as an attempt to ‘write back’ to the metropolitan centre, specifically against those colonial cartographic activities which were historically employed as a means to assert control (Huggan, 1990: 124-125). A reading of the novel as a reconfiguration of space allows for a consideration of how spaces/places in the novel are imagined and from what perspectives, as well as how space is inscribed and demarcated in the novel. The first point to establish in this regard, however, is the primacy of the space/place of the home.

The particular conjuncture from which the narrative voice emerges is as a result of a culmination of events which have led to her current situation. As I have said, the novel is broadly set in Dakar, Senegal, approximately twenty years after the country’s independence from France. It thus

includes an awareness of “the challenges and issues that face contemporary Africa at a time of profound change in the political and social arenas following decolonization” (McElaney-Johnson, 1999: 110). The main character, Ramatoulaye, is a middle-class individual who partook in both the nationalist and feminist movements of the 1950s; she was a young student amidst “a climate of great social transition in postcolonial Africa” (McElaney-Johnson, 1999: 111). The outcome of these movements is evaluated from the contemporary viewpoint of Ramatoulaye, who narrates the various intertwined stories of her peers by reflecting on her own experience.

In Stratton’s view, the novel depicts the “undermining of the nationalists’ socialist ideals by bourgeois materialism, and the compromising of the feminist ideal of gender equality through adherence to imported western and indigenous Islamic patriarchal values and practices” (1994: 137). For Ramatoulaye, questions of gender equality reach a crisis point after her husband, Modou’s, death. However, it is Ramatoulaye’s choice not to leave Modou upon his second marriage which leaves her ironically abandoned, and eventually widowed, and it is during the allotted time of mourning prescribed by Islam that she undertakes her reflection. It is in fact the undertaking of this second marriage five years earlier, and not Modou’s death, which leads to Ramatoulaye’s crisis. Stratton states that Ramatoulaye “writes to herself in an attempt to locate the source of her disequilibrium” (1994: 138). The writing of a letter also marks the attempt to negotiate a new gendered identity for herself by exploring the various ideas and models available to her. These include the example of her close friend and confidant Aissatou, the choices given by religion and a patriarchal society, and the beliefs assimilated from a foreign culture through her early education at mission schools. In this way, *So Long a Letter* both employs and subverts the conventions of the epistolary style in order to explore the possibilities of new gender identities, women’s friendship and female solidarity. It is also the mode through which we glimpse the strong female character of Aissatou and the alternatives she presents to Ramatoulaye’s choices, as well as the possibilities which Aissatou embodies.

The space of the home in *So Long a Letter* provides an interesting and important entry point into an investigative analysis of space and gender. Both the act of writing and reflection occur within the home itself, which becomes an important indicator of the narrator’s confinement. Although the novel provides some information about the broader Dakar setting, the outside or public space is chiefly relayed through a series of ruminations by the central protagonist during her prescribed

seclusion. Thus it is the space of the home which provides the principal site for the novel's exploration of gender and patriarchy. For Ramatoulaye, the prescribed mourning period for a widow of Muslim faith, founded on seclusion, encourages reflection on the past and present. Ramatoulaye's relationship to the domestic space she inhabits undergoes a significant shift after her husband takes on another wife. It is this second marriage which causes Ramatoulaye's displacement as a result of changing economic, social and cultural circumstances. This displacement affects her sense of place, and by extension, her sense of the link between place and identity, resulting in her renegotiation of gender divisions. It is thus within this place of the home that we observe the tensions in the representations and experiences of the same places. Briefly, I shall argue that, prior to the crisis borne of Ramatoulaye's husband's second marriage, her sense of the space of the home is somewhat idealized. This is also the view of Florence Stratton, who argues that Ramatoulaye's present state of confinement is a mere extension of her life beforehand (1994: 145). For Ramatoulaye, the space had previously acted as "an image of female fulfillment"; a place which she had endowed with meaning in this place in which she was both mother and wife (Stratton, 1994: 142). In the present, however, her reflections begin to challenge her former assumption of idealized domestic life prior to the breakdown of the marriage.

Ramatoulaye's experience of domestic confinement during her period of mourning is an important index of the ambivalent or contradictory reading of space which I argue is an important characteristic of this novel. In this regard, the secluded space of mourning is experienced as both a place of exclusion and a place of privacy and self-reflection. In this way, it becomes a metaphor of Ramatoulaye's psychological state: she is comfortable within the walls which obstruct her view of other possibilities and prevent contact with others; it is also within these walls that she is afforded the opportunity of self-reflection through the act of writing. As Ann McElaney-Johnson states: "Ramatoulaye's inscription of her life enables her to transcend her physical and psychological confinement" (1999: 116). By exploring some of the ambiguities in the novel's reading of space, we are also attuned to another key ambiguity, the tensions between indigenous and imported cultural practices and their implications for gendered identities and roles.

The initial introduction to the place of the home in the novel is one of disruption as Ramatoulaye's house is host to, and taken over by, the transient mourners paying respect to her departed husband, Modou. Adding to Ramatoulaye's sense of discomfort within her demarcated

space of the home is the customary presence of her co-wife Binetou: “[s]he has been installed in my house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition” (Bâ, 1981: 3). This cultural practice of place seems to encode this spatial site as a wife’s rightful place, that is within the home: both wives are present, indeed almost as possessions within “Modou Fall’s house”, a fact which Ramatoulaye is displeased with yet does not contest outright. The house has been stripped of its possessions lest they were stolen or spoiled, and mats belonging to the mourners “are spread out everywhere there is space” (Bâ, 1981: 5). Thus, Ramatoulaye’s sense of demarcated private space (Western middle class) is wholly disrupted through its transformation into a communal space (traditional Senegalese, Muslim).

Against this reading of African communality as a disruption of cherished private space, there is also a sense in which traditional communal space is constructed as deeply consoling. Thus the traditional communal space which has formed for the mourning ritual also provides Ramatoulaye with some relief: “[c]omforting words from the Koran fill the air” (Bâ, 1981: 5). Similarly, the aromas of the environment have an uplifting effect: “[t]he smell of the *lakh* cooling in the calabashes pervades the air, exciting” (Bâ, 1981: 5) and bowls of red or white rice “cooked here or in neighbouring houses” (Bâ, 1981: 5). This space of traditional, albeit temporary, communal living also reveals some interesting cultural nuances. The Senegalese/Muslim mourning practices, aside from transforming the space temporarily into communal space, also mark it as primarily traditional and religious, demarcating the space in terms of gender and thus distinguishing between men’s and women’s experience of this space. Although the communal sense of space is transient, overlaying the private place of home, it is already marked as gendered space in which the roles of men and women differ. It is important to realize the power relations behind this construction of space and the practices which create specific boundaries of inclusion and exclusion based on gender. This spatial division of public space perpetuates social constructions of gender division, that is of women having a particular place within it. The funeral ritual is indicative of this, as close female relatives of the deceased are tasked with the washing of the body, whilst only the men are able to accompany the body to its final resting place. Similarly, it is the women (specifically the sisters-in-law) who must tend to the widows and lead them to the tent which has been carefully demarcated specifically for them.

It is interesting to note Ramatoulaye's thoughts on the monetary exchange after the funeral in light of the novel's reading of the tensions between tradition and Western modernity. This practice seems to denote the demise of a traditional practice in favour of Western forms of appreciation. Certain of the mourners are to be paid upon leaving the funeral, as is tradition. However, Ramatoulaye notes her disconcertion at how remembrance for her dead husband is shown: traditionally mourners would offer livestock, whereas the mourners now shower banknotes, anxious not to be seen as giving or displaying less money than the next group. In Ramatoulaye's opinion, this show of wealth at funerals, which in addition is painstakingly recorded to be returned in kind at the next funeral, often comes too late for those who, in other instances, may have survived their illness if they had had the funds to pay for treatment. It laments a show of wealth which, if paid earlier, could perhaps save lives: "[a]nd again I think how many of the dead would have survived if, before organizing these festive funeral ceremonies, the relative or friend had bought the life-saving prescription or paid for hospitalization" (Bâ, 1981: 6).

The house empties after the funeral, but for Ramatoulaye it feels partly tainted in the aftermath, still bearing the signs of the mourners' presence: "[t]he smell of stale sweat and food blend as trails in the air, unpleasant and nauseating. Cola nuts spat out here and there, have left red stains: my tiles, kept with such painstaking care, are blackened. Oil stains on the wall, balls of crumpled paper. What a balance sheet for a day!" (Bâ, 1981: 7). However, she is finally able to find relief in the fact that Binetou will be leaving. Ramatoulaye's home will once again become a private place as opposed to an enforced communal space during the funeral. This ambiguous attitude towards tradition and traditional practices, and their implications for women, is thus reflected in Ramatoulaye's sense of place.

A further example of the way in which the textual demarcation of space becomes an important part of the novel's critique of patriarchy occurs in further descriptions of Ramatoulaye's home as constantly being invaded and paraded by others despite her ownership of it. In another of the descriptions of the home, Ramatoulaye credits it as a space where Modou's family hold a meeting in the living room to discuss the social practice of *Mirasse* in which a dead person's secrets are revealed, which is also essentially what Ramatoulaye achieves in her letter/diary. Mbye Baboucar Cham states that Bâ extends "the notion of disclosure ... to encompass material possessions as well

as non-material attributes and history of the individual” (cited in Stratton, 1994: 139). Once again, an outside force exercises control over the space, encoding a different sense of its meaning:

The family meeting held in this morning in my sitting-room is at last over. You can easily guess those who were present: Lady Mother-in-Law, her brother and her daughter, Binetou, who is even thinner; old Tamsir, Modou’s brother, and the *Imam* from the mosque in his area. (Bâ, 1981: 9)

During this period, Ramatoulaye muses over Modou’s betrayal of her children and herself, and the debts he has accumulated in order to placate Binetou, namely his purchase of Binetou’s villa and its contents which were acquired through a mortgage on Ramatoulaye’s and Modou’s joint property. In Ramatoulaye’s assessment of Binetou’s house, the disparity in terms of living conditions in relation to her own home becomes apparent: “the elegant SICAP villa, four bedrooms, a three-room flat, built at his own expense at the bottom of the second courtyard for Lady Mother-in-Law. And furniture from France for his new wife and furniture constructed by local carpenters for Lady Mother-in-Law” (Bâ, 1981: 10). In addition, Binetou was paid the equivalent of a salary by Modou to leave school instead of finishing her education, a move which in Ramatoulaye’s eyes solidifies his control over his young wife: “[s]o as to establish his rule, Modou, wickedly, determined to remove her from the critical and unsparing world of the young” (Bâ, 1981: 10). While Binetou is well kept by Modou in her stately villa with its imported furniture, Ramatoulaye is forced to scrape a living together for her children and herself:

The purchase of basic foodstuffs kept me occupied at the end of every month; I made sure that I was never short of tomatoes or of oil, potatoes or onions during those periods when they became rare in the markets; I stored bags of ‘Siam’ rice, much loved by the Senegalese. My brain was taxed by new financial gymnastics. The last day of payment of electricity bills and of water rates demanded my attention. I was often the only woman in the queue. Replacing the locks and latches of broken doors, replacing broken windows was a bother, as well as looking for a plumber to deal with blocked sinks. (Bâ, 1981: 51)

This also marks a change in Ramatoulaye's gendered identity and subjectivity: she is forced to take on the role of both mother and father in Modou's absence, and she describes how often she is the only woman in the queue to pay the bills and how she must now tend to repairs in the house.

As I have suggested, Ramatoulaye's reflections begin to challenge her former assumption of idealized domestic life prior to the breakdown of the marriage. In these retrospective readings of communal space, Ramatoulaye registers similar frustrations to those she experienced during Modou's funeral. Thus Ramatoulaye describes how her sisters-in-law visited too often and allowed their children to roam freely and make a mess:

I tolerated his sisters, who too often would desert their own homes to encumber my own. They allowed themselves to be fed and petted. They would look on, without reacting, as their children romped around on my chairs. I tolerated their spitting, the phlegm expertly secreted under my carpets. (Bâ, 1981: 19)

This disrespect for the sanctity of Ramatoulaye's house is similarly displayed by Modou's mother, who appropriates the space for her own means by showing off the house she did not own to her friends so they could see her supremacy in this home which was not hers:

His mother would stop by again and again while on her outings, always flanked by different friends, just to show off her son's social success but particularly so that they might see, at close quarters, her supremacy in this beautiful house in which she did not live. I would receive her with all the respect due to a queen, and she would leave satisfied, especially if her hand closed over the banknote I had carefully placed there. (Bâ, 1981: 19)

The place of the communal Senegalese home then, seems to be a site in which the outsiders encode their power and domination over Ramatoulaye, creating a very different construction of space/place despite it being Ramatoulaye's home. This invasion of place occurs before Modou's second marriage and offers insight into Ramatoulaye's sense of place in the home before the breakdown of the marriage. It suggests that Ramatoulaye's sense of her home is not stable but subject to contradiction. In these examples, too, space is revealed as a central site for the novel's engagement with dominant cultural norms and their implications for women's self-empowerment and agency. Ramatoulaye's anger at the appropriation of space by those who are regarded as her seniors not only reveals her

dissatisfaction with prevailing cultural norms but also that the control of space itself has become an important index of women's power.

A similar dissatisfaction with prevailing cultural norms is revealed when Ramatoulaye is informed of her husband's latest marriage by Tamsir, Modou's brother, Mawdo Bâ and an *Imam*. Here again, the focus is directed to the arrogance with which the men appropriate female space – the air of indifference they have when entering her home with such news: “[t]hey entered laughing, deliberately sniffing the fragrant odour of incense that was floating on the air” (Bâ, 1981: 36). In this instance Ramatoulaye reads the men's visit as an encroachment upon her cherished private space, thus adding to the tension she experiences in her own home. However, in the time period following the funeral, and upon hearing the proposal from Modou's brother, Tamsir, as is the practice, Ramatoulaye further challenges patriarchal definitions of ownership and space by rejecting his proposal on her own terms: “[m]y voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous” (Bâ, 1981: 57-58). Thus the place of home, which previously was a site in which traditional gender norms were confirmed, now becomes a place in which Ramatoulaye struggles both to change gender relations and to renegotiate the link between place and identity for herself. According to Sarvan, Bâ's feminist critique of the practice of widows marrying male relatives of the deceased also extends to a critique of the various subject positions women hold, such as a commodity to be abandoned or exchanged, as well as the lack of liberty women experience regarding their marital status (1988: 456).

Part of Ba's feminist appraisal of patriarchal relations in *So Long a Letter* concerns a critique of normative notions of masculinity as dominating and all-powerful. Male characters only have a marginal presence in the novel. The more stereotypical versions of masculinity are to be found in the characters of Modou Fall and Mawdo Bâ, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou's respective husbands. Ramatoulaye's romantic dream of Modou remains intrinsically linked to her memory of him within specific spaces such as the teachers' training college Ramatoulaye and Aissatou attended, which is where she first meets Modou:

Do you remember the morning train that took us for the first time to Ponty-Ville, the teachers' training college in Sebokotane? Ponty-Ville is the countryside still green from the last rains, a celebration of youth right in the middle of nature, banjo music in dormitories transformed into dance floors,

conversations held along the rows of geraniums or under the thick mango trees. Modou Fall, the very moment you bowed before me, asking me to dance, I knew you were the one I was waiting for. (Bâ, 1981: 13)

What this memory clearly evokes is nature, youth and music, as well as the start of a love affair with Modou. However, this romanticized representation is replaced by the dominant portrayal of Modou Fall and Mawdo Bâ as having taken advantage of the dominant ideology which favours men to the degree that it allows them to take on additional wives. They hence construct themselves in a privileged position above their wives' own concerns, in a society and system which deem it possible for them. As Miles observes, this is achieved through the ideology of "divine inspiration transmitted from a male power to males empowered for this purpose [which] thereby [enshrines] maleness itself as power" (1988: 59).

Against these figures of patriarchy, several alternative versions of masculinity are also offered. Daouda Dieng, for example, is presented as having rather unorthodox views on the roles of women in society, at least compared to Modou and Mawdo. His 'feminist' stance is implied after his initial meeting with Ramatoulaye after many years, in which he says:

Whom are you addressing Ramatoulaye? You are echoing my speeches at the National Assembly, where I have been called a "feminist". I am not, in fact, the only one to insist on changing the rules of the game and injecting new life into it. Women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises. Women are the nation's primary, fundamental root, from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country. Even you who are protesting; you preferred your husband, your class, your children to public life. (Bâ, 1981: 61-62)

Thus, Daouda reminds Ramatoulaye of her own position, somewhat critically, as it stands presently in the feminist movement. However, Daouda is a contradictory character who, after arguing for more autonomy for women, reverts to a marriage proposal which would once again place Ramatoulaye in a polygamous marriage. Thus, Daouda "reverts to type" (Stratton, 1994: 146).

It would appear then, that new constructions of masculinity emerge with the younger

generation. Abou, Ramatoulaye's son-in-law, seems to have embraced a new collection of meanings as it pertains to his masculinity. Hence, his relationship with Daba is one of mutual respect and equality, offering an alternative model of marriage, emphasised by his response to Ramatoulaye, who chides him for spoiling his wife: "Daba is my wife. She is not my slave, nor my servant" (Bâ, 1981: 73). According to Stratton, "[i]n her portrayal of Abou, Bâ breaks much more decisively with the stereotype, assigning to him radical views on the role and status of women in marital relations" (1994: 146).

Working against the dominance of men is the act of letter writing, a practice which helps inscribe women's friendship, support and solidarity. The notion of female solidarity against the oppression of men is consolidated by Ramatoulaye's descriptions of the space of childhood. This space, which elucidate both her own and Aissatou's common history, reveals a history which is developed through the relationships with the women in their respective families:

Our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by a fence and would exchange messages daily. Our mothers used to argue over who would look after our uncles and aunts. As for us, we wore out wrappers and sandals on the same stony road to the koranic school; we buried our milk teeth in the same holes and begged our fairy godmothers to restore them to us, more splendid than before. (Bâ, 1981: 1)

In these descriptions, Ramatoulaye describes the links that the two women share through the common allegiance of place. While the space of the compounds is bordered and ordered through spatial demarcations such as the fence, there is still the suggestion of intimacy and easy exchange. The detail of the wrappers, sandals, and milk teeth are indicative of the way in which space has become domesticated and invested with personal histories which are themselves gendered. This creates a set of spatial relations which acts as a starting point to defining, or at least recognising gendered identities/subjectivities and gendered relations. This construction of space through these female relationships is also one which is informed by traditional cultural practices/norms; even the description of both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou as children sets the scene of a more traditional and rural lifestyle which is in marked contrast to Ramatoulaye's (self) positioning as a modern, contemporary woman, as becomes apparent later in the novel. This rural setting from her past seems quite idyllic as she tends to romanticize the rural; these idealized descriptions are a direct contrast to

Ramatoulaye's more critical assessment of communal life during Modou's funeral. This opening chapter invokes images of women and girls: "drops of sweat beading your mother's ochre-coloured face as she emerges from the kitchen, the procession of young wet girls from the springs" (Bâ, 1981: 1).

Ramatoulaye reminisces in vivid colours about the school which she and Aissatou attended as children, and the description lends itself to a continuation of the girls' friendship within a different spatial context, further delineating their bond of having "walked the same paths from adolescence to maturity" (Bâ, 1981: 1), their "lives developed in parallel" (Bâ, 1981: 19). Ramatoulaye describes the walls coming to life with the intensity of their study and the intoxicating atmosphere at night:

Together, let us recall our school, green, pink, blue and yellow, the colours of the flowers everywhere in the compound; pink the colour of the dormitories, with the beds impeccably made. Let us hear the walls of our school come to life with the intensity of our study. Let us relive its intoxicating atmosphere at night, while the evening song, our joint prayer, rang out, full of hope. (Bâ, 1981: 15)

The mapping of this shared educational space further defines the relationship between the two women in a relation of the spatial. In terms of experience of place, Ramatoulaye's experience of her old school is both vivid and colourful and also deeply intertwined with her relationship with Aissatou. It is the start of what could be described as Ramatoulaye's love affair with the education system which she still regards as very important. It highlights the formative years of Ramatoulaye's education and induction into the educational system, whilst also incorporating the "intoxicating atmosphere" of their joint prayer. The emancipating spaces of the school thus provide the opportunity for the reassessment of dominant gender relations and norms, specifically the promise of female education and work.

The historical context and geographical location are such that Ramatoulaye refers to herself and Aissatou as sisters destined for emancipation – prepared from an early age by the aims of the headmistress, whose aims were, according to Ramatoulaye:

To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us.
(Bâ, 1981: 15)

Ramatoulaye positions herself as an educated woman who, by virtue of this colonial education, believes she has been lifted out of “the bog of tradition, superstition and custom”. She was conscientised early on by a European headmistress, “a woman who destined Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, and the other girls for the mission of female emancipation” (Sarvan, 1988: 456). Thus, the elite were “highly Westernized”, even though Ramatoulaye is a practising Muslim (Sarvan, 1988: 456). It is this assimilation of the western model of womanhood, obtained through the course of her colonial education, that Stratton argues is the source of Ramatoulaye’s disequilibrium (1994: 145). Ramatoulaye finds it difficult to reconcile the model offered with her reality, the context of postcolonial Senegalese society in which tradition and modernity exist in complex contradiction and tension. The suggestion seems to be that a new mode specific to the African women’s context must be created rather than simply assimilating western ideals. As Stratton states, Ramatoulaye’s assimilation of the “western model of womanhood” leaves her “[p]sychologically entrapped in this model’s debilitating definitions of her gender, [and] she becomes susceptible to victimization by indigenous patriarchal practices. Thus, despite the compromises she makes, the rewards of conformity elude her”. In her inability to reconcile western and Senegalese practices and attitudes towards gender and women, Ramatoulaye is “unable to find independence and freedom” (Stratton, 1994: 145 and 146-147). Thus, tensions between Western and African modes are complicated here by the recognition that Western feminist consciousness must be adapted to suit the Senegalese context. The west is therefore not simply embraced as an unequivocal good.

Ramatoulaye further develops the narrative of her friendship with Aissatou, framing it within memories of the seaside suburbs they would visit when they tired of the “stifling city” as well as the farm Mawdo Bâ inherited in Sangalkam (Bâ, 1981: 21). It is interesting to note how these spaces and places seem to have an overt sense of being gendered female, as the women are the ones who attribute meaning to the spaces. In this specific set of reminiscences, Ramatoulaye begins by locating or mapping them, often through a set of directions by which one can approach these places, suggesting once again the importance of space/place in the gradual development of feminist

consciousness: “[w]e would go on to the road to Ouakam, which also leads to Ngor and further on to Yoff airport. We would recognise on the way the narrow road leading farther on to Almadies beach” (Bâ, 1981: 21). In this way, like the earlier comments on the school, place is constructed in conversation through collaborative remembering. Thus, the women are speaking a place specifically defined by their experiences.

In contrast to my positive reading of memories as part of the development of a new female solidarity, Sarvan sees signs of elitism. In one of these memories, Ramatoulaye focuses on the area of Dakar Corniche, and more specifically, Ngor village and the beach named for it where “old bearded fishermen repaired their nets under the silk-cotton trees. Naked and snotty children played in complete freedom when they were not frolicking about in the sea” and “naively painted canoes awaited their turn to be launched into the waters” (Bâ, 1981: 21). According to Sarvan, in her assessment of the activities of the fisherman and the children, “Ramatoulaye idealizes poverty so as to avoid confronting it and, on the other hand, romanticises physical labor” (1988: 458):

In the evening the fisherman would return from their laborious outings. Once more, they had escaped the moving snare of the sea. At first simple points on the horizon, the boats would become more distinct from one another as they drew nearer. They would dance in the hollows of the waves, then would lazily let themselves be dragged along. Fishermen would gaily furl their sails and draw in their tackle. While some of them would gather in the wriggling catch, others would wring out their soaked clothes and mop their faces. (Bâ, 1981: 21)

Ramatoulaye envies the freedom of the fisher-folks’ children whose freedom is dictated by a lack of funds to attend school, or to wear clothes or play with toys (Sarvan, 1988: 457-458). Continuing his assessment of Ramatoulaye as elitist, Sarvan observes that the huts are represented as picturesque. This is the way that an outsider would see them, not realising the reality of people in this situation (1988: 457): “[t]he most humble of huts is pleasing when it is clean; the most luxurious setting offers no attraction if it is covered in dust” (Bâ, 1981: 63).

Taking up Sarvan’s point, it would seem that Ramatoulaye’s experience of public space and crowds is very different from the more negative construction of the crowded space of the home which is evident in the opening sections of the novel. Here, by contrast, the mood is euphoric:

What a crowd on public holidays! Numerous families would stroll about, thirsty for space and fresh air. People would undress without embarrassment, tempted by the benevolent caress of the iodized breeze and the warmth from the sun's rays. The idle would sleep under spread parasols. A few children, spade and bucket in hand, would build and demolish the castles of their imagination. (Bâ, 1981: 21)

As we have seen, Ramatoulaye is uncomfortable with the private space of her home being used as communal space. This quotation allows us to examine Ramatoulaye's preconceived notions of the relationship between specific behaviours and specific spaces, a perspective in which communal behaviour seems to be relegated to the public space.

Ramatoulaye also considers the farm in Sangalkam which Mawdo Bâ inherited from his father. Notably, Ramatoulaye refers to it as a place that "remains the refuge of people from Dakar, those who want a break from the frenzy of the city. The younger set, in particular, has bought land there and built country residences: these green, open spaces are conducive to rest, meditation and the letting off of steam by children" (Bâ, 1981: 22). In this way, the novel once again demarcates the rural space as more relaxed and idealized than city life. Interesting to note in this section are the ways in which meaning is invested in space by women, transforming it into place. First, Mawdo's mother, later referred to as Aunty Nabou, cared for the farm before the marriage of her son. Here we are told how she laboured in the farm with her husband, investing meaning in this space: "[t]he memory of her husband had made her attached to this plot of land, where their joint and patient hands had disciplined the vegetation that filled our eyes with admiration" (Bâ, 1981: 22). Similarly, Aissatou invests meaning in this space by extending the house and tending the garden, trying to make it her own. As Ramatoulaye points out: "[y]ourself, you added the small building at the far end: three small, simple bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen. You grew many flowers in a few corners. You had a hen run built, then a closed pen for sheep" (Bâ, 1981: 22). Thus, it is evident that it is the women who are investing meaning in these spaces. Further, Ramatoulaye's investment in this place is one which is reminiscent of her experience of her school as the image is again one which is vivid, heady and called into memory through the joint experience of place by Ramatoulaye and Aissatou:

Coconut trees with their interlacing leaves, gave protection from the sun.
Succulent sapodilla stood next to sweet-smelling pomegranates. Heavy

mangoes weighed down the branches. Pawpaws resembling breasts of different shapes hung tempting and inaccessible from the tops of elongated trunks. Green leaves and browned leaves, new grass and withered grass were strewn all over the ground. Under our feet the ants untiringly built and rebuilt their homes. How warm the shades over the camp beds! Teams for games were formed one after the other amid cries of victory or lamentations of defeat. And we stuffed ourselves with fruits within easy reach. And we drank the milk from coconuts. And we told 'juicy stories'! And we danced about, roused by the strident notes of a gramophone. And the lamb, seasoned with white pepper, garlic, butter, hot pepper, would be roasting over the wood fire. (Bâ, 1981: 22-23)

Leading from this, it is interesting to look at the way Aunty Nabou invests meaning in other places, particularly as her sense of place is imbued with tradition not only as it relates to her actions and opinions, but also in her view of space. Aunty Nabou's traditional reading of space provides a contrast to the modern/Western liberated space of the schools as well as the ambivalent space of Ramaotulaye's home. This is an important aspect to consider, especially as Aunty Nabou, Aissatou's mother-in-law, represents a potential double for Ramatoulaye. Aunty Nabou embarks on a trip to her hometown, Diakhao, with the purpose of finding another wife for her son, Mawdo Bâ, resenting his first marriage to Aissatou and believing a more suitable wife will come from this traditional community. Once again, Ramatoulaye as narrator reverts to mapping the area:

These days, the road to Rufisque forks at the Diamniadio crossroads: the National 1, to the right, leads, after Mbour, to the Sine-Saloum, while the National 2 goes through Thies and Tivaouane, cradle of Tidjanism, towards Saint-Louis, former capital of Senegal. Aunty Nabou did not enjoy the benefit of these pleasant roads. Jostled in the bus on the bumpy road, she sought refuge in her memories. The dizzying speed of the vehicle, carrying her towards the place of her childhood, did not prevent her from recognising the familiar countryside. Here, Sindia, and to the left, Popenguine, where the Catholics celebrate Whitsun. (Bâ, 1981: 27)

The area around Diakhao is mapped in relation to neighbouring cities. In addition, whilst Aunty Nabou is described as recognising the familiarity of the countryside during the bus trip, she also

“seeks refuge in her memories” rather than enjoying the journey, suggesting that she is very set in her traditional ways and not interested in expanding her horizons. In the forefront of Aunty Nabou’s experience of space is an awareness of tradition and ancestors as she thinks of the rites and religions that must be performed upon her arrival in Diakhao: “Associating in her thoughts anticipated rites and religion, she remembered the milk to be poured into the Sine to appease the invisible spirits. Tomorrow, in the river, she would make her offerings to protect herself from the evil eye, while at the same time attracting the benevolence of the *tours*” (Bâ, 1981: 28). As her journey reaches its destination and Aunty Nabou observes her surroundings and the people, we become aware of how her notion of tradition seems linked to a sense of the more pious nature of the rural areas outside of Dakar. This is similar to the way in which Ramatoulaye also idealizes the rural space: “The beautiful Medinatou-Minaouramosqe had not yet been built to the glory of Islam, but in the same pious spirit, men and women prayed by the side of the road. “You have to come away from Dakar to be convinced of the survival of traditions,” murmured Aunty Nabou” (Bâ, 1981: 27).

Within the space of her brother’s home, Aunty Nabou, also widowed, is received reverently as the elder sister:

Royally received, she immediately resumed her position as the elder sister of the master of the house. Nobody addressed her without kneeling down. She took her meals alone, having been served with the choicest bits from the pot. Visitors came from everywhere to honour her, thus reminding her of the truth of the law of blood. For her, they revived the exploits of the ancestor Bour-Sine, the dust of combats and the ardour of thoroughbred horses.... And, heady with the heavy scent of burnt incense, she drew force and vigour from the ancestral ashes stirred to the eclectic sound of the *koras*. (Bâ, 1981: 28)

In this way, although respectfully attended to as the elder in the house, she has essentially come into power in her family by virtue of the fact that she has outlived all the men in her family who could wield power over her. Instead of subverting these gender and class divisions, she conforms to and perpetuates them: “[s]chooled in the patriarchal dictums and the class distinctions of her society, Aunty Nabou becomes an assertive agent on their behalf” (Stratton, 1994: 144). Convinced by “the

law of blood”, Aunty Nabou manipulates a not entirely reluctant Mawdo into taking a second wife of her own choosing whom she has arranged to replace her daughter-in-law Aissatou based primarily on Aissatou’s lower class. Stratton states that “Aunty Nabou is a grim parody of Ramatoulaye and a grim reminder of what she is in danger of becoming if she does not seek the power to liberate herself” (Stratton, 1994: 145). As Sarvan notes, despite the feminism prevalent in the novel, it is often women who orchestrate the demise of both Ramatoulaye’s and Aissatou’s marriages (1988: 458). Interestingly, and perhaps furthering Sarvan’s suggestion of class, Ramatoulaye somewhat admires Aissatou’s regal mother-in-law despite her treatment of Aissatou due to her lower class, and in much the same way, Ramatoulaye notes Binetou and her mother’s lower class (Sarvan, 1988: 458).

Ramatoulaye can also be paired with her co-wife Binetou, as the two wives closely resemble each other. According to Stratton, “[b]ecause of the disparity in age and class background, each is envious of the other” (1994: 144). Binetou, as the new or second wife of Modou Fall, is essentially coerced into the marriage by the pleas of her mother, and poor family, who promote the arrangement in hope of both social advancement and material possession. In Stratton’s view, however, what Ramatoulaye refuses to see is that the “co-wife is a mirror image of herself. For she, too, is a sacrificial victim, though of somewhat different forces” (1994: 144). Indeed, Binetou seems to fulfil the patriarchal idea that women are mere commodities: she sacrifices her education and life so that others may benefit from her coercion into marriage. Thus, it could be concluded that “the gap is not between white and black women but between black women who belong to two widely distanced classes” (Sarvan, 1988: 458).

It is in the pairing of the characters of Aissatou and Ramatoulaye that the most assertive femininity in the novel emerges. It is through Ramatoulaye’s positioning of herself in relation to her confidante Aissatou that she is able to engage with the challenges which confront her, large and small, material or psychological. Whilst Ramatoulaye conforms to the social definitions of her gender, Aissatou refuses to submit to the categories meant to define her. As Stratton argues, “confronted with the same dilemma, they opt for different solutions, Aissatou to resist the imposition of patriarchal standards and Ramatoulaye to submit and reap the rewards of conformity” (1994: 138). Aissatou does that which Ramatoulaye is reluctant to do: “Aissatou both literally and figuratively storms the walls that confine her” after her husband takes another wife (Stratton, 1994: 142). She becomes economically independent, raises her sons well despite the precautions regarding

the absence of a male in the household, and upgrades her qualifications, which grant her an appointment with the Senegalese embassy. Thus, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou present two different models of female identity. In Stratton's view, "Ramatoulaye is unable to write her own story. By pairing her with Aissatou, Bâ rewrites the text of what is acceptable for women, providing a positive fiction of female identity, the story of a woman who does not compromise with the forces of patriarchy" (1994: 147). However, I would argue that there are different types of resistance, and Ramatoulaye negotiates this through a consideration of all the avenues which are available to her. Ramatoulaye uses the domestic space as her principal site of the renegotiation of gendered identities and subjectivities. The home is a site for Ramatoulaye's self-empowerment and agency through her control of a space that, previously, confirmed traditional gender roles. While Aissatou does present very strongly the ideal of assertive female identity, Ramatoulaye represents a different option, and perhaps an option which is more feasible for many women in her context.

In my reading of this novel, the inscription of space has emerged as a key entry point for the exploration of gender roles and identities. The novel's concerns with gender are elaborated through attention to space and place, first, in the critique of patriarchy and dominant gender norms, and second, in the way that new spaces created by women are depicted as crucial for the development of new subjectivities. The novel also offers an ambiguous reading of place which reflects an on-going tension between tradition/indigeneity and modern/Western life. These tensions are central to the novel's critique of patriarchy and its exploration of gendered identity. In the various representations of space in the novel, it is evident that space becomes important in the development of identities and a site for women's self-empowerment and agency. The control of space becomes an important index of women's power in the domestic sphere, which is the dominant site of inscription. The home is also a space which is redefined by women: initially, it is a site where traditional gender norms were confirmed but it becomes a space which is redefined in Ramatoulaye's renegotiation of gender relations and the link between place and identity. The school is also a site where dominant gender relations and norms, such as female education and work, are reassessed in a freer environment, although, as noted, this has significant implications as Ramatoulaye struggles to reconcile the Western model with her reality. Thus the novel appears to confirm that Western feminist consciousness must be adapted to suit the Senegalese context. It is partly through the renegotiation and re-definition of space/place that this new feminist consciousness will emerge.

Chapter 2: *Scarlet Song*

As previously mentioned in the preceding chapter analyzing *So Long a Letter*, Bâ's novels conform to the representation and reconfiguration of space typical of postcolonial literature. *Scarlet Song* is similar to *So Long a Letter* in its attempt to 'write back' the space which was previously asserted under French colonial control: in both cases, the action of the novel is set in Dakar, Senegal, specifically in the Cape Verde Peninsula. In this chapter, I explore the connections between this postcolonial rewriting of space and the novel's inscription of gender identity and experience. It is interesting to explore Bâ's use of mapping within the novel, and indeed her use of it as an introductory point to the rest of the novel. This mapping of location within the novel also highlights the urgent need for women to create empowered spaces for themselves. Susan Andrade provides insight as to why comparative or inter-textual perspectives are insightful for a reading of the text: "all texts and especially, all works of literature, are involved in conversations with other texts—and ... a productive analysis examines points of conversation as well as potential or visible differences" (2011: 94). Thus I will begin with a consideration of the novel in relation to Mariama Bâ's first novel *So Long a Letter*.

Scarlet Song is concerned with the relationship between Ousmane and Mireille, the son of a poor Muslim Senegalese family and the daughter of a French diplomat. The two begin a relationship while they are both studying at university. Both Ousmane's educational journey and his relationship with Mireille are partly constructed as a move away from his 'culture'. Upon discovering their relationship, Mireille's father sends her back to France. However, after completing his education, Ousmane travels to France and marries Mireille. Returning from Paris to Senegal after the wedding, Ousmane once again adopts his traditions and customs, and essentially abandons Mireille to take a second wife, Ouleymatou, a woman he knew in his youth. Mireille inevitably learns of this second marriage. Finding herself in a vulnerable position as a woman in a foreign country who has been abandoned by the man she came to be with, and seeing no alternative of acceptance for either herself or her son, she suffers a breakdown, with tragic consequences.

Mariama Bâ's work has been praised for its careful and sensitive exploration of the disadvantaged position of women in patriarchal society, particularly the experiences of married women (Makward, 1986; Sarvan, 1988; and Stratton, 1994). These are central preoccupations of

both *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*. Both novels are concerned with the different standards that patriarchal ideology sets for men and women, most prominently in the practice of polygamy and the position it places women in. The central tension in both novels arises as a result of a second marriage. *So Long a Letter* depicts female characters that negotiate the choices available to them after the second marriages take place. By contrast, *Scarlet Song* complicates the issue of being abandoned by one's husband by exploring the patriarchal dynamic which arises in the relationship between a Senegalese man, Ousmane, and a French woman, Mireille. Further, tensions between tradition and modernity are explored through the two female figures, Ouleymatou and Mireille respectively.

The inscription of space is more prominent in the novel *Scarlet Song* in comparison to *So Long a Letter*. Drawing on Eleanor Shevlin for a theoretical base, I explore the novel in terms of how it employs a "language of space". This is important as descriptions of space establish a knowledge of the order of things, and because social mappings are an important part of the novel's engagement (Shevlin, 1997: 941). Shevlin includes an awareness of space in her exploration of *Scarlet Song*, establishing a new mode of analysis outside the traditional critique of Bâ's novels. She explores both the cartographic concerns as well as the difficulties which hamper the demarcation of postcolonial space within the novel, stating that the "explicit and implicit employment of various cartographic practices illustrates the continually shifting boundaries of postcolonial significance" (1997: 933). This is evident in the "verbal mapping" of the city and the fictional enactments of space, which are amongst Shevlin's broader concerns. My exploration of space within the novel is also informed by Michel de Certeau's influential essay, "Walking in the City" (1984). De Certeau presents a theory of, or ideal for, the city, in which he considers how space is both negotiated and appropriated by ordinary people in the everyday practice of their lived space. This theory is useful in terms of exploring the ways in which space is configured in a variety of spatial practices, be it the ordinary practice of walking the city from within, or viewing it from above as a voyeur.

The novel employs explicit verbal mapping. The reader is immediately immersed in the district of Usine Niari Talli, a district of Grand-Dakar, Senegal: "The district of Grand Dakar known as Usine Niari Talli takes its name from the two parallel main roads that run through it and the Biscuit Factory in the neighbourhood" (Bâ, 1986: 3). Shevlin argues that the Biscuit Factory and the district name perform two functions: they anchor the roads with specific names and they establish a clear division between the industrial and the busy residential areas (1997: 942). The use of the

character Ousmane Gueye as a focaliser, means that the mapping of the street is from his perspective as he conducts his everyday practice of walking the city. This narrative technique allows for the establishment of intimate knowledge as his reading of the city progresses, as well as a more emotional and subjective reading of the space he negotiates. The fact that this is a busy, lived space is evident in the lines: “The street! Its rhythm and colours! Already people were swarming along the two thoroughfares that ran through the district” (Bâ, 1986: 4). In this process of walking the city, Ousmane presents his own reading of the space of the city. Thus as a ‘walker’ Ousmane individuates his experience of this space. Drawing on de Certeau, it could be argued that what Ousmane experiences is the “disquieting familiarity of the city” (1984: 157): “The street! It was life and light, as familiar to Ousmane as an old and trusted friend. He was sensitive to its needs and could list its characteristics. He could assign to each locality its specific troubles and was always in tune with its moods which varied with the season or the time of day” (Bâ, 1986: 4). The disquieting familiarity of the city arises from the conflict and ambiguity of Ousmane’s feelings towards this space as both a place of belonging and a place which must be abandoned. As a lived space, the city seems to have a communal, interconnected quality to it. There are even suggestions of egalitarianism in the description of space, descriptions which illuminate both the character of Ousmane and the character of Senegal: “The street was the city’s essential connecting link, tolerating, with equal indifference, the proximity of slums and imposing mansions...” (Bâ, 1986: 4).

Ousmane’s verbal mapping of the district of Usine Niari Talli suggests both intimacy and distance. This verbal mapping of space establishes both Ousmane’s intimate knowledge and his affiliations with the suffering and poverty in this particular area of Usine Niari Talli. It also creates empathy for Ousmane and provides a rationalization for his desire to escape this place and his position in society. While Ousmane is not a voyeur in the same sense as de Certeau’s observer or *flâneur*, there is a similar effect in this mapping of the city which distances the character whose observations are often elevated above street level. De Certeau’s observations on the *flâneur* are thus pertinent to Ousmane: “[the walker’s] elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes” (1993: 152). For example, one passage reads:

What was hidden behind these dilapidated walls at each bend of the road?

What stories did these faded old facades have to tell? The humble dwelling

and the proud abode alike could shelter domestic harmony or be governed by discord and enmity. (Bâ, 1986: 4)

In this passage, we can see a certain degree of distance between Ousmane and the ‘text’ before his eyes, which allows for a more voyeuristic and dispassionate view of the space. Taking this argument further, Shevlin suggests that Ousmane is at times reduced to “a viewpoint and nothing more” (1997: 943):

The intimacy of closed shutters ... thatched roofs ... pink tiles ... cracked stones ... flower-covered fences ... wrought-iron gates ... rickety shanties ... mud walls ... red brick facades ... foliage through which breezes murmur! Ousmane walked on and on. (Bâ, 1986: 4)

This distancing effect is further compounded by Ousmane’s detachment. Shevlin’s view is that whilst his description of the district is intimate, he also displays a certain degree of detachment from his environment. Shevlin deals with this ambiguity by suggesting that this both hints at his mental progression beyond this space of Usine Niari Talli as well as an inevitable move away from the district (1997: 943):

Every morning the madman stood under the same lamp-post, stretching out his hand for alms. The unnatural brightness of his eyes and his tormented gaze were disturbing to the onlooker. Ousmane fled from the spectre, turning his own eyes upward to admire the heavens. The heavens – that immense expanse where swollen gold and purple clouds drifted interminably. What was the destination and the destiny of those long skeins of birds, which took over each morning from those of the previous day? Would they die in captivity, or perish as victims of the elements? (Bâ, 1986: 4-5)

Ousmane’s intimate knowledge of Usine Niari Talli is displayed as he walks past the same beggar every morning under the same lamp post. However, this intimacy is disrupted by Ousmane’s discomfort at the man’s gaze, and indeed Ousmane expertly distances himself by focusing on the sky. The sky seems to signify a world outside of Usine Niari Talli, a world Ousmane seems eager to

explore, corroborating Shevlin's argument that Ousmane will eventually seek to separate himself from this place.

This detachment is further complicated by the illusion created earlier by Ousmane's relationship with the street and his perceived sense of moving forward, both in terms of his education and his desire to leave the district. As Shevlin has argued, this also suggests a journey to self-awareness and success (1997: 943). This journey through the city sets the terms for the bildungsroman narrative, specifically the theme of the journey to self-knowledge. Ousmane himself displays several characteristics of the bildungsroman hero: As Kerschen argues, "[i]n bildungsromane the hero leaves home on a journey or quest. Usually, the protagonist leaves a rural setting to travel into the wider world of the city. In this way, the character encounters a larger society that tests his or her mettle. The physical journey initiates change, and change brings growth" (2002: 5). Ousmane's intention to further his education and thus escape the poorer district of Usine Niari Talli to the broader city is in keeping with the theme of the bildungsroman, as is the change that this move initiates. However, the period Ousmane spends walking seems dedicated mostly to remembering the past instead of focusing on the present: "[h]e was used to walking. Over the ten years that he had been walking to school, he had learned the secret of overcoming the distance" (Bâ, 1986: 4). According to Shevlin, this engagement with both the past and present is indicative of a move away from self-knowledge, "a movement that becomes particularly ironic given his simultaneous charting of the presumed progress he is achieving via this walking" (1997: 944-945). The present as a move forward also sets up the binary logic of the novel of Africa (here symbolized by Usine Niari Talli) versus the West (education, economic advance).

Whilst this verbal mapping mostly occurs in the earlier part of the novel, the use of cartography is maintained throughout the course of the novel. The observer position is granted to other characters besides Ousmane, such as Mireille. Mireille is the white expatriate who, upon marrying Ousmane, returns with him to Senegal from her native France. Upon their return from France, there is an instance when Mireille becomes the observer of the city, mapping a similar setting to that of Ousmane's earlier topography of the city. The key difference, however, is that the mode of transport is now by car instead of on foot:

Mireille recognised the motorway along which she used to drive with her parents to the Petite Côte. Its two narrow carriageways rolled along

impassively between the same wastelands lined with stunted hedgerows. A few villages on the outskirts of the town. The taxi lurched on the uneven surface of the road. At the Colobane bus station, the driver hooted impatiently as he forced his way through the dense crowds. Then he turned off the main road. (Bâ, 1986: 79)

Although it displays a similar mapping process to the earlier observations of Ousmane's walking of the city, this passage displays a less intimate knowledge of and familiarity with the surroundings, which is emphasized by the mode of transport of the car, which also has a distancing effect. Mireille maps the area from her own point of reference: thus she recognises the motorway which is the same one her parents took on their way to the stretch of coast known as Petite Côte. There is also a degree of judgment implied in Mireille's assessment: she refers to the area as "wastelands" composed of "stunted hedgerows" as the car lurches along the uneven road. The general impression offered from Mireille's perspective is one of desolation and poverty. The same intricate knowledge of the villages is also absent from Mireille's mapping. In addition, Ousmane then takes on the role of tour guide, mapping the area by pointing out specific features of the landscape, despite Mireille's knowledge of some of these spaces: "Ousmane reminded her of the landmarks: 'The Family Allowances Office'. Then a bit further on, 'The Girls' High School, where you'll probably get a job'. A few yards from the school, 'The Independence Monument! You remember?'" (Bâ, 1986: 79-80). Importantly, Ousmane's tone changes when introducing Mireille to the neighbourhood in which he grew up:

"Gibraltar was built by the Department for Subsidised Accommodation and took over the name of the slum area that was here before, notorious for its palm-wine shops, brawling prostitutes, frequent fires and general insecurity!" (Bâ, 1986: 80)

According to Shevlin, this passage is significant because there is a notable shift from personal voice to anonymous public voice which is indicative of the shifting spaces which the characters traverse, such as Ousmane's move out of the district. The tone of this passage, and the shift to anonymous public voice, also depicts this space as "a landscape of absence, replacing that which 'was here before' with nothing more than a negation of its negative past" (Shevlin, 1997: 946).

Other important spaces which are mapped in the novel are Ousmane's home in Usine Niari Talli, the university and the beach, and France. In the mapping of the space of the home in Usine Niari Talli, Ousmane Gueye acts as the focaliser of the third-person narration of the novel. This mapping gives a sense of the place of his home: the "flip flop" of his mother's sandals, the shower-hut protected from the wind by galvanized iron sheets, the courtyard in which the family eat their breakfast, and in the distance his father's voice mingles with others faithfully joining in prayer at the mosque (Bâ, 1986: 3). This space is thus defined and given meaning by both the spatial demarcations as well as by the intimacy and easy exchange displayed in the family home. It is also important to note the way in which the space has become domesticated and invested with personal histories, such as when Ousmane can hear the voices in the mosque from the home and he knows that his father's voice is mingled amongst them, as well as the sound of his mother's sandals. In this intimate description of place, we are made aware of the traditional cultural practices and norms which Ousmane becomes so concerned with later in the novel, and which lead to his second marriage to Ouleymatou and the betrayal of Mireille. It solidifies the definition of the place of home with which Ousmane is comfortable, that sense of familiarity which is intertwined with his family and traditional family life.

Two places which are important in the developing relationship between Ousmane and Mireille are the university (the *Keur Ali* or The Abode of Ali, a friend, in the University Residence) and the nearby beach. It is in these spaces that they develop loving feelings towards each other:

Sometimes they played truant. Across the main road, on the far side of the university, lay the sea. As he gazed at the water, Ousmane Gueye murmured the beginning of a dictation he remembered from the primary school: 'The sea lashes the coast with its short, monotonous waves.' And Mireille added: 'And Ousmane and Mireille are in love. And Ousmane and Mireille kiss.' She suited the action to the words. They laughed, intoxicated with their youth, their illusions and the open stretch of the ocean. (Bâ, 1986: 19)

This space also reflects their mutual love of learning and furthering themselves through education, which is one of the characteristics of Mireille that Ousmane recognises in himself and which initially attracts him to her:

Sometimes they would bring a mat to lie on, and as they relaxed so their confidences would flow. There was no lack of subjects to talk about: they would report on books they had read, discuss and clarify points in their lectures, draft their essays so as to obtain the highest marks. Ousmane Gueye excelled at demonstrating how to tackle a paper. (Bâ, 1986: 19)

After Mireille's father discovers her love affair with Ousmane, he sends her back to France. Their love endures, however, through the time that they are both completing their studies. Afterwards, Ousmane travels to France to marry Mireille. Ousmane's reaction to seeing Mireille in France is significant: "Ousmane was entranced. His fairy princess was more bewitching than ever, here in her own environment" (Bâ, 1986: 63). The effect of defining this space as hers immediately establishes a difference between Ousmane and Mireille. Descriptions of her as 'bewitching' and a 'fairy princess' also confirm the novel's suggestion that it is in part Mireille's association with the enchanted space of France which makes her attractive to him. Similarly, the description also serves to establish the differences between Paris, France and Dakar, Senegal: "Roissy-Charles de Gaulle Airport! Already the climate and the technological marvels that surrounded him made Ousmane aware of the difference between the two worlds linked by the plane" (Bâ, 1986: 63).

When Ousmane returns to the district of Usine Niari Talli after establishing a new home for his parents in Gibraltar (a more affluent and respected suburb of Dakar), and after his marriage to Mireille, questions of space and identity are revisited. In these sections of the novel, the same sense of ambiguity regarding belonging and the desire to leave the district are displayed. Ousmane returns to Usine Niari Tall to visit his old 'hut brother' Ousseynou, Ouleymatou's brother. His first impression upon returning is one of disgust: "His nostrils were assailed by the same nauseating effluvia borne on the evening air, as of old. Drains overflowed with foul, stinking water from the basins and buckets of slops emptied throughout the day. Ousmane cleared his throat, restraining a desire to vomit" (Bâ, 1986: 103). However, he is welcomed with excitement by the children and former neighbours. He enters the compound neighbouring his old childhood home, where he is greeted by Ousseynou's family as the 'good son', conveying a sense again of communal belonging (Bâ, 1986: 103). This validates his desire to return to a place of origin, a cultural home: "Ousmane smiled. The happiness which he bought made him forget momentarily the smell of dried fish, while he thought to himself, "I did well to renew the contact. This is my return to my roots" (Bâ, 1986: 103).

In her reading of the novel, Shevlin makes a connection between cartography as a tool to order space and the ‘mapping’ of the female body. Here she cites Ousmane’s mapping and frequent dismembering of the female form which is linked to a process of plotting points on a visual graph (1997: 949). In this way, Ousmane’s mapping of space is reiterated in his mapping of the female body, specifically, but not limited to, that of Mireille. In this example of the anatomizing or mapping of the female body, the novel confirms the notion of the male gaze as objectifying. Indeed, the induction of Mireille into the narrative occurs, in the main, through Ousmane’s voyeuristic gaze: “The face of the white girl was always before his eyes. She mouthed the words he needed to get out of his difficulties. She shook her silky golden hair. She fluttered the long lashes over her grey-blue eyes. She smiled at him. She gazed at him” (Bâ, 1986: 16). As Ousmane maps and thus controls and dominates urban space, so his mapping of Mireille’s body indicates a controlling, appropriative mode prefiguring later events and hinting at the patriarchal attitudes the novel explores later. At the very least, their second encounter seems to confirm an objectifying, ‘dismembering’ gaze:

That milk-white neck that Ousmane saw before him was indeed Mireille’s. He had planted too many kisses on it in his dreams to be able to forget its graceful curves. He would recognise that profile even in the dark, since he had outlined it a thousand times during the three months’ vacation. (Bâ, 1986: 17)

Eventually, for both Mireille and Ousmane, “the visible parts of their bodies had no more secrets for them” as they “feasted their eyes on each other” (Bâ, 1986: 18). Whilst this also suggests a position of objectification on Mireille’s part, the passage which closely follows – which culminates in their first sexual encounter – negates her autonomy as she is described as being ‘obedient to his desires’: “As the light faded, they could scarcely see their bodies. They embraced more passionately than usual. Ousmane held Mireille tight to himself. He clasped her supple young form powerfully and she abandoned herself, obedient to his desires” (Bâ, 1986: 26).

What becomes evident in the descriptive passages is Ousmane’s objectification of Mireille not only sexually but also as ‘white’ and ‘foreign’. This objectification even extends to the interchangeability of Mireille and Ouleymatou later in the novel, when he desires Ouleymatou, whom he perceives as a symbol of his cultural origins, while having sex with Mireille: “[t]hen he took Mireille in his arms and in the body of his white wife assuaged his desires for the black woman” (Bâ,

1986: 111). These descriptions of Mireille will later contribute to Ousmane's view of her as a symbolic embodiment of her motherland, a reading of Mireille which will become more pronounced as both the novel progresses and Ousmane engages with and compares her to Ouleymatou who, in turn, becomes the embodiment of Africa. Although the text does create sympathy towards Mireille as a suffering woman, the image of her becomes increasingly contrasted with images of Ouleymatou, not only by the narrator but also through the eyes of Ousmane and his mapping of their bodies. At this point in the novel, Mireille is also increasingly viewed by Ousmane as a product of her society, in contrast to his earlier attraction to her for her association with the enchanted space of France.

Ouleymatou appears to go out of her way to cultivate the patriarchal stereotype of the sexualized, pliant woman. It is also important to note at this point that, in the representation of Mireille and Ouleymatou, the novel appears to confirm stereotypes of Africa and the West. As previously mentioned, Mireille seems to represent intellect and the educated woman. On the other hand, Ouleymatou represents sex and sensuality: "Ah! Her body! She groomed it, she polished it, she perfumed it. She took care of it, for it was her weapon of seduction" (Bâ, 1986: 115). Ouleymatou is complicit in attracting Ousmane's gaze and his objectification of her. Ousmane objectifies her in the following manner:

In the courtyard he took in the whole picture: skin that gleamed like watered silk in the sunlight, black designs traced in henna glimpsed against crimson shoes, plaited hair beneath the wings of the knotted headtie, eyebrows arched over the seductive gaze, full lips with their expression of deliberate indifference. The scent of incense mingled with *gongo* rose from the folds of the visitor's garments. Ousmane's eyes wandered with desire from her ample bosom to the curve of her hips, from her plump little bottom to her smooth armpits. He undressed her in his mind, down to the black ribbon around the little white petticoat clinging to her skin. (Bâ, 1986: 110)

Ousmane is not the only character to reduce women to the status of object. This is demonstrated by the comments of Ouleymatou's brother, who questions Ousmane's visits to Ouleymatou not out of concern for his sister, but out of concern for what it could do to his reputation:

“But I’m telling you to watch your step, sister. A white woman doesn’t share her man. Honour demands that you refuse to be Ousmane’s plaything. He’s my friend. It would be a serious insult to me, an unforgivable shame if Ousmane played fast and loose with you and then didn’t marry you. If Ousmane comes here just to amuse himself, if instead of setting you up, he degrades you, if you’re just an object to him, it would be a serious matter, very serious, you understand?” (Bâ, 1986: 115)

When he warns Ouleymatou not to allow herself to become a ‘plaything’ for Ousmane, he does not warn her out of concern for her emotional well-being, rather his apprehension arises from patriarchal notions of ownership of women, and the shame that a woman’s actions can bring upon the family. This is evident as he positions himself as the recipient of the resulting insult and shame if the relationship between Ouleymatou and Ousmane should end badly.

Through the characters of Ouleymatou and Mireille, the novel maps or stages two versions of femininity: the stereotype of the sensual African woman providing sex and food versus the stereotype of the intellectual, emasculating Western woman who expects her husband to share in the labour of the home. Even Ouleymatou’s food is described in a sensual way as it encourages the use of Ousmane’s hands and prickles his senses:

He refused the spoon he was offered. He experienced a childish pleasure to be eating with his fingers again. He kneaded a mixture of fish, vegetables and couscous into little balls and chewed them slowly. The hot chillies stung his tongue, brought tears to his eyes and made his nose run so that he had to hold his handkerchief to it continuously. (Bâ, 1986: 117)

Ousmane relishes the opportunity of being fawned over by the other women at the dinner, and being given the choicest tidbits, a stark contrast in his mind to the home he shares with Mireille where he is told what cutlery to use and expected to share in the chores of the house. In this way, the novel seems to explicitly polarize Africa and the West, reducing them to simple binaries. Shevlin argues that these depictions of women, and the dismemberment of their bodies into different sets of body parts, is a “related narrative pattern” of how both Mireille and Ouleymatou become symbolic embodiments of Europe (imperialism) and Africa (return to his roots), respectively (1997: 949). Shevlin further develops her argument by stating: “*Scarlet Song* maps espousals of a need to “return

to one's roots"... as a move that ultimately debilitates women no matter what subject position they occupy" (Shevlin, 1997: 952). It is Ousmane's reasoning that he is returning to his roots, foregoing his earlier rationalizations, which enable him to justify his lust. Ousmane's justifications to grant himself certain liberties, as well as his objectifying gaze of women, are captured in the lines:

What could Mireille's lack of sophistication do in the face of the provocative tinkle of beads around the hips, or the aphrodisiac potency of *gongo* powder? What could Mireille do against the suggestive wiggle of an African woman's rump, wrapped in the warm colours of her *pagne*? He had struggled to forget Ouleymatou's seductiveness. He had tried to cure his obsession by bedding his wife. But what could Mireille do against the law of the blood? Defeated! Ousmane admitted that he was defeated. His life had been one long battle: against poverty, to come first, to escape from Coumba's clutches, to win Mireille. Must he go on struggling? Must he start all over again? Must he stand firm? His whole being said no. His conscience was strong enough to fight to the end, to win still more victories. But he no longer wanted to resist. He wanted to live, to live at last. (Bâ, 1986: 112)

Shevlin reads the sustained comparison between Mireille and Ouleymatou as the creation of "parallel terrains in which the conflicts and oppression wrought by differences in racial/national differences are placed alongside the conflicts and oppression wrought by patriarchal attitudes towards gender relations" (1997: 951). Thus, the contrasting image of the intellectual Mireille and the sensual and passionate Ouleymatou becomes representative not only of the differences in nationality, but also serves as a marker of sexual attraction: how could Mireille compete with the 'law of the blood'? His objectification of Mireille and Ouleymatou in this way is also indicative of his patriarchal attitude towards the treatment of women.

Through the stories of the female characters Bâ explores a range of subjectivities: "what it means to be female and white or poor or educated or black or unmarried or bound to tradition or in a racially mixed marriage in urban postcolonial Senegal" (Shevlin, 1997: 948). Concerning the representations of different versions of femininity in the novel, it is interesting to note how traditional femininity seems to be marked as truly African. There is an example in *Usine Niari Talli*, when Ousmane remembers back to the traditional collective femininity as mothers and care-givers:

Usine Niari Talli enfolded him. Yaye Khady's love was echoed in the hearts of all the women of the neighbourhood, all mothers by proxy, ready to wipe his chronically running nose, surrogate mothers, always watching over him, never hesitating to punish him when he rummaged in rubbish heaps for junk, bits of salvage, empty cans, cardboard boxes that his child's imagination transformed into matchless toys ... Were he to fall ill, the whole neighbourhood would ask anxiously after him. Every hand would bring talismans and holy water to deliver him from the spells of some invisible sorcerer. He remembered tossing and shivering with fever and throbbing temples, during a severe attack of malaria, while to his anxious ears came murmured advice on the ingredients, which invariably included garlic, for a rub-down with miraculous powers ... (Bâ, 1986: 36-37)

In this instance, the novel's endorsement of traditional femininity could be interpreted as a way to validate an African identity. In doing so, however, it is almost as though Bâ is prepared to sacrifice gender for the promotion of the race/nation. What is also revealed in the novel is an increasingly reductive equation between 'woman' and 'nation': thus Mireille becomes France and Ouleymatou becomes Senegal/Africa. The novel recognises this conflation in Ousmane's head, but also appears to partly endorse it. Ousmane begins to believe that being with a white woman is to be lost to his country, but to be with a black woman is to return to his roots as an African. In addition, Ousmane positions himself as the hero of a narrative, a narrative in which he envisions the black woman as a dependent, and as a symbol of Africa whom he must emancipate. At this point, the narrator seems to recognise the error of this conflation: "In his mind he confused Ouleymatou with Africa, 'an African which has to be restored to its prerogatives, to be helped to evolve!' When he was with the African woman, he was the prophet of the 'word made truth', the messiah with the unstinting hands, providing nourishment for body and soul. And these roles suited his deep involvement" (Bâ, 1986: 149-150). Ousmane believes that by being with Ouleymatou, he has restored a link within himself:

Ouleymatou had become his true soulmate, the woman in whom he recognised the extension of himself. She was, as Mabo Dialli so rightly sang, at one and the same time his roots, his stock, his growth, his flowering. They were linked by their childhood, spent in the maze of dusty streets. Most important, they were linked by their common origins: the same ancestors, the same skies. The same soil! The same traditions! Their souls

were impregnated with the sap of the same customs. They were excited by the same causes. Neither Ousmane nor Ouleymatou could disclaim this common essence without distorting their very natures. Cultural heritage was taking its pitiless revenge. It was reclaiming its due and revealing to Ousmane the end-point of his flight. (Bâ, 1986: 121)

The reference to cultural heritage taking revenge is perhaps indicative of Bâ's sympathy towards Ousmane as an African, and a sign of the novel's endorsement of his relationship with Ouleymatou, insofar as she is an African woman. Thus, while the novel's denouement seems to return to sympathy towards Mireille as an abandoned woman, it also seems to confirm her as the irrational, self-destructive woman in contrast to the health and sanity of Ouleymatou. The novel's conclusion, along with Ousmane's epiphany that his actions have contributed to Mireille's breakdown, also suggest that he is a victim of a cultural clash and the different demands of two contrasting cultures.

As the early relationship between Mireille and Ousmane develops and their separation calls for commitment, Mireille declares her intention to devote herself to Ousmane in a letter. By this time, however, Ousmane has already begun to reflect on the cultural tensions which may arise from his marriage to Mireille. As he reflects on the problem, he envisions himself as the 'hero' within patriarchal culture, the man who 'lifts up' the African woman:

The letter meant that he now had to give serious thought to his position, that he had to make a choice between two irreconcilable decisions, which either way would bring heartache. Ousmane compared himself to the hero of a Corneille drama. "On the one side, my heart draws me to a white girl ... on the other, my own people. My reason fluctuates between the two, like the arm of a balance on which two objects of equal value are weighed". (Bâ, 1986: 36)

As Sarvan observes, Ousmane "feels his marriage will call his credentials – as a Moslem, a male, an African – into question. He is torn between two worlds perceived to be mutually exclusive" (1988: 462). Ousmane concludes that he will not subjugate his identity for Mireille. In the same breath, however, he charts the concessions she will need to make, such as converting to Islam and adopting elements of his culture, in order for them to marry. At the forefront of his concerns is that he is rejecting the home and place/neighbourhood from which he has come:

Reject the Usine Niari Talli district? Escape from its clutches? Spew up its stench? It was tempting! But his home kept a tight grip on him. These loud voices in his ear, singing in unison of traditional values, urging obedience to the dictates of a collective existence, these were the voices of his birthplace. Any departure from the norm, any violent change was a source of bewilderment, derision or indignation. The torch of his cultural heritage lighting up the only path for him to follow ... Minds fossilized by the antiquated ideas of the past ... Protected by their armour-plating, manners and customs were safe against attack ... (Bâ, 1986: 36)

In this way, the novel seems to concur with a reading of space/place and identity as essentially linked and mutually reinforcing. This idea is reinforced by a similar mapping of the woman and the nation, rendering them indivisible: the novel's use of a 'violent' representation of women as place makes this idea seem irrefutable. Inevitably, Ousmane does return to the traditional home in order to find his true self, so place and identity have become conflated in his mind.

In the same way, Mireille experiences a dislocation in identity after returning to Senegal after her marriage to Ousmane. Initially, the newlyweds move into the home in Gibraltar to live with Yaye Khady and Djibril Gueye. It is evident that this new experience of communal living and communal space, which has been central to Ousmane's upbringing, presents a difficult transition for Mireille:

She made an effort to get used for the time being to the community life, which upset her. The meals were always served in a large aluminium dish from which everyone helped themselves. After every meal the tablecloth was folded up and pushed into a corner of doubtful cleanliness. The water which everyone used to wash their hands was dirty after the first person. That did not prevent the others from dipping their hands in and Mireille did not dare to be the exception. (Bâ, 1986: 81)

Despite her best intentions, she is unable to come to reconcile herself to the social conventions of her new home, an unease which is driven by Western notions of cleanliness. In the same way, differences in the understanding of domestic space also become a point of contestation for the newlyweds. Whenever Yaye Khady intrudes on Mireille's privacy by entering the bedroom,

Ousmane defends the behavior by attributing it to his mother's feeling that she has lost her son. This is further compounded by the fact that Mireille, who has been living with the Gueye family for several months, is paraded by Yaye Khady in front of her friends as "an object of curiosity". She "did not hesitate to bring them to the house, like a visit to the zoo" (Bâ, 1986: 81). However, Mireille is treated more hospitably by her sister-in-law, Soukeyna, who interprets for her and with whom she develops a deep friendship. Eventually, Mireille is offered a post by the Ministry of Education, which makes her eligible for an official flat, and "she couldn't move fast enough out of Yaye Khady's home and escape from her continual and annoying surveillance" (Bâ, 1986: 81). It is becoming increasingly evident that Mireille is uncomfortable in her surroundings and with this new sense of place enveloped in community.

It is within the space of their own home that the main action of the breakdown of the relationship between Mireille and Ousmane occurs. Contributing to this breakdown are their contrasting views/experiences of home as place. For Mireille, the home is a private place. With her savings from over the years she is able to furnish the flat to her liking: "[h]er innate feeling for beautiful objects and her taste for interior decoration brought a pleasing, personal note to their home" (Bâ, 1986: 82). Further:

She indulged herself on fitted carpets and wallpaper. She did not stint on the furnishing of her bedroom. In the sitting-room the dominant colour was orange. Thick rugs, comfortable armchairs, lampshades everywhere, original paintings which she had brought with her from France, all set up a life-style to which Ousmane was not accustomed. In one room she installed a desk and her collection of books: rare and precious volumes which she had received as gifts and carefully preserved, sets of novels and books for her work. (Bâ, 1986: 82)

For Ousmane, this experience of place pleases him to a certain degree: "Ousmane Gueye appreciated his environment. His bathroom sparkled. Toiletries filled the shelves. His electric razor hummed each morning. Thick bath-ropes and bath-towels big enough to drape yourself in like a *pagne*, hung from the hooks" (Bâ, 1986: 82). Mireille's desire to control this space is reflected in the lines: "[i]n her opinion, people's environments influenced their behaviour. And in order to 'hold on to' her man, she tidied up and moved around the furniture and knick-knacks to find the best way of

setting them all off” (Bâ, 1986: 82). Thus in Mireille’s mind, controlling the space of the home is a way of influencing Ousmane’s behaviour. Although Ousmane appreciates his home, the question is emerging as to whether it is “enough on its own to keep a man at home?” (Bâ, 1986: 82).

That the home becomes a principal site in which the tensions between cultures are played out is evident in the continuous invasion of the space of the home, in Mireille’s opinion, by both Yaye Khady and Ousmane’s friends. Yaye Khady continues to invade their privacy whenever she feels Ousmane has not graced her with his presence by sweeping into their bedroom. This becomes a ritual every Sunday: she would size up and compare everything within the house, attributing its value to Ousmane, even though much was purchased with Mireille’s savings. Further, Yaye Khady fuels the growing distance between the couple by purposefully picking her teeth and spitting on the carpet “fully aware that her action would spark off a quarrel after she had gone” (Bâ, 1986: 85):

As Mireille cleaned up angrily after her, she remarked, “It’s bad enough to be woken up, as if the last trumpet had sounded! But can’t she use the ashtrays for her filthy toothpicks? You might tell her so, without upsetting her.” Ousmane thundered, “You want me to forbid Yaye Khady to pick her teeth here? To hell with your carpet!” “You don’t have to forbid anything. You just have to teach her how to behave.” “In my country children don’t teach their parents how to behave.” Mireille had to give in. (Bâ, 1986: 85)

What is revealing about this passage is the alienating effect of Ousmane’s use of the words, “my country”, demarcating space and excluding/alienating Mireille from it. This suggests that country (space) and culture have also conflated in Ousmane’s mind, thus further limiting any negotiation of the possibility of change.

When Ousmane falls sick, the progressively precarious relationship is further disturbed by Yaye Khady’s daily visits, which Mireille experiences both as an invasion of privacy and an unpleasant ‘foreign’ intrusion: “Yaye Khady even had the effrontery to hang a horn on the door of her bedroom! And Djibril Gueye backed her up by settling into the flat every day at sunrise, to recite protective verses of the Koran” (Bâ, 1986: 94). Upon his recovery, Mireille suggests Yaye Khady can now stay at home, and when she resists they turn to Ousmane to settle the dispute:

But Ousmane was met by Yaye Khady in tears, who explained between her sobs and sniffs, “Your wife has thrown me out. She told me to never set foot here again.” Mireille countered, “I have put up with all these disgusting smells. I have put up with this horn, hung on my bedroom door, and my soiled sheets. Now that you are better, I demand that my privacy be respected. Yaye Khady won’t understand that this is not her home!” To his wife’s stupefaction, Ousmane sided with his mother and shouted, “If you can’t stand Yaye Khady’s presence here, then you can get out ...”. (Bâ, 1986: 94-95)

Tensions between ‘African’ and ‘Western’ domestic conventions are further explored through the interactions Ousmane has with his friends in the home. Their uninvited visits incite Mireille who sees their habits as blatant acts of disrespect for her home: “[t]hey laughed uproariously. They shouted at each other as if they were yards apart. Those who smoked ignored the ashtrays and scattered their cigarette-ends on the floor. Those who chewed colanuts sneaked the bits under the carpet” (Bâ, 1986: 86). The greater harm of these visits is to be found in their traditional and vocal views on gender, and their explicit demarcations of space in favour of Ousmane: “Ousmane is the master of the house!” and “Ousmane’s is the voice that counts!” (Bâ, 1986: 86). This partly inspires Ousmane’s growing belief that “When you marry a man, you also take on his life-style” (Bâ, 1986: 87). The traditionalist friends attack the mixed marriage (and reveal their gendered bias) stating that a woman is just a woman. They simultaneously praise Ousmane for not letting himself be “dictated to or assimilated” and for keeping up with his friends and family in the face of this *Toubab* (Bâ, 1986: 86). Thus, in the conflicts which arise in the domestic space, the novel’s sympathies seem to be with Mireille. It is the friends and mother-in-law who seem more unreasonable, and it is in this way that there appears to be an implicit critique of traditional practices, as in *So Long a Letter*. At the same time however, as the previous section reveals, there is sympathy for Ousmane’s cultural yearnings.

In *Scarlet Song*, while Bâ is sympathetic towards Mireille as a disadvantaged married woman, her descriptions of Ouleymatou at times suggest that Ousmane is right in starting a relationship with a woman who shares his roots and who is representative of tradition. Similarly, whilst Bâ allows Ousmane to realize the mistake of his second marriage and the resulting position it has placed Mireille in at the end of the novel, he is also almost presented as being a victim of the clash between

'Western' and 'African' culture. In this way, Bâ's gender politics differ from those of *So Long a Letter*, in which her central concern was the urgent need for women to create empowered spaces for themselves. In *Scarlet Song*, the problems of cultural allegiance and national identity are given much more weight than the struggles of women under patriarchy. What is also significant for my reading of the novel's inscriptions of space and gender is that space and place become the chief means by which the tension between 'Africa' and the 'West' are explored. This leads not only to reductive polarization of Western and African identities but also to a highly problematic conflation of the woman and the nation. Thus gender and space intersect in the way in which the return to 'home' and the founding of an indigenous Senegalese identity is figured as a return to an essentialised African woman.

Chapter 3: *Purple Hibiscus*

An analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, will find its primary focus in the tracing of the connections between the textual inscription of gendered identity and the representation of space/place. Literary criticism with regard to Adichie's novels is still an emerging field, and questions concerning the relationship between space and gender and the significance of gendered geographies are largely absent. Thus, a reading of the construction of gender relations and identities which also considers the demarcations of space within the text may provide a useful addition to the existing literature. Another point of primary concern will be a consideration of what implications arise for individual subjectivity (particularly with regard to women in times of crisis) in these differing experiences of space/place.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria. She grew up in Nsukka, where both her parents worked at the University of Nigeria, her father as a professor of statistics and her mother as a registrar. Both Enugu and Nsukka feature prominently as settings in her novels. Adichie travelled to America to continue her tertiary education, first at Drexel University in Philadelphia and then at Eastern Connecticut State University, where she graduated with a degree in communication and political science. She then went on to obtain a Masters' Degree in Creative Writing at John Hopkins University, Baltimore (Tunca, 2012). Adichie's first two novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, have received critical acclaim; they have also been selected for a variety of awards and distinctions.

Although questions concerning space and gender are largely absent in the literary criticism of Adichie's novels, there are critics whose concerns are intrinsically linked with questions of gender. In response to Adichie's novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, critics have considered Adichie's position as a 'third generation' Nigerian women writer (Hawley, 2008), as well as her gender politics. Drawing largely upon a womanist approach, some critics, such as Brenda Cooper (2008), have criticised Adichie for the way in which the concerns with gender and gender politics are subordinated in favour of a national project. Critics such as Bryce (2008) have offered a feminist perspective on the novels' negotiation of patriarchal oppression (Bryce, 2008) while Novak pursues a reading of the novels through the prism of trauma theory (Novak, 2009). Yet other critics, such as

Heather Hewett, have drawn attention to the question of women's silence, explored both as a form of oppression and as mode of resistance. Therefore, a reading of gender relations and identities in addition to demarcations of space is a potentially useful addition to the available literature, in light of the critical preoccupations and omissions in the emerging critical literature on Adichie.

The home of Eugene Achike is an important space for the novel's exploration of gender identities and relations, reflecting a more general concern with the domestic sphere as a site of both gender oppression and resistance. Lily Mabura makes the link between Eugene's house as a Gothic setting, given that it is the site of domestic violence, terror and isolation (Mabura, 2008: 208). Further, the house in Enugu mirrors the "fraught psyches of its inhabitants", and provides an appropriate setting for "psychological and social disintegration" (Mabura, 2008: 208). In order to understand the sense of the space which is experienced in Eugene's home, it is important to consider the paradoxical character of Eugene Achike as it is revealed in the contrasting locations of the public and private, spaces which demonstrate both his 'double character' and demarcate the shifts in his persona. In the public sphere, Eugene is heralded as a charismatic, generous, and well respected Catholic patriarch. In the space of the home, however, he is a violent, repressive and fanatically religious father and husband. Initially, the emphasis in the book is placed on the difference in public and private spheres and how the characters' identities are performed in these different spaces. Bryce makes the argument that *Purple Hibiscus* is set in Nigeria in a time of political upheaval, "in which attitudes have hardened, where violence that was external has become entrenched in the family" (Bryce, 2008: 58). Heather Hewett further links the violence of the public realm to that of the private by arguing that Eugene's familial authority "is made all the more important by his relative powerlessness in a postcolonial country in which military might trumps even the most successful and well-connected civilian" (Hewett, 2005: 80).

Eugene is an assimilated African who conforms and clings to the imported narrative of Christian redemption from a past of barbarism, rejecting any and all forms of collaboration with traditionalist Igbo views, even going so far as to completely reject his traditionalist father. Hewett argues that: "Eugene ... has constructed his self-identity around his rejection of his own father and all that he stands for" and that effectively "his father's traditional Igbo beliefs threaten the entire structure upon which he bases his identity and his power" (2005: 80). Thus, Eugene cuts the typically Fanonian figure of the classically divided colonised individual. The violence of this identity

is particularly marked in his religious views: an exacting conveyor of his beliefs, he requires absolute conformity from his wife and children. This is coupled with his need to demonstrate the required ‘civilised self’. Eugene’s construction as the self-hating colonial subject is indicated in Kambili’s observations on language:

He hardly spoke Igbo, and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English. Papa’s sister, Aunty Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product. She said this about Papa in a mild, forgiving way, as if it were not Papa’s fault, as one would talk about a person who was shouting gibberish from a severe case of malaria. (Adichie, 2005: 13)

Eugene’s wealthy home is a key signifier of his material ‘success’ and importance as a businessman and status as assimilated African. He is also a generous public benefactor whose public donations to the church in Abba are heralded amongst those in the family’s hometown community: “He led the way out of the hall, smiling and waving at the many hands that reached out to grasp his white tunic as if touching him would heal them of an illness” (Adichie, 2005: 90-91). In this example, he is elevated to an almost Christ-like status. However, in his assessment of the running of this very church, Kambili notes Eugene’s discomfort with the sermon in which the priest touches on real-life, tangible issues which are of concern in the community, as opposed to Eugene’s idealised belief of what a sermons should entail. The priest:

did not talk about the gospel during the sermon. Instead he talked about zinc and cement. “You people think I ate the money for the zinc, *okwĩa?*” he shouted, gesticulating, pointing accusingly at the congregation. “After all, how many of you give to this church, *gbo?* How can we build the house if you don’t give? Do you think zinc and cement cost a mere ten *kobo?*”

Papa wished the priest would talk about something else, something about the birth in the manger, about the shepherds and the guiding star; I knew from the way Papa held his missal too tight, the way he shifted often on the pew. (Adichie, 2005: 89-90)

This passage gives further emphasis to Eugene's characteristic as an assimilated African, who rejects and fails to recognise the needs of actual people within his own community, focusing instead on the ideals of imported religion, which in itself demonstrates the restrictions of his religious view. His charity seems to be a result of his desire to be the 'good Christian'. In addition to this exploration of the links between Christianity and patriarchy, Adichie refocuses the traditional canon of religion and colonialism by her addition of the aspect of gender, what Adrienne Rich would call a 'feminist revisioning' (1978) employing appropriation and inversion (Hewett, 2005: 80).

Instances of Eugene's public generosity are difficult to square with this private persona. For instance, in the case of the death of Ade Coker, Eugene blames himself for letting Ade run a story in the newspaper. By way of repairing his mistake, he organizes the funeral, sets up a trust for the deceased's family and buys them a new house. He also pays the newspaper staff substantial bonuses and tells them to take a long period of leave.

As I have argued, the dominant site of fictional inscription in the novel is the domestic sphere. This space is constructed in two ways: first, as the restrictive and oppressive domain of the colonial patriarchy, and second, as a liberated, feminine space associated with Eugene's sister Ifeoma. In the novelistic demarcation of space, it is Eugene's daughter, Kambili who, as first-person narrator, is assigned the primary role in the construction of space in the novel. It is her subjective experience of the domestic space in different contexts and locations which is foregrounded. The significance of this first-person narration is that it recentres the narrative: "[t]hrough Kambili's eyes, we come to see how an entire family has adapted to life under a rigid and unpredictable patriarch, and we understand how unbridled power can cause both physical and psychological destruction" (Hewett, 2005: 80). From Kambili's point of view, Eugene's house is experienced as a place of violence, obedience and silence. The novel reflects his governance of discipline and punishment by registering this rule in terms of the spatial relations of his home. Eugene's wealthy home is a key signifier of his material 'success' and status as assimilated African. Ironically, the enormous space of the home is not liberating but oppressive and claustrophobic. In similar fashion, the material objects such as chairs, tables, fans are experienced not as comforting but as threatening:

The silence was broken only by the whirl of the ceiling fan as it sliced through the still air. Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated. The off-white walls with the

framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me. Even the glass dining table was moving towards me. (Adichie, 2005: 7)

Whilst certain spaces of the home are oppressive and stifling, indeed at times threatening, Kambili has mixed emotions about Eugene's bedroom, which has been both a site of his abuse and a place in which he has demonstrated his affection. His cream bedroom holds some degree of safety as suggested by the fact that when Kambili was younger, Eugene would wrap her in a blanket during harmattan thunderstorms. In this sense, some of the objects in the space of the bedroom, such as the blanket and the rug, seem to symbolise some degree of safety for Kambili: "I sat on a similar blanket now, on the edge of the bed. I slipped off my slippers and sank my feet into the rug and decided to keep them sunk in so that my toes would feel cushioned. So that a part of me would feel safe" (Adichie, 2005: 41). In this way, the construction of the patriarch makes him even more difficult to handle. He is able to be both warm and protective, as has been observed with his generosity, but he is also violent and cruel. Facing a beating at his hands, Kambili also notes other elements of the bedroom which retain the oppressive and threatening feeling of the dining room: "All that cream blended and made the room seem wider, as if it never ended, as if you could not run even if you wanted to, because there was nowhere to run to" (Adichie, 2005: 41). Thus, the patriarchal figure of Eugene is mixed rather than wholly evil, and therefore harder for Kambili to deal with. Further, the image of the feet in the blanket suggests Kambili's need for a benevolent protector: a construction of femininity which recognises the seductive power of male protection made most evident when it is not there. Hewett makes the argument that: "Kambili ... is trapped in a cycle of self-negation by her adoration of her God-like father and her acute need for his affirmation" (2004: 10). Thus, it could be argued that the use of the term 'space' to describe the patriarchal home is more appropriate than the term 'place'. Eugene's house, for Kambili, is not experienced as home. Even though there is an immense sense of emotional investment on Kambili's part, it is clearly not a positive one, and Kambili is alienated in this space, to the point that she does not feel safe within it.

Within the space of the home, there is the additional space of the garden. It is interesting to take up Foucault's concept of the heterotopic space with regard to the garden. As I have mentioned, heterotopic space is a space which exists in tension with dominant social orderings. It is a space of fluidity and change, and of unfixed and re-imagined identities. In the home, the children can make no impression on their surroundings. The garden, however, provides Kambili and Jaja with a space

of new possibilities: of control, creativity and cultivation. It represents a space outside of the dominant social orderings which Eugene enforces in his home, in which Jaja plants and grows his purple hibiscus, which represent the change in the siblings' identities and their development of awareness and insight. For example, after Jaja's refusal to partake in communion, and his confrontation with Eugene, Kambili retires to her bedroom, where she looks out into the garden. The motif of the purple hibiscus is of particular importance as it is symbolic of Jaja and Kambili's growing awareness of self:

Our yard was wide enough to hold a hundred people dancing atilogu, spacious enough for each dancer to do the usual somersaults and land on the next dancer's shoulders. The compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires, were so high I could not see the cars driving by on our street. It was early rainy season, and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillea, cut smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars. (Adichie, 2005: 8-9)

However, even within this image of the space of the garden there are contradictions. The vibrant images of the plants and open spaces contrast with an image of the compound walls which are so high that they obstruct Kambili's view of the road, creating a feeling of entrapment (Mabura, 2008: 208). The description of the compound walls provides a visual sense for the way in which patriarchy is constructed in the novel, that is, as an attempt to wall in, contain, and stifle the inhabitants of the house: "[s]afely ensconced behind their high compound walls, buffered not only from the political violence taking place outside but also from others who might help them, the Achike family has become trapped by Eugene's wealth and his position in the community" (Hewett, 2005: 86). Whilst the novel recognises the power of patriarchal dominance, it does not neglect the potential for resistance. The possibility of growth and escape are suggested in the image of the flowers, most

notably in the image of the purple hibiscus. The purple hibiscus are offset with the red hibiscus of the children's past, bright red being symbolically associated with the male, and thus hinting at the patriarchal dominance set in a violent home. As Mabura argues, "[t]he emergence of purple hibiscus in a formerly startling red space speaks to the presence of a new balance of power", which hints at the children's new found freedom. This freedom resembles the purple hibiscus, which is: "rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the ones the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do" (Adichie, 2005: 16). The purple and red hibiscus are counterposed and are "metonymic of a series of oppositions on which the novel is structured: silence and speech, repression and spontaneity, state violence (for example, public executions) and family abuse, censorship and press freedom, harsh and gentle versions of masculinity" (Bryce, 2008: 59).

Another space of safety in the novel is the kitchen. In what has become a regular Sunday ritual, Beatrice plaits her daughter's hair in the kitchen whilst Sisi cooks. There is a sense of something safe, a ritual in the space of the kitchen amidst the cooking pots:

Every Sunday before lunch, in between telling Sisi to put a little more palm oil in the soup, a little less curry in the coconut rice, and while Papa took his siesta, Mama plaited my hair. She would sit on an armchair near the kitchen door and I on the floor with my head cradled between her thighs. Although the kitchen was airy, with the windows always open, my hair would still manage to absorb the spices, and afterward, when I brought the end of a braid to my nose, I would smell egusi soup, utazi, curry. (Adichie, 2005: 10)

However, these activities silently suggest the oppressive nature of everyday, in the acknowledgement that the time in the kitchen is spent during Eugene's siesta. A further example suggesting the oppressive nature of the everyday is suggested in the enormous significance which Kambili invests in the painting of Papa-Nnukwu given to her by her cousin Amaka, a painting which can only be enjoyed in the privacy of Kambili's bedroom. As Cooper suggests, the painting becomes for Kambili what the *étagère* is to her mother, "a sacred object/space to comfort her" (Cooper, 2008: 118).

What is interesting to consider about the figure of Beatrice, an educated woman in her own right, is both the impact of violence, oppression and silence, and the avenues of female response. In the novel's inscription of Beatrice's subjectivity, it is revealed is that Beatrice polishes the figurines

on the *étagère* as a means of coping with the patriarchal violence inflicted upon her. Cooper suggests that the *étagère* symbolises “a woman’s world, where knick-knack shelves satisfy the longings of women, who seek limited mastery over space” (Cooper, 2008: 117). When the *étagère* and figurines are smashed by Eugene’s missal in his fit of rage at Jaja’s missing communion, it seems to denote the fact that change is inevitable:

Maybe Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realizing it, only just letting myself think it. (Adichie, 2005: 15)

The impact of patriarchal dominance is also registered in physical demeanour, speech and interpersonal behaviour. In Beatrice’s case, it is evident in a kind of contraction of the self: she is described as speaking “the way a bird eats, in small amounts” (Adichie, 2005: 20). Similarly, the silence enforced upon Jaja and Kambili results in their inability initially, and perhaps still for Kambili, to express their emotions in words: “I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, “I’m sorry your figurines broke, Mama” (Adichie, 2005: 10). Kambili is unable to communicate her true feelings for fear of “implicating her father in his acts of violence” (Hewett, 2005: 86). The reality of “woman’s silenced voice” as Cooper calls it (2008: 112) is that Kambili’s own words betray her, as they are used as “instruments of concealment of the reality of Papa’s crimes” (Cooper, 2008: 116). This enforced silence has even gone so far as to result in the siblings creating an ‘eye language’ (*asusu anya*), a form of communication they have developed to omit words and hence avoid the consequences of those words. Thus, the novel details the wide ramifications of patriarchal violence: psychic, interpersonal, physical, and behavioural dimensions, which is marked not only by Kambili’s inability to speak but also hinted at in Beatrice’s multiple miscarriages and Jaja’s deformed finger.

The novel registers the intimate details of patriarchal oppression in the strict ordering of the children’s space and time. Eugene’s obsession with structuring his children’s lives is reflected in the passage:

Jaja sat on my bed for a while longer before he went downstairs to have lunch; I pushed my textbook aside, looked up, and stared at my daily schedule, pasted on the wall above me. *Kambili* was written in bold letters

on top of the white sheet of paper, just as *Jaja* was written on the schedule above Jaja's desk in his room ... Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep. He revised them often. When we were in school, we had less siesta time and more study time, even on weekends. When we were on vacation, we had a little more family time, a little more time to read newspapers, play chess or monopoly, and listen to the radio. (Adichie, 2005: 23-24)

Eugene's rescheduling of Jaja's timetable to suit his exemplary scholarly progression does not even allow for the children to spend lunch together, suggesting that Eugene's dominance extends even to the relationships between individuals in his home.

Eugene's dominance also extends to the structuring of a typical Sunday, which is strictly ordered in terms of time and space much like Jaja and Kambili's timetables:

We went upstairs to change, Jaja and Mama and I. Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterward. Even our family times on Sundays was quiet, without chess games or newspaper discussions, more in tune with the Day of Rest. (Adichie, 2005: 31)

It is increasingly evident in this passage that it is not only the children's space and time which Eugene obsessively controls: he has also instilled silence and obedience in his children, which contributes to the constraining atmosphere of the patriarchal home.

The patriarchal regulation of Sunday, bolstered by religious authority, makes Jaja's defiance during his confrontation with Eugene over his absence from communion all the more pointed. Here, Jaja defiantly breaks convention whilst the family are dining: he defaults on complimenting Eugene's new product from one of his factories, and leaves the dining table prematurely before the prayers. Kambili is eager to avoid conflict, and tries to appease Eugene with her own comments

about the juice from his factory: “I wanted to seem eager; maybe if I talked about how good it tasted, Papa might forget that he had not yet punished Jaja” (Adichie, 2005: 12). This disruption of the order of things is too much for Kambili:

I reached for my glass and stared at the juice, watery yellow, like urine. I poured it all down my throat, in one gulp. I didn't know what else to do. This had never happened before in my entire life, never. The compound walls would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani trees. The sky would cave in. The Persian rugs on the stretches of gleaming marble floor would shrink. Something would happen. (Adichie, 2005: 14)

The effects of Jaja's disobedience are registered for Kambili in terms of space and material objects. Her fears that the walls of the compound will come crumbling down, crushing the frangipani trees, and that the Persian rugs on their large marble floors would shrink offers a powerful sense of how crucial space is for the identity of the colonial patriarch. These imagined changes in the space become metonymic of the threats to patriarchy. Jaja's defiance and Kambili's fear of the demise of patriarchal order are also indicative of the way the novel reveals the differential impact of patriarchal violence on the boy and the girl.

Kambili liberally refers to herself as stuttering, choking, stammering and whispering words in order to avoid questions and conversation, all “symptoms of her physical struggle with fear” (Hewett, 2005: 85). This is especially noticeable in her initial interactions with her cousins and Ifeoma: “I went over to join them, starting to pace my breathing so that I would not stutter” (Adichie, 2005: 92), and when asked by Auntie Ifeoma if she would like to go to Nsukka, “I mumbled into my plate, then started to cough as if real, sensible words would have come out of my mouth but for the coughing” (Adichie, 2005: 97). In this sense at least, Kambili's cousin Amaka seems to be a potential double for her: Kambili negotiates her way to her own voice in part through the interactions with her cousin. Amaka is a self-assured teenage girl similar in age to her cousin Kambili. Unlike Kambili, however, she has been raised in a household which encourages her to voice her opinions. Amaka provides the platform to the alternative of what Kambili's life could be, whilst the girls represent different versions of femininity. Amaka's conversations and voicing of her opinions are both a cause of anxiety and fascination for Kambili. When Ifeoma and her children join the Achikes' at their table in Abba, Kambili anxiously thinks, “I wished Amaka would keep her voice

low. I was not used to this kind of conversation at table” (Adichie, 2005: 97). However, Kambili also admires her ability to speak out: “I wondered how Amaka did it, how she opened her mouth and had words flow easily out” (Adichie, 2005: 99). Further, when Amaka makes a polite yet critical comment on the juice served from Eugene’s factory, Kambili’s anxiety manifests itself physically:

Another knot formed in my throat, and I could not get a mouthful of rice down. I knocked my glass over as I reached for it, and the blood-colored juice crept over the white lace tablecloth. Mama hastily placed a napkin on the spot, and when she raised the reddened napkin, I remembered her blood on the stairs. (Adichie, 2005: 98-99)

Kambili’s struggle with fear manifests itself physically as she is “[e]stranged from her own speech and the workings of her throat and tongue”. Through this, the reader realises the extent to which her linguistic alienation reflects her personal isolation (Hewett, 2005: 85).

The violent and oppressive environment of the home in Enugu is continued in the novel’s portrayal of the family’s home in Eugene’s hometown of Abba. The portrayal of this second home is on an even grander scale than the first: “Our house still took my breath away, the four-story majesty of it, with the spurting fountain in front and the coconut trees flanking it on both sides and the orange trees dotting the front yard” (Adichie, 2005: 55). However, the holiday home in Abba also reflects the Gothic labyrinthine nature of the Enugu home: “The wide passages made our house feel like a hotel, as did the impersonal smell of doors kept locked most of the year, of unused bathrooms and kitchens and toilets, of uninhabited rooms. We only used the ground floor and first floor; the other two were last used years ago” (Adichie, 2005: 58). Even Eugene’s title in this community is grander, referring to him as ‘Omelora’, the one who does for the community. The one exception to the children’s lifestyle is that they are not expected to follow a timetable:

In Abba, Jaja and I had no schedules. We talked more and sat alone in our rooms less, because Papa was too busy entertaining the endless stream of visitors and attending church council meetings at five in the morning and town council meetings until midnight. Or maybe it was because Abba was different, because people strolled into our compound at will, because the very air we breathed moved more slowly. (Adichie, 2005: 59)

What is important to note about Abba is how this setting provides a platform for more traditionally-defined gender roles. Kambili observes how the male voices can be heard arguing inside the house, whilst female voices are heard in the backyard as the women of the community cook soups and stews in huge pots to serve the people who were visiting, revealing the gendered roles occupied within the gendered spaces of the 'home' in this setting:

The church council meeting had started, and we heard the male voices rise sometimes in argument, just as we heard the up-down cadence of the female voices in the backyard, the wives of our umunna who were oiling pots to make them easier to wash later and grinding spices in wooden mortars and starting fires underneath the tripods. (Adichie, 2005: 68)

The home of Ifeoma is an equally important space for the novel's exploration of gender identities and relations, and acts as an alternative to the domestic space experienced in Eugene's home, which was primarily a site of gender oppression and resistance. Kambili's experiences of space and place are drastically altered upon being sent to live with Ifeoma and her family, after the outbreak of a military coup, and it is here that the siblings are exposed to a completely different family life, and liberated feminine space. Crucially, it is the move from one spatial location to another which alters Jaja and Kambili's circumstances and perceptions (Cooper, 2008: 111).

Compared to Eugene's wealthy homes, the setting of Ifeoma's house is very different from both the Enugu and Abba houses which Jaja and Kambili are used to:

It was in the fourth block we came to, a tall, bland building with peeling blue paint and with television aerials sticking out from the verandahs. It had three flats on each side, and Auntie Ifeoma's was on the ground floor on the left. In front was a circular burst of bright colors – a garden – fenced around with barbed wire. Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a hand-painted wreath. (Adichie, 2005: 112)

Ifeoma's home is small, somewhat dilapidated from the outside and bordered by several other flats, nothing like the grandiose homes of Enugu and Abba. However, the garden quickly draws Kambili's attention, just like the house in Enugu, with its vibrant flowers.

Unlike the large rooms and high ceilings in Enugu, Ifeoma's home in Nsukka has noticeably low ceilings and smaller rooms which they must share. As a result of the lack of space, the air is pervaded by the smells of the kitchen and spices, which give Kambili a sense of comfort and safety:

I noticed the ceiling first, how low it was. I felt I could reach out and touch it; it was so unlike home, where the high ceilings gave our rooms an airy stillness. The pungent fumes of kerosene smoke mixed with the aroma of curry and nutmeg from the kitchen. (Adichie, 2005: 113)

Although the rooms of Eugene's houses are large, they are not liberating spaces, but rather oppressive and claustrophobic, as the phrase "an airy stillness" suggests. Ifeoma's lounge also breaks convention with the banal creams Kambili associates with the oppressive space of Enugu, and although the material objects located in this space are in close proximity, they are not perceived as threatening and encroaching, as the objects are in Enugu:

I sat down on the brown sofa. The seams of the cushions were frayed and slipping apart. It was the only sofa in the living room; next to it were cane chairs, softened with brown cushions. The center table was cane, too, supporting an oriental vase with pictures of kimono-clad dancing women. Three long-stemmed roses, so piercingly red I wondered if they were plastic, were in the vase. (Adichie, 2005: 114)

The rest of the space of the home is small and full to bursting. As a liberated, intellectual woman, Auntie Ifeoma has filled her home with books that burst the bookshelves in the hallway. Although this creates a small sense of space, it also adds to the intimacy of the space: "I followed her down a short hallway lined with crammed bookshelves. The gray wood looked as though it would collapse if just one more book were added. Each book looked clean; they were all either read often or dusted often" (Adichie, 2005: 114).

Unlike the ordered, regulated spaces of the patriarchal home, Auntie Ifeoma's home is a somewhat eclectic, chaotic confusion of space, in which the rooms have dual functions as shared sleeping areas and food storage rooms, suggesting a kind of anarchy in the use of space which reflects both greater intimacy and human connection, and greater freedom and fluidity:

“This is my room. I sleep here with Chima,” Aunty Ifeoma said, opening the first door. Cartons and bags of rice were stacked against the wall near the door. A tray held giant tins of dried milk and Bournvita, near a study table with a reading lamp, bottles of medicine, books. At another corner, suitcases were piled on top of one another. Aunty Ifeoma led the way to another room, with two beds along one wall. They were pushed together to create space for more than two people. Two dressers, a mirror, and a study desk and a chair managed to fit in also. (Adichie, 2005: 114)

As previously mentioned, the kitchen in Enugu to a certain degree represents a source of comfort for Kambili, in the sense of safety and ritual it has provided. It is a scene for both physical intimacy and mothering, which are not available in the rest of the Enugu house. Ifeoma’s kitchen in Nsukka is small, but homely. However, it becomes an affirmative space for Kambili and her identity, even more so than in her home. This image of the kitchen represents a place of labour, spices, smells and conversations:

Aunty Ifeoma sounded so casual, as if it were completely normal to have us visit, as if we had visited so many times in the past. Jaja led the way into the kitchen and sat down on a low wooden stool. I stood by the door because there was hardly enough room in the kitchen not to get in her way, as she drained rice at the sink, checked on the cooking meat, blended tomatoes in a mortar. The light blue kitchen tiles were worn and chipped at the corners, but they looked scrubbed clean, as did the pots, whose lids did not fit, one side slipping crookedly into the pot. The kerosene stove was on a wooden table by the window. The walls near the window and the threadbare curtains had turned black-gray from the kerosene smoke. Aunty Ifeoma chattered as she put the rice back on the stove and chopped two purple onions, her stream of sentences punctuated by her cackling laughter. She seemed to be laughing and crying at the same time because she reached up often to brush away the onion tears with the back of her hand. (Adichie, 2005: 115)

In similar fashion, the text also marks an explicit contrast between the space of the dining room table in Enugu and Aunty Ifeoma’s table:

The dining room table was made of wood that cracked in dry weather. The outermost layer was shedding, like a molting cricket, brown slices curling up from the surface. The dining chairs were mismatched. Four were made of plain wood, the kind of chairs in my classroom, and the other two were black and padded. Jaja and I sat side by side. Aunty Ifeoma said the grace, and after my cousins said “Amen,” I still had my eyes closed. (Adichie, 2005: 119)

The most notable difference, despite the haphazard arrangement of furniture, is how this space is conducive to conversation. As has been observed in Kambili’s dining experiences in both Enugu and Abba, she becomes so anxious that she accidentally knocks over glasses of juice. In Eugene’s presence, the dining room table is also a space of restricted utterings to please Eugene. Hewett makes the argument that Kambili initially struggles to interact with other people, based on her previous subjectivity: “she does not know what she would say, or how she would say it, if she could say anything. She does not know what she feels or who she is; her subjectivity is too wrapped up in pleasing her father” (Hewett, 2005: 86). However, in Nsukka with her aunt and cousins, Kambili observes how “[l]aughter floated over my head. Words sprouted from everyone, often not seeking and not getting any response. We always spoke with a purpose back home, especially at the table, but my cousins seemed to simply speak and speak and speak” (Adichie, 2005: 120). Differences in the experience of the homes are signalled in textual oppositions between the silence of Eugene’s household and the laughter experienced in Aunty Ifeoma’s home. Further, Kambili considers Ifeoma’s table as “a table where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished” (Adichie, 2005: 120). Thus, Kambili is very aware of the different ordering of the space of the dining room table and what that space allows in terms of freedom in the form of open, honest, uncensored and unscripted conversation. Although Kambili initially shows some signs of resistance to life at Ifeoma’s – “I pressed my lips together, biting my lower lip, so my mouth would not join in the singing on its own, so my mouth would not betray me” (Adichie, 2005: 138-139) – she eventually begins to respond to the family’s influence, an influence which eventually affords Kambili the opportunity for growth:

Their freewheeling discourse encourages the growth of Kambili’s self-awareness. As a result, the binary structure under which she had grown up begins to unravel and she begins to question her father’s rigid dogmatism ...

Through transgressing the precepts of her father's moralistic universe, Kambili finds her way to voicing herself, thus becoming the author of her own story. (Hewett, 2005: 86)

This disruption of patriarchal influence as a result of the spatial shift to Enugu is registered immediately in Ifeoma's action of taking away the children's schedules, which is initially registered by Kambili as a transgressive act: "I watched Auntie Ifeoma walk into her room with our schedules. My mouth felt dry, my tongue clinging to the roof" (Adichie, 2005: 124). Without the strict ordering of time and space and the rigid structure of family life under Eugene, Kambili is initially at a loss. Once again the disruption of order is a source of anxiety for her and is expressed in her resistance to life there: "I felt as if my shadow were visiting Auntie Ifeoma and her family, while the real me was studying in my room in Enugu, my schedule posted above me" (Adichie, 2005: 125).

The gendered responses of Kambili and Jaja within Ifeoma's home are also important points to consider. For Jaja, the space of the garden provides him with a space in which to exercise his control and creativity in the cultivation of the plants, and it is the images of the flowers, and especially of the purple hibiscus, which reflects the possibility of growth and escape: "I looked up to watch him, to watch his dark skin covered with beads of sweat that gleamed in the sun. I had never seen his arm move this way, never seen this piercing light in his eyes that appeared when he was in Auntie Ifeoma's garden" (Adichie, 2005: 145). There is also the pressure of a particular definition of masculinity revealed in Jaja's response to observing Obiora acting the part of the man of the house, a role which Jaja feels he should have emulated to protect both his mother and sister from the tyrannical grip of his father.

There are several factors which alter Kambili's response to living in Ifeoma's home. The impact of patriarchal dominance in Eugene's home is registered in Kambili's physical demeanour, speech and interpersonal behaviour. Kambili's inability to speak without difficulty is her most noticeable response. What becomes evident in the space of Ifeoma's home is how Kambili has internalised her silence much more than Jaja, thus revealing the differential impact of patriarchal dominance on the boy and the girl. This is evident in Jaja's increasing comfort in Ifeoma's home and Kambili's observation of the ease with which he breaks that silence: "How did Jaja do it? How could he speak so easily? Didn't he have the same bubbles of air in his throat, keeping the words back, letting out only a stutter at best?" (Adichie, 2005: 145).

One of the ways in which Kambili is able to negotiate a new gendered response in relation to place is through interactions with Ifeoma's family, most notably in connection with her potential double Amaka, and Ifeoma's encouragement of dialogue and engagement. After being continuously taunted by Amaka, Kambili finally finds her voice:

Aunty Ifeoma's eyes hardened – she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at me. “*O gnnidi*, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her!”

I watched a wilted African lily fall from its stalk in the garden. The crotons rustled in the late morning breeze. “You don't have to shout, Amaka,” I said, finally. “I don't know how to do the *orab* leaves, but you can show me.” I did not know where the calm words had come from. I did not want to look at Amaka, did not want to see her scowl, did not want to prompt her to say something else to me, because I knew I could not keep up. I thought I was imagining it when I heard the cackling, but then I looked at Amaka – and sure enough, she was laughing.

“So your voice can be this loud, Kambili,” she said. (Adichie, 2005: 170)

The second factor which aids in altering Kambili's gendered response is Father Amadi, who presents an alternative construction of masculinity. Thus, apart from initiating a rebellion against patriarchal control, Nsukka also provides the setting for the story of sexual awakening. As with Amaka, Kambili marvels at the ease with which Father Amadi speaks: “He spoke so effortlessly, as if his mouth were a musical instrument that just let sound out when touched, when opened” (Adichie, 2005: 138). Kambili's fascination with Father Amadi's voice is one of the main sources of her attraction to him, a voice which contrasts with her own silence and inability to articulate herself. His presence and encouragement enable Kambili to break through her normal stuttering and choking, although initially not without anxiety: “I blurted out, then wished I had not asked, that the bubbles in my throat had not let that through” (Adichie, 2005: 179). However, her interactions with Father Amadi do eventually reveal quite a sensuous liberation in his presence and Kambili feels free to embrace her voice: “I laughed. I laughed because the allamanda flowers were so yellow. I laughed imagining how bitter their white juices would taste if Father Amadi had really sucked them. I laughed because Father Amadi's eyes were so brown I could see my reflection in them” (Adichie,

2005: 269). Even though a further relationship does not develop between the two, Kambili still treasures Father Amadi for the fact that he acts as a reminder of her worthiness.

The third factor is the space of Nsukka itself and what possibilities it allows for. This change is especially noticeable once the liberated space of Nsukka is experienced and then contrasted with Eugene's home upon the siblings' return to Enugu. Most notably, this is indicated by Kambili's response to the space of the home:

I wanted to tell Mama that it did feel different to be back, that our living room had too much empty space, too much wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our furniture was lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted skin in the harmattan, the leather sofas' greeting was a clammy coldness, the Persian rugs were too lush to have any feeling. (Adichie, 2005: 192)

After neglecting to inform Eugene about Papa-Nnukwu's visit to Nsukka at the same time as their visit, Jaja and Kambili are punished by having their feet scalded with hot water:

I wanted to say "Yes, Papa," because he was right, but the burning on my feet was climbing up, in swift courses of excruciating pain, to my head and lips and eyes. Papa was holding me with one wide hand, pouring the water carefully with the other. I did not know that the sobbing voice – "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" was mine until the water stopped and I realized my mouth was moving and the words were still coming out. (Adichie, 2005: 194-195)

This violent action of burning Kambili's feet serves to completely sever her from her words. That domestic violence is refracting colonial violence is suggested in the story Eugene tells Kambili in the aftermath of the foot-burning. He tells of how he was similarly punished as a boy by one of the priests who raised him by having his hands soaked in boiling water for being caught masturbating. Hewett argues that: "Eugene himself is trapped in a cycle of abuse emanating from colonialism and Christianity, yet he views the act of punishing his own children as compassionate. He is hurting them in order to save them from the fires of hell" (Hewett, 2005: 84).

After being severely beaten by Eugene for harbouring the painting of Papa-Nnukwu, Kambili finally responds to Beatrice's statement that Eugene has been by her bed for days whilst she

was hospitalised: “It was hard to turn my head, but I did it and looked away” (Adichie, 2005: 214). This moment is both transformative and empowering for Kambili. This seemingly small action marks the end of both Kambili’s respect for and fear of her father as well the hold he had on her. It is transformative and empowering because she will no longer comply with the violence inflicted upon her by Eugene. It is with this realisation that Kambili returns to Nsukka and it is this second visit which denotes the biggest change for her. Kambili comments on the new rain:

I went out to the verandah and stood by the wet metal railing, watching the rain thin to a drizzle and then stop. God had decided on sunlight. There was the smell of freshness in the air, that edible scent the baked soil gave out at the first touch of rain. I imagined going into the garden, where Jaja was on his knees, digging out a clump of mud with my fingers and eating it. (Adichie, 2005: 218)

Kambili and Amaka stand on the verandah discussing the cause of Kambili’s injuries and Father Amadi’s visit to the hospital: “I was happy that he came to the hospital,’ I said. It felt easy saying that, letting the words roll off my tongue” (Adichie, 2005: 220). She even easily admits that it was Eugene who had inflicted the injuries to Amaka. Thus, there is the distinct change in Kambili from thought to being able to articulate her thoughts.

The final return to the space of the patriarchal home is marred by the complete symbolic disruption of the space: “Everything came tumbling down after Palm Sunday” (Adichie, 2005: 257). Even the garden, a space which was previously regarded in some ways as more liberated, is literally encroaching on Kambili with its smells: “The scent of fruits filled my nose when Adamu opened our compound gates. It was as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados. It nauseated me” (Adichie, 2005: 252-253). Kambili refers to irregular occurrences within the house which symbolise the disruption of space: a storm leaves trees uprooted, the satellite dish falls, the door of Kambili’s wardrobe dislodges, and Sisi breaks a full set of Beatrice’s china. This is inevitably followed by the fall of the patriarch himself, and Kambili registers her loss through space – the cold expansive floors and the expectation and anticipation of hearing Eugene’s footsteps which heralded his arrival:

I took off my slippers. The cold marble floor drew the heat from my feet. I wanted to tell Jaja that my eyes tingled with unshed tears, that I still listened

for, wanted to hear, Papa's footsteps on the stairs. That there were painfully scattered bits inside me that I could never put back because the places they fit into were gone. Instead, I said, "St. Agnes will be full for Papa's funeral Mass". (Adichie, 2005: 289-290)

However, it is the space of Nsukka which has intrinsically altered Kambili's perceptions:

As we drove back to Enugu, I laughed loudly, above Fela's stringent singing. I laughed because Nsukka's untarred roads coat cars with dust in the harmattan and with sticky mud in the rainy season. Because the tarred roads spring potholes like surprise presents and the air smells of hills and history and the sunlight scatters the sand and turns it into gold dust. Because Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song. As laughter. (Adichie, 2005: 299)

Thus the alternative to patriarchal dominance is explicitly registered in spatial terms in the form of Ifeoma's home.

The final space which will be considered is the space of the home of Papa-Nnukwu in Abba. Papa-Nnukwu is the paternal grandfather of Kambili and Jaja, who has been sidelined in their lives due to the conflicting religious doctrine of Eugene, and Papa-Nnukwu's traditionalist beliefs. In Abba, where the family's village house is located, Kambili and Jaja are briefly permitted to briefly visit their grandfather:

Jaja swung open Papa-Nnukwu's creaking wooden gate, which was so narrow that Papa might have to enter sideways if he ever were to visit. The compound was barely a quarter of the size of our backyard in Enugu. Two goats and a few chickens sauntered around, nibbling and pecking at drying stems of grass. The house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and Aunty Ifeoma growing up here. It looked just like the pictures of houses I used to draw in kindergarten: a square house with a square door at the center and two square windows on each side. The only difference was that Papa-Nnukwu's house had a verandah, which was bounded by rusty metal bars. The first time Jaja and I had visited, I had walked in looking for the bathroom, and

Papa Nnukwu had laughed and pointed at the outhouse, a closet-size building of unpainted cement blocks with a mat of entwined palm fronds pulled across the gaping entrance. I had examined him that day, too, looking away when his eyes met mine, for signs of difference, of Godlessness. I didn't see any, but I was sure they were there somewhere. They had to be. (Adichie, 2005: 63)

Vastly different from Eugene's wealthy houses in Enugu and Abba, and different even from Ifeoma's home in Nsukka, Papa-Nnukwu's home is both sparse and simple. It is however the space in which both Eugene and Ifeoma grew up. Mabura argues that Adichie "teases out the peculiarities of the 'Postcolonial Gothic' in continental Africa as she (dissects fraught African psyches and) engages in Gothic-like reclamation of her Igbo heritage, including Igbo-Ukwu art, language, and religion" (Mabura, 2008: 206). In *Purple Hibiscus* this is most notable in the character of Papa-Nnukwu and his traditionalist beliefs. Indoctrinated by Eugene into the belief that Papa-Nnukwu is a heathen, Kambili is wary of him and always searching for some sign of Godlessness. It is not until she observes his morning prayer ritual in Nsukka that she truly appreciates his spirituality. She is surprised that he prays for Eugene with "the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Auntie Ifeoma" (Adichie, 2005: 168). The pivotal moment for Kambili comes when: "[h]e was still smiling as I quietly turned and went back to the bedroom. I never smiled after we said the rosary back home. None of us did" (Adichie, 2005: 169).

Gender roles in the rural community of Abba have already been observed in Eugene's compound; however what Papa-Nnukwu reveals are traditional gender roles, not only in ritual but also more generally in the everyday. Whilst Ifeoma and her family, Kambili, Jaja, and Papa-Nnukwu are driving to see the *mmuo* in Ezilcheke, the nuances of Papa-Nnukwu's gender relations are revealed, indicating that gendered subjectivity ascribed to women is not necessarily dealt with better in traditional culture than in the Christian tradition: "But you are a woman. You do not count" (Adichie, 2005: 83). For her part, Ifeoma asserts her stand as a liberated feminist intellectual by refuting Papa-Nnukwu's statement that he hopes she will find a man to rely on:

"I joke with you, *nwa m*. Where would I be today if my *chi* had not given me a daughter?" Papa Nnukwu paused. "My spirit will intercede for you, so that *Chukwu* will send a good man to take care of you and the children."

“Let your spirit ask *Chukwuto* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask,” Aunty Ifeoma said. (Adichie, 2005: 83)

In this way, as Cheryl Stobie states: “Adichie does not present the grandfather or the traditionalism that he embodies as perfect, as she describes a number of incidents where he unwittingly reveals the sexism of his culture and its spiritual practices” (Stobie, 2010: 423). In Aunty Ifeoma’s response, however, where she reveals that her aspiration is to receive a promotion rather than a husband, we can observe “a modern shift in perspective on gender issues” (Stobie, 2010: 424).

Further, it is interesting to note Papa-Nnukwu’s almost (culturally) enforced gendered responses for both the women in his family and for the grandsons in terms of how they are to view the parade of the *mmuo*. For example, the women in the community are not allowed to look upon specific *mmuo*. As far as ascribing certain characteristics to women, this is revealed in the community’s idea and representation of what a female *mmuo* would look like: “The *mmuo* he pointed to was small; its carved wooden face had angular, pretty features and rouged lips. It stopped often to dance, wiggling this way and that, so that the string of beads around its waist swayed and rippled” (Adichie, 2005: 85-86). The responses Papa Nnukwu expects from his male grandchildren is also revealed when Jaja, unbeknownst to him, breaks the taboo of acknowledging the fact that there are people inside a costume and Papa-Nnukwu rebukes him: ““Shh! These are *mmuo*, spirits! Don’t speak like a woman!” Papa-Nnukwu snapped, turning to glare at Jaja” (Adichie, 2005: 87).

In conclusion, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, provides a platform for a discussion of the inter-relations between inscriptions of space/place and gendered identity. In regard to the significance of space in the novel, Cooper states that:

All of these places and their furnishings and the gardens and their plants – the houses in Enugu and Abba, Papa-Nnukwu’s compound and shrine in Abba, the flat and garden in Nsukka, the sacred shrine at Aokpe and finally the stinking prison – become significant spaces, which are richly, thickly and intricately described in all their material detail. (2008: 112)

It is these ‘significant’ and varied spaces which allow for an exploration of gendered identities and relations predominantly within the domestic sphere, as well as a consideration of how the characters’ identities are performed in these different spaces. *Purple Hibiscus* is a narrative of self-emergence,

finding a voice, and exploring different versions of acquiescent/resistant femininity whilst resisting a dominant patriarch. It is partly through the renegotiation of space that the characters are able to break through the repressed alienation of the patriarchal home.

Chapter 4: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half of a Yellow Sun is an exploration of the Nigerian-Biafra war of the 1960s, specifically and the way in which large public events on a national scale are mediated through the details of familial relationships and the domestic space. My focus, as in other chapters, will be the fictional inscription of gendered identity and experience and the ways in which this is mediated by space in the novel, particularly the constant relocation of the domestic domain. We are introduced to the characters in Part One of the novel. Ugwu sets out from his village to work for Odenigbo in his home in the university town of Nsukka. Shortly after, Odenigbo's lover Olanna moves into the house. We are also introduced to Olanna's twin sister Kainene, with whom she has a difficult relationship, and the English expatriate, Richard. As in the other novels discussed in this thesis, the domestic sphere is the most prominent site of fictional inscription within the novel. In its account of the civil war, the novel traverses a variety of spatial locations as the characters seek safety. The novel's attention to the demarcations of space is of pivotal concern for the representation of gendered experience and identity.

Half of a Yellow Sun exhibits a fractured temporal structure, oscillating between the early and late 1960s. The result for the novel's inscription of space is a continual oscillation between different domestic spaces, varying subjective experiences of space and the social relations which are played out. Part One and Part Three are set in the early 1960s. Part Two and Part Four are set in the late 1960s. In this latter period, the independent Republic of Biafra was formed due to post-independence strife, leading to a new and separate national identity (Mabura, 2008: 203). This, coupled with the continual disruption of domestic location and the hardships of war, lead to dislocations of both identity and space. The effect of this postmodernist structure is such that in Part Three, we observe some characters involved in the tasks of everyday life, but we have already witnessed their deaths in Part Two. Thus, as Cooper states, "the meaning of the everyday within its supposed ordinariness is de-familiarised" (Cooper, 2008: 135). As time does not follow a linear path, the reader's perceptions of reality are distorted through hindsight. For example, Part Three is viewed through the lens of the realities of war, and thus the present reality is profoundly altered (Cooper, 2008). In addition to temporal disruption, the use of three focaliser characters and the inclusion of

metafictional elements such as journalism, displayed in the book within the book idea, contribute to the postmodernist structure of the novel.

The central demarcation of space in *Purple Hibiscus* is between the ‘town’ and the ‘country’. This division, whilst important to consider in a reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, is permeated with other demarcations such as ‘tradition’ and ‘western modernity’, poverty and wealth, all of which have implications for the inscription of gender roles and identities. Focusing on the parts of the novel that deal with the early 1960s (pre war), it is possible to contrast the University town of Nsukka and the home of the Ozobias in Lagos, with the more traditional spaces of Ugwu’s rural home and the impoverished home of Uncle Mbaezi and Aunty Ifeka in Kano. Thus, the spatial demarcations of the novel seem to mark tensions between the rich and the poor and between westernised identities and traditional Igbo identities. As Cooper states, although the novel’s focus remains on the middle class, “[t]he different realms that Adichie captures are linked to her understanding of the distinctions between the affluent and the poor, in terms of how the war impinged on their everyday lives” (Cooper, 2008: 135).

These spatial demarcations are especially evident in Ugwu’s move from the traditional Igbo homestead of Opi to the middle-class University town of Nsukka. Ugwu’s assessment of the Westernised, middle-class home effectively de-familiarises the space. However, as ‘houseboy’, this space also affords Ugwu the opportunity to engage in traditionally female roles such as cooking and cleaning, which would have been frowned on at home.

The tension in Ugwu’s assessment of the different locations is evident from his arrival not only within the domestic sphere, but also in his first impressions of the setting of the neighbourhood/town:

He had never seen anything like the streets that appeared after they went past the university gates, streets so smooth and tarred that he itched to lay his cheek down on them. He would never be able to describe to his sister Anulika how the bungalows here were painted the colour of the sky and sat side by side like polite, well-dressed men, how the hedges separating them were trimmed so flat on top that they looked like tables wrapped with leaves. (Adichie, 2006: 3)

Ugwu's tactile sense of the streets and his disbelief at the painted houses and neat hedges are indications of how surreal this new environment is to him. Upon arrival at Odenigbo's house where he will be working as houseboy, Ugwu once again feels the need to embrace and touch the surfaces around him, so as to come to terms with the differences set before him: "Ugwu held back from reaching out to touch the cement wall, to see how different it would feel from the mud walls of his mother's hut that still bore the faint patterns of moulding fingers" (Adichie, 2006: 4).

Since the mapping of this space is from Ugwu's point of view, it serves to de-familiarise both the middle-class domestic space itself and the objects therein: "Ugwu had never seen a room so wide. Despite the brown sofas arranged in a semi-circle, the side tables between them, the shelves crammed with books, and the centre table with a vase of red and white plastic flowers, the room still seemed to have too much space" (Adichie, 2006: 4). Odenigbo's home serves as the precedent of the "modern opulent space housing [the] wealthy African elite" (Mabura, 2008: 209) described by Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, and Ugwu experiences the space as enormous and superfluous in much the same way as Kambili does, despite the fact that the room is well furnished and "crammed with books" (Adichie, 2006: 4). This feeling of 'too much space' reflects his own expectations of the (middle-class) domestic space as someone who has come from a much more modest and traditional rural lifestyle. In addition, he views the objects in the room with disbelief: "[t]o think that he would sit on these sofas, polish this slippery-smooth floor, wash these gauzy curtains" (Adichie, 2006: 5). Further, the domestic space is mapped by Ugwu as he notes how Odenigbo's books are piled in every room and on every surface from the bedrooms to bathrooms, the study and the storeroom next to various supplies, suggesting the dual roles of the rooms as storage and living space:

Ugwu turned off the tap, turned it on again, then off. On and off and on and off until he was laughing at the magic of the running water and the chicken and bread that lay balmy in his stomach. He went past the living room and into the corridor. There were books piled on the shelves and tables in the three bedrooms, on the sink and cabinets in the bathroom, stacked from floor to ceiling in the study, and in the storeroom, old journals were stacked next to crates of Coke and cartons of Premier beer. Some of the books were placed face down, open, as though Master had not yet finished reading them but had hastily gone onto another ... He walked on tiptoe from room to room, because his feet felt dirty, and as he did so he

grew increasingly determined to please Master, to stay in this house of meat and cool floors. (Adichie, 2006: 6-7)

In the novel, the urban space of Odenigbo's house is counterposed to the rural compound of Ugwu's family, leading to implicit comparisons between the middle-class, westernised lifestyle adopted by residents of Nsukka and the traditional lifestyle of Opi. Most glaring is the discrepancy between the richer middle-class and the poorer village community. In Nsukka, Ugwu is fascinated with the tarred street and the spacious house, compared to the hut he shares with his mother and siblings in Opi. Ugwu is filled with disbelief at the furnishings, objects, and even the indoor plumbing within Odenigbo's house, which are arguably necessities for the middle-class. However, for Ugwu even the meat and bread are luxuries that he would have had to share with his siblings at home, indicative of the complete lack of necessities that his family have to survive. The rural homestead does not even have electricity, as is evident in Ugwu's description of the bulb which does "not cast long shadows on the wall like the palm oil lamps back home" (Adichie, 2006: 7). Ugwu's move from the rural to urban space also seems to signify the end of his childhood as he reflects on how his sister will take over his responsibilities in his absence:

His mother would be preparing the evening meal now, pounding *akpu* in the mortar, the pestle grasped tightly with both hands. Chioke, the junior wife, would be tending the pot of watery soup balanced on three stones over the fire. The children would have come back from the stream and would be taunting and chasing one another under the breadfruit tree. Perhaps Anulika would be watching them. She was the oldest child in the household now, and as they all sat around the fire to eat, she would break up the fights when the younger ones struggled over the strips of dried fish in the soup. She would wait until all the *akpu* was eaten and then divide the fish so that each child had a piece, and she would keep the biggest for herself, as he had always done. (Adichie, 2006: 7)

The differences between this urban space and the rural compound are revealed in the presence and absence of material possessions and the quantity of things. These ordinary possessions in the Western home are described in such detail because for Ugwu, who comes from a completely different economic background, they are all new and exciting objects. However, his fascination with the Western home is mixed with nostalgia for what he has left behind: the sense of order and

predictability of the daily routine of his family, the established roles and routines, and a house filled with people. Ugwu misses the interconnected nature of community which the traditional space afforded him which is absent from Nsukka: “He wished his whole village was here, so he could join in the moonlight conversations and quarrels and yet live in Master’s house with its running taps and refrigerator and stove” (Adichie, 2006: 92). Indeed, in the novel’s reading of the two spaces, people seem to be counterposed with things – people dominate in the one space and things in the other. What is also emphasised in this delineation of space is the extreme poverty of rural Nigeria, suggested both in Ugwu’s attempts to hold onto food and in the way the children fight over the scraps.

The tension between westernised living and the traditional homestead is also apparent in Ugwu’s reaction to Richard’s request that he accompanies him to the *ori-okpa* festival in Opi. Ugwu’s attitude to the merits of his new adopted lifestyle are clear, in his belief that he will impress the family he left behind in Opi with his new Westernised ways: “he could not wait to impress Anulika and his cousins and relatives with his English, his new shirt, his knowledge of sandwiches and running tap water, his scented powder” (Adichie, 2006: 86). Similarly, whilst his mother is being treated at Odenigbo’s house, she complains about the smell of toothpaste to Ugwu, who proudly responds: “‘Oh. That is toothpaste. We use it to clean our teeth.’ Ugwu felt proud saying *we*, so that his mother would know that he too used it” (Adichie, 2006: 91). When she leaves she gives him a chewing stick that is used in place of toothpaste in rural, traditional life.

The space of Odenigbo’s home in Nsukka is not always rendered in positive terms. The conflict between traditional rural space and the urban space is addressed less favourably in Ugwu’s assessment of practicality, versus aesthetics in the space of the garden:

There was a round, grassless patch in the middle of the lawn, like an island in a green sea, where a thin palm tree stood. Ugwu had never seen any palm tree that short, or one with leaves that flared out so perfectly. It did not look strong enough to bear fruit, did not look useful at all, like most of the plants here. He picked up a stone and threw it into the distance. So much wasted space. In his village, people farmed the tiniest plots outside their homes and planted useful vegetables and herbs. His grandmother had not

needed to grow her favourite herb, *arigbo*, because it grew wild everywhere.
(Adichie, 2006: 15)

In the traditional rural space, arable land is put to utmost use in terms of harvestable and edible crops. In Nsukka, the space of the garden is used for aesthetics rather than practicality as emphasised by the nature of the palm tree. When Ugwu's aunt tells him that his mother is sick, his discomfort is also registered in the uncomfortable setting of space: "The sunlight that came in through the window seemed too bright for later afternoon, too full of an ominous radiance" (Adichie, 2006: 87).

There is also evidence in Ugwu's assessment of the village space of different gendered identities and roles in traditional communities. In contrast to Nsukka, which is figured as a space for female assertion and expression, the traditional rural spaces are figured as places of poverty and traditional belief, and are associated with more traditional attitudes towards women and marriage: Ugwu's father marries more than one wife; male children are privileged over female children; traditional marriages include wine-carrying ceremonies necessary to commence the marriage process, and arranged marriages are commonplace. Whilst Olanna is able to escape the expectations of marriage before moving in with Odenigbo, the same opportunity is not available to her cousin Arize, who feels she must marry young and quickly before her potential worth as a wife is forfeited:

"So you are moving to Nsukka to marry Odenigbo, Sister?" Arize asked.

"I don't know about marriage yet. I just want to be closer to him, and I want to teach." Arize's round eyes were admiring and bewildered. "It is only women that know too much Book like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don't know Book wait too long, we will expire" ... "I want a husband today and tomorrow, oh! My mates have all left me and gone to husband's houses". (Adichie, 2006: 41)

In his new role as 'houseboy' in Nsukka, Ugwu is able to engage in traditionally feminised roles such as cooking and cleaning:

He had spent many evenings watching his mother cook. He had started the fire for her, or fanned the embers when it started to die out. He had peeled and pounded yams and cassava, blown out the husks in rice, picked out the

weevils from beans, peeled onions, and ground peppers. Often, when his mother was sick with the coughing, he wished that he, and not Anulika, would cook. He had never told anyone this, not even Anulika; she had already told him he spent too much time around women cooking, and he might never grow a beard if he kept doing that. (Adichie, 2006: 12)

This makes Ugwu's masculinity a complex issue to consider. He is secretly excited at the thought of planning meals and cleaning, a gender role not readily afforded to him in the rural traditional space of his home village of Opi. Ugwu is enjoying the freedom of a more flexible gender identity, and Olanna's arrival signals for him a change in which she as a woman will reclaim this space, news which he initially finds threatening to his new found role. And indeed she does show him new ways to cook and clean. At the same time, he remains profoundly ambivalent about the greater freedom and sexual agency which women enjoy in Nsukka, particularly Miss Adebayo. Impressions of Miss Adebayo suggest that she is a liberated, well-educated woman who is described as taking the same liberties as her male counterparts, drinking brandy like Odenigbo, loudly challenging and arguing her point in conversation.

The loudest [of the university women] was Miss Adebayo ... He did not want to ride in her car, did not like how her voice rose above Master's in the living room, challenging and arguing. He often fought the urge to raise his own voice from behind the kitchen door and tell her to shut up, especially when she called Master a sophist. He did not know what *sophist* meant, but he did not like that she called Master that. Nor did he like the way she looked at Master. Even when somebody else was speaking and she was supposed to be focused on that person, her eyes would be on Master. (Adichie, 2006: 19-20)

This portrait of Miss Adebayo is presented from Ugwu's more conservative gender perspective, a perspective in which her sexual and intellectual confidence is rendered as threatening:

Then she did what startled Ugwu: she got up laughing and went over to Master and pressed his lips close together. She stood there for what seemed a long time, her hand to his mouth. Ugwu imagined Master's brandy-diluted saliva touching her fingers. He stiffened as he picked up the shattered glass.

He wished Master would not sit there shaking his head as if the whole thing were very funny. (Adichie, 2006: 21)

Ugwu's ambivalence to female sexuality is also evident in his response to Olanna. He is also both repelled and attracted by Olanna, as indicated in his practice of sucking her discarded chicken bones, as he imagines her mouth enclosed on the same bone:

He had sucked all the bones, and he imagined that the taste of Olanna's mouth was in his as he started to wash the dishes. The first time he sucked her bones, weeks ago, it was after he saw her and Master kissing in the living room on a Saturday morning, their open mouths pressed together. The thought of her saliva in Master's mouth had both repelled and excited him. It still did. It was the same way he felt about her moaning at night; he did not like to hear her and yet he often went to their door to press his ear against the cold wood and listen. Just as he examined the underwear she hung in the bathroom – black slips, slippery bras, white pants. (Adichie, 2006: 85)

Provisionally, then, the 'town' of Nsukka is figured as a space of greater female assertion and expression, most notably displayed in the characters Miss Adebayo and Olanna. In Odenigbo's home where he entertains various guests from the university faculty, Miss Adebayo freely participates in the conversations and political discussions of the men. Olanna is afforded the opportunity in this space of Nsukka to not marry her lover, yet still move in with him. That the urban space offers greater freedom to women is also apparent in the character Kainene. Kainene, described as "almost androgynous" and with "boyish hips" (Adichie, 2006: 60), according to Mabura "plays the role of the son in the family, expanding the family business in Port Harcourt, brokering military contracts during the Biafra War, and running an Igbo refugee camp" (Mabura, 2008: 207). This portrait of Kainene both explores gender boundary transgression in her physical appearance, as well as engaging with the traditional gender norms through her work, challenging the normative roles given to women. Equally, the rural boy experiences much freedom in relation to his gender roles.

Further tensions between traditional attitudes towards women and marriage and western views are revealed in Odenigbo's mother's reaction to the presence of Olanna. Odenigbo's mother

represents the invasion of tradition into the space of the home in Nsukka, where she attempts to reorganise the space and oust the modern woman, Olanna, whom she finds objectionable because she is educated. She chastises Ugwu for referring to Olanna as his madam: 'She is not your madam, my child. She is just a woman who is living with a man who has not paid her bride price' (Adichie, 2006: 212). Thus, even though Olanna experiences freedom in not having to marry Odenigbo, moving in to his home and breaking with traditional concepts of marriage is not presented as without conflict. In particular, it results in complications regarding the space of her home: "I just had to leave ... your house.' Olanna faltered. She had wanted to say *our house*?" (Adichie, 2006: 100). This feeling of dislocation is further compounded by her experience of her unlive in flat: "He sat down in the armchair, and for the first time she noticed how much space there was between the furniture, how sparse her flat was, how unlive in. Her things were in his house; her favourite books were in the shelves in his study" (Adichie, 2006: 100).

It is at this point that some of the contradictions of Westernised African masculinity begin to emerge. Instead of bringing Olanna back to their home, Odenigbo suggests that they stay at her flat, hence avoiding the inevitable consequences of defying his mother's wishes: "She paused as she washed her hands. She wanted him to ask her to come back with him to the house, wanted him to say he would tell his mother off in front of her. But here he was deciding to stay at her flat, like a frightened little boy hiding from his mother" (Adichie, 2006: 101-102). Whilst initially rejecting Odenigbo's plea, Olanna resigns herself to stay at her flat when he makes an emotional appeal which reveals his vulnerability, a vulnerability and helplessness which will be brought into even sharper relief in the exigencies of war:

He smelt of brandy. He came inside and placed the *suya* on the table, and in his bloodshot eyes she glimpsed the vulnerability that hid itself so well underneath his voluble confidence. He could be afraid, after all. She rested her face against his neck as he hugged her and said to him, quietly, "No, you don't have to do that. Stay here". (Adichie, 2006: 104)

The spaces of the super-rich, such as the home of the Ozobias in Lagos, depict a differently-defined and controlled femininity which is associated with space, a space which has been adapted for commercial relationships and business deals. Here, the home as domestic space also reflects alienation in family life. Upon her return from studies abroad, Olanna visits her parents in Lagos and

joins her family and a Minister for dinner. During the dinner, Olanna realises that she is the object of sexual bartering. Her parents have offered her to the Minister in exchange for commercial relationships and deals: “She wondered, too, how her parents had promised Chief Okonji an affair with her in exchange for the contract” (Adichie, 2006: 32). This problem of sexual bartering and the objectification of women is reiterated by Kainene in her first conversation with Richard: “‘Have you ever been to the market in Balogun?’ she asked. ‘They display slabs of meat on tables, and you are supposed to grope and feel and then decide which you want. My sister and I are meat. We are here so suitable bachelors will make the kill’” (Adichie, 2006: 59). It is this contract that equates the power and money of men with the sexual favours of women that Ugwu is aware of when Richard suggests they return to his hometown for the festival.

What the novel probes is the particular kind of masculinity which arises in these contexts, a version of maleness which results from the femininity Olanna and Kainene’s parents have prescribed and the system of sexual bartering they have tried to enforce: “She was used to this, being grabbed by men who walked around in a cloud of cologne-drenched entitlement, with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together” (Adichie, 2006: 33). It is a culture in which men believe that they can objectify the women that they want to possess, that it is a right of theirs that comes with the power and money they have accumulated, to also possess a woman.

Ugwu is very aware of how money and power can equate into sexual bartering in the world of the affluent, leading to the objectification of women like Olanna and Kainene. Thus, Ugwu is aware that returning to his village with Richard in the white man’s car should attract the attention of the girl he likes, Nnesinachi:

But he was pleased that he had mentioned the festival to Mr Richard, because it meant an opportunity to see Nnesinachi before she left for the North. To think how impressed she would be when he arrived in a white man’s car, driven by the white man himself! She would certainly notice him this time, he was sure. (Adichie, 2006: 86)

The home as domestic space also reflects alienation in the family life of the Ozobias:

She stopped to sniff the wilting flowers in a vase on the side table near the staircase, even though she knew their scent would be gone, before walking upstairs. Her room felt alien, the warm wood tones, the tan furniture, the wall-to-wall burgundy carpeting that cushioned her feet, the reams of space that made Kainene call their rooms *flats*. (Adichie, 2006: 33-34)

As in the home of Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus*, the space seems too large, alienating the occupants of the house. The objects, such as the scentless flowers, seem to further dislocate Olanna. Further, the space seems to emphasize the distance between herself and Kainene: “She listened for Kainene’s footsteps on the carpeted hallway. It was now that they were back from England, living in the same house again, that Olanna realized just how distant they had become” (Adichie, 2006: 36).

This alienation is further reflected in the relationship Olanna has with her parents. Her mother confesses that her father is having an affair. However, Olanna knows that it is not the affair that has upset her mother so much as the significant fact that her father has bought his mistress a house in an expensive area occupied by Lagos socialites. When Olanna confronts her father on her mother’s behalf, the material objects around him metamorphose, reflecting her disgust and disrespect for his actions (Cooper, 2008): “She looked around his room and thought how unfamiliar his large bed was; she had never seen that lustrous shade of gold on a blanket before or noticed how intricately convoluted the metal handles of his chest of drawers were. He even looked like a stranger, a fat man she didn’t know” (Adichie, 2006: 219).

However, even though the affluent lifestyle of the Ozobias, in their spacious Lagos mansion, with their lavish dinners and parties, and sexual bartering is portrayed as corrupt (Cooper, 2008), there is also a certain sensuality and pleasure which Olanna associates with this space:

After dinner, they moved to the balcony for liqueurs. Olanna liked this after-dinner ritual and often would move away from her parents and the guests to stand by the railing, looking at the tall lamps that lit up the paths below, so bright that the swimming pool looked silver and the hibiscus and bougainvillea took on an incandescent patina over their reds and pinks. (Adichie, 2006: 32)

The shimmering pool lit by the lamps and surrounded by the radiant flowers seems to disguise the less than tasteful human interactions taking place around it.

Tensions between modernity and tradition are also reflected in distinctions of class. This is revealed in the comparison between the Ozobias in Lagos and their relatives in Kano. According to Cooper, “Adichie is operating at the level of these details of material culture in order to re-create how Biafra completely transformed these lives” (2008: 135-136). Aunty Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi are distinctly poorer, and when Olanna visits she forcibly ignores the less favourable aspects of their living conditions: “Olanna sat on a stool and carefully avoided looking at the cockroach eggs, smooth black capsules, lodged in all corners of the table. A neighbour was building a wood fire in one corner and despite the slanting openings in the roof, the smoke choked the kitchen” (Adichie, 2006: 41). Olanna also no longer argues with her aunt and uncle when they insist she sleeps in the one bed the family own while they share the sleeping mats in the other room:

That night, as Olanna lay on her uncle and aunt’s bed, she watched Arize through the thin curtain that hung on a rope attached to nails on the wall. The rope was not taut, and the curtain sagged in the middle. She followed the up-down movement of Arize’s breathing and imagined what growing up had been like for Arize and her brothers, Odinchezo and Ekene, seeing their parents through the curtain, hearing the sounds that might suggest an eerie pain to a child as their father’s hips moved and their mother’s arms clutched him. She had never heard her own parents making love, never seen any indication that they did. But she had always been separated from them by hallways that got longer and more thickly carpeted as they moved from house to house. (Adichie, 2006: 43)

Thus, the material reality of the family is starkly contrasted with that of Olanna’s parents in Lagos, as Olanna notes how she has always been vastly separated from her parents’ bedroom. Rural space is imagined in the same way as in the calm depiction of Ugwu’s home. The intimacy of space is treated much more negatively in the later sections of the novel when in Umuahai the family are forced to share one bedroom and Olanna laments all that she has lost, including her status, as the novel shows how space is related to one’s standing in society.

The house in Kano also serves as a place of female solidarity when Olanna learns of Odenigbo’s sexual betrayal. In her conversation with Aunty Ifeka, Olanna states her intention to postpone returning to Nsukka and instead remain in Kano. Aunty Ifeka insists Olanna returns, rejecting her reasoning that she cannot return because she cannot stay at Odenigbo’s house, and

reminding her that she has her own flat and job. Auntie Ifeka bluntly asks whether Odenigbo's sexual betrayal, something she attributes to the entire male species, is the end of the world: "Odenigbo has done what all men do and has inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away. Does that mean somebody died?" (Adichie, 2006: 226). Auntie Ifeka goes on to say:

"When your uncle first married me, I worried because I thought those women outside would come and displace me from my home. I now know that nothing he does will make my life change. My life will change only if I want it to change ... You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Do you hear me?" Auntie Ifeka said. "Your life belongs to you and you alone, *sosogi*. You will go back on Saturday. Let me hurry up and make some *abacha* for you to take". (Adichie, 2006: 226)

This exchange between Olanna and Auntie Ifeka complicates the traditional readings of the West as progressive and Africa as conservative. In this case, it is Olanna who needs a lesson in female independence. If the novel tends to associate the West with more relaxed gender identity, it also does not confirm stereotypical readings of tradition as inherently conservative. A criticism that could be made of Adichie's feminism is that while critiquing male sexual betrayal, she also characterises all men in this way. All the male characters in the novel seem to commit some sexual misdemeanour, and thus "she contrarily appears to condone them by confirming that it is in their biological make-up to be sexually promiscuous" (Cooper, 2008: 149).

The novel's concern with masculinity is evident in the characterisation of Ugwu. The issue continues to receive attention in the characters Odenigbo, Madu Madu, Richard and Mohammed. The novel explores a range of masculine identities from the hegemonic (even hyper-) masculinity of Madu Madu to the more feminised Richard and Mohammed. Hegemonic or normative masculinity is usually understood as "the pattern of practice ... that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell, 2005: 832). Kimmel views masculinity as "a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world" and occupying a realm which is neither static nor timeless, and is instead historical (2002: 200). Imperative to this consideration is the idea that 'manhood' is a socially constructed entity created in culture (Kimmel, 2002: 200). These notions are defined in opposition to a set of "others", most notably a binary coefficient to women (Kimmel, 2002: 201). The definition is constantly

changing in the political and social arena “when old definitions no longer work and new definitions are yet to be firmly established” (Kimmel, 2002: 201). Kimmel states that it is the power of the definitions in themselves which maintain the power men have over women (2002: 204). Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* takes up the question of hegemonic masculinity by exploring a range of male ‘types’.

Olanna’s first impression of and attraction towards Odenigbo are based upon her experience of standing in line to buy tickets to the university theatre when Odenigbo escorts a white man the teller has told to come forward back into the queue:

Olanna had stared at him, at the arch of his eyebrows behind the glasses, the thickness of his body, already thinking of the least hurtful way to untangle herself from Mohammed. Perhaps she would have known that Odenigbo was different, even if he had not spoken; his haircut alone said it, standing up in a high halo. But there was an unmistakable grooming about him, too; he was not one of those who used untidiness to substantiate their radicalism. She smiled and said ‘Well done!’ as he walked past her, and it was the boldest thing she had ever done, the first time she had demanded attention from a man. (Adichie, 2006: 29)

The boldness of his action attracts her and she responds with her own demand for his attention, reflecting on her femininity. However, as previously mentioned, faults in Odenigbo’s masculinity begin to emerge with the arrival of his mother and his reluctance to address the issue of her claiming of the space. He is unable to reclaim the domestic space of his home in Nsukka from his traditional mother who has ousted the unmarried, modern woman. Instead, he retreats to Olanna’s flat and avoids the confrontation entirely.

Madu Madu is another character who seems overtly masculine. He is initially described by Richard:

Richard smelt the guest’s cologne from the hallway, a cloying, brawny scent. The man wearing it was striking in a way that Richard immediately thought was primordial: a wide, mahogany-coloured face, wide lips, a wide nose. When he stood to shake hands, Richard nearly stepped back. The man was huge. Richard was used to being the tallest man in a room, the one who was

looked up to, but here was a man who was at least three inches taller than he was, and with a width to his shoulders and a firm bulk to his body that made him seem taller, *bulking*. (Adichie, 2006: 78)

Madu Madu is a soldier in the army, and a friend of Kainene's, who is portrayed as remarkably confident and self-assured. For Richard, Madu Madu seems threatening in his masculinity – tall, wide, and overstated, and especially perhaps in the light of the problems that Richard faces with impotence.

Richard is described as being almost shy and having an “endearing uncertainty about him” (Adichie, 2006: 36). He does not exude the same confidence as Odenigbo and Madu Madu, and this lack seems to manifest in his sexual impotence in his relationship with Kainene:

He had not permitted himself to hope for too much. Perhaps it was why an erection eluded him: the gelding mix of surprise and desire. They undressed quickly. His naked body was pressed to hers and yet he was limp. He explored the angles of her collarbones and her hips, all the time willing his body and his mind to work better together, willing his desire to bypass his anxiety. But he did not become hard. He could feel the flaccid weight between his legs. (Adichie, 2006: 63)

His inability to perform is a constant source of anxiety: “Often he would try to keep his mind from worrying about failing Kainene that night; his body was still so unreliable and he had discovered that thinking about failure made it more likely to happen” (Adichie, 2006: 78). Indeed, it seems to exacerbate the tensions in his relationship with Madu Madu, who appears to be a sexual rival.

Olanna's former lover Mohammed is described as having a quite feminine beauty: “She looked up and Mohammed was there, in a white kaftan, smiling down at her. His lips were a sensual curve, lips she had once kissed often during those days when she spent most of her weekends in Kano” (Adichie, 2006: 44). Similarly, he is described as having a “tall, slim body and tapering fingers [which] spoke of fragility, gentleness” (Adichie, 2006: 45). Mohammed displays a rather atypical reaction to Olanna's intention to leave him:

she recalled the disbelieving pain on his face that had only deepened when she told him she had to end it right away because she did not want to be

unfaithful to him. She expected that he would resist, she knew very well how much he loved her, but she had been shocked when he told her to go ahead and sleep with Odenigbo as long as she did not leave him: Mohammed, who often half-joked about coming from a lineage of holy warriors, the very avatars of pious masculinity. (Adichie, 2006: 45)

Instead of rejecting her, he offers Olanna an alternative provided she does not leave him. His plea bargain is at direct odds with the unemotional masculinity he claimed ran in the family.

In all these examples, the novel seems to take issue with a certain kind of over-confident or arrogant masculinity. Just as Mohammed provides an alternative reading of masculinity, so too does the relationship between Arize and Nnakwanze. In direct contrast to Odenigbo's reaction to his mother's visit, and his inability to support his partner Olanna, Nnakwanze creates boundaries with his own mother in order to support Arize:

Nnakwanze was sitting on the floor at Arize's feet, rubbing her belly in light circular motions. He had worried a lot less than Arize when she did not get pregnant the first, second, and third year of their marriage; when his mother visited them too often, poking at Arize's belly and urging her to confess how many abortions she had had before marriage, he asked his mother to stop visiting. He asked her, too, to stop bringing foul-smelling concoctions for Arize to drink in bitter gulps. Now that Arize was pregnant, he did more overtime at the railway and asked her to cut down on her sewing. (Adichie, 2006: 131)

In addition to openly supporting Arize against his mother's poking and inappropriate questions, he is an attentive and affectionate husband who takes Arize's best interests to heart. Not only that, but he is able to take on more responsibility in order to make her pregnancy and life as comfortable as possible. Thus, Nnakwanze provides an alternative masculinity that provides stability and equality to his wife. In this way, the character Nnakwanze demonstrates how masculinities are "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action" and which can therefore "differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (Connell, 2005: 836).

The second section of the novel deals with the impact of the war and the disintegration of space, as well as the breakdown of the everyday lives of the characters in the novel. Cooper states that in the context of war, “ordinary things, the smells, sights, sounds and possessions” are changed/transfigured as the everyday shifts into a different, “demonic” version becoming the “abnormal ordinary”(Cooper, 2008: 134). Thus, objects which hold a particular meaning in times of peace hold a different meaning in times of war. It is also important to consider what gender identities and roles emerge from this particular conjuncture. Once again, Ugwu is the primary focaliser through which the space is mapped. This disintegration of space is registered in the move from the home in Nsukka to an increasingly dislocated sense of place and home as the family navigates the different spaces allocated to the refugees:

Change was hurtling toward him, bearing down on him, and there was nothing he could do to make it slow down. He sat down and stared at the cover of *The Pickwick Papers*. There was a serene calm in the backyard, in the gentle wave of the mango tree and the winelike scent of ripening cashews. It belied what he saw around him. (Adichie, 2006: 175)

The changes of impending war are first noted in the political discussions at Odenigbo’s evening suppers: “The conversations no longer ended in reassuring laughter, and the living room often seemed clouded with uncertainties, with unfinished knowledge, as if they all knew something would happen and yet did not know what” (Adichie, 2006: 142). The initial disruption of space occurs after the announcement that Eastern Nigeria will become a sovereign independent republic for security. With the country at war, Ugwu, Olanna and Odenigbo are quickly and unexpectedly forced to leave behind the home in Nsukka and retreat to Abba:

Olanna looked dazed; she wrapped the pot of soup in a dishcloth and took it out to the car. Ugwu ran around throwing things into bags: Baby’s clothes and toys, biscuits from the fridge, his clothes, Master’s clothes, Olanna’s wrappers and dresses. He wished he knew what to take. He wished that sound did not seem even closer. He dumped the bags in the backseat of the car and dashed back inside to lock the doors and close the window louvres. Master was honking outside. He stood in the middle of the living room, feeling dizzy. He needed to urinate. He ran into the kitchen and turned the stove off. Master was shouting his name. He took the albums from the

shelves, the three photo albums Olanna so carefully put together, and ran out to the car. He had hardly shut the car door when Master drove off. The campus streets were eerie; silent and empty. (Adichie, 2006: 179)

With this initial disruption of space there is complete upheaval and confusion. Olanna grabs the first thing in her reach, which is the pot of soup. Ugwu is more practical and packs clothes for the family. However, there is the feeling that the severity of the situation has not completely been grasped as Ugwu returns to close the windows and turn off the stove. Ugwu, Olanna and Odenigbo do not stay long in Abba, however, and soon move onto a house in Umuahai, a house not quite in the same style as the family is accustomed to:

There was nothing normal about the house. The thatch roof and cracked, unpainted walls bothered Ugwu, but not as much as the cavernous pit latrine in the outhouse with a rusting zinc sheet drawn across it to keep flies out. It terrified Baby. The first time she used it, Ugwu held her steady while Olanna cajoled her. Baby cried and cried. She cried often the following days, as if she too realized that the house was unworthy of Master, that the compound was ugly with its stubby grass and cement blocks piled in corners, that the neighbours' houses were too close, so close one smelt their greasy cooking and heard their crying children. Ugwu was certain that Professor Achara had fooled Master into renting the house; there was something wily in the man's bulging eyes. Besides, his own house down the road was large and painted a dazzling white. (Adichie, 2006: 197)

Despite the obvious indignities which Ugwu notes in the house, Olanna helps to put the space into perspective as she tells him that many of the people in their situation are now sharing houses and that they are lucky to have a two-bedroom house. Eventually overlooking the faults, the family return to some routine of normalcy: "Life came close to being as it was in Nsukka just after the secession; hope swirled around once again" (Adichie, 2006: 197). However, it is also important to note the mention of the differences between their house and that of Professor Achara, indicating the discrepancies between those in positions of privilege and the everyday person on the street. When Olanna visits Achara to enquire about possibilities of a job for Odenigbo, she is shown into a room: "Olanna sank into a plush red sofa. A dollhouse, with tiny, exquisite doll plates and teacups, was set out on the centre table" (Adichie, 2006: 341). Thus, differences in social status and material

possessions still mark Nigerian society. Another example of this inequality can be found in the scene at the United Nations, where there are “tables set out with sacks of food”. This is contrasted with the image of women clutching baskets eager to enter the gates. However, the United Nations staff are described as “wasting time” in allowing these desperate women in (Adichie, 2006: 268).

This new space of Umuahai, due to the high occupancy of refugees, requires buildings and spaces not originally designed for that function in order to house this influx of people. For example, the primary school is being repaired and turned into a refugee camp, and Ugwu helps to replace the school roof:

When Ugwu took a batch of palm fronds across to the ladder, he stopped to peer into one of the classrooms. Cooking pots, sleeping mats, metal boxes, and bamboo beds cluttered it so completely that the room did not look as though it had ever been anything else but a home for disparate groups of people with nowhere else to go. A bright poster of the wall read: IN CASE OF AIR RAID, DO NOT PANIC. IF YOU SEE THE ENEMY, MOW HIM DOWN. (Adichie, 2006: 289)

The space is in no way designed to accommodate residents and so the space is littered with a mixture of items required in a living space – cooking pots, sleeping mats and bamboo beds.

The final breakdown of space occurs when Ugwu and the family are forced to downgrade yet again to a one-bedroomed home in Umuahai:

They were lucky to find one room, now that Umuahia was thronged with refugees. The long strip of a building had nine rooms, side by side, with doors that led out onto a narrow veranda. The kitchen was at one end and the bathroom at the other, next to a grove of banana trees. Their room was closer to the bathroom and, on the first day, Olanna looked at it and could not imagine how she would *live* here with Odenigbo and Baby and Ugwu, eat and dress and make love in a single room. Odenigbo set about separating their sleeping area with a thin curtain, and afterwards Olanna looked at the sagging string he had tied to nails on the wall, remembered Uncle Mbaezi and Aunty Ifeka’s room in Kano, and began to cry. (Adichie, 2006: 326)

The home in Umuahai is a far cry from the house in Nsukka. The family is forced to share a kitchen and bathroom with other refugees. The room they rent has to be further sub-divided into functional areas with a curtain, reminiscent for Olanna of her aunt and uncle's room in Kano. The thought of living and functioning in this space is initially daunting, and represents a complete breakdown of domestic space:

Olanna glanced at the clutter that was their room and home – the bed, two yam tubers, and the mattress that leaned against the dirt-smeared wall, the cartons and bags piled in a corner, the kerosene stove that she took to the kitchen only when it was needed – and felt a surge of revulsion, the urge to run and run and run until she was far away from it all. (Adichie, 2006: 337)

Thus, it is in the details of place that the novel describes the collapsing of class identity.

Once the war has ended, the family return to the domestic home in Nsukka, which has also undergone a dramatic transformation, and presents a sharp contrast to Ugwu's earlier mapping of the space. The order of the space of Nsukka, which was captured in the trimmed hedges and smoothed, tarred roads, is now seen by Ugwu as "shapeless and tangled": "Olanna was holding Baby's hand and looking at the whistling pine and ixora and lilies, all shapeless and tangled. Odim Street itself was shapeless and tangled, with both sides knotted in thick bush. Even the Nigerian armoured car, left abandoned at the end of the street, had grass growing from its tyres" (Adichie, 2006: 418). The domestic home is in a similar state of disarray:

Milky cobwebs hung in the living room... The sofas and curtains and carpet and shelves were gone. The louvres, too, had been slipped off and the windows were gaping holes and the dry harmattan winds had blown in so much dust that the walls were now an even brown. Dust motes swam ghostlike in the empty room. In the kitchen, only the heavy wood mortar was left behind. (Adichie, 2006: 418)

The home, which was previously described by Ugwu with meticulous detail given to objects, has been stripped down, leaving the living room and kitchen bare. The urban space seems to have been reclaimed by nature, signalled by both the cobwebs and the elemental damage of the harmattan winds. Ugwu's response is to want to clean the space, as if to purge it, and himself, of the damage done by the war:

He wanted to clean. He wanted to scrub furiously. He feared, though, that it would change nothing. Perhaps the house was stained to its very foundation and that smell of something long dead and dried would always cling to the rooms and the rustle of rats would always come from the ceiling. (Adichie, 2006: 419)

Aside from physical cleaning, another method of atonement for Ugwu is writing: “the more he wrote, the less he dreamed” (Adichie, 2006: 398). This suggests the importance of writing testimony and reclaiming trauma. The reclamation and cleansing of spaces mirrors the psychological journey that Ugwu embarks on after his return. It becomes a means of atonement for his involvement in the gang rape of the woman who worked in the bar. It is also evident in Olanna’s attempts to recount the story of the girl’s head in the calabash in the train from Kano. However, Cooper questions whether the portrayal of the violent act of gang rape in which Ugwu was a full participant does not create some problems for the novel as a whole. Firstly, she argues that this portrayal may play into Western stereotypes of Africa as “a savage place of unnatural violence and blood letting” during times of war (Cooper, 2008: 133). Secondly, she suggests that the act of writing “echoes older forms of Igbo creativity as symbolised by the ancient roped pot and traditional Igbo words and wisdom” (Cooper, 2008: 133). Cooper’s argument is that “in providing a counter symbolism to the images of gratuitous acts of violence, Igbo material life begins to metamorphose into tropes of national pride. In so doing ... they detract from the concreteness of rape and compromise the novel’s gender politics” (Cooper, 2008: 133). However, Cooper does acknowledge that nothing demonstrates the traumatic transformation of the ordinary and everyday as powerfully as Ugwu’s transformation from a kind and gentle person to someone who could participate in a gang rape (2008: 141). Ugwu is initiated into the world of war via an enforced conscription: here we see the tension between his initial excitement at the thought of fighting as a soldier in the war and “the casual cruelty of this new world in which he had no say” (Adichie, 2006: 359). His head is shaved with a piece of broken glass, and the other men are described as “skinny soldiers – with no boots, no uniforms, no half of a yellow sun their sleeves”, who berate and physically hit him during his physical training, which itself leaves him stiff and sore; but he does not leave: “He longed to play a role, to act. Win the war” (Adichie, 2006: 199)

The rape scene allows for an exploration of a particular kind of masculinity. As has already been observed, Ugwu is aware of the patriarchal system which had indicated to him that women’s

bodies could be used as objects of exchange. In addition, it is not entirely a shock to the reader, considering his objectification of women such as the girl from his village, Nnesinachi:

He always started with her face, the fullness of her cheeks and the ivory tone of her teeth, and then he imagined her arms around him, her body moulded to his. Finally, he let her breasts form; sometimes they felt hard, tempting him to bite into them, and other times they were so soft he was afraid his imaginary squeezing caused her pain. (Adichie, 2006: 9)

Commenting on the novel's attitude of forgiveness towards African male violence against women, Cooper suggests that *Half of a Yellow Sun* comes close to a womanist perspective. Ugwu seems to be a combination of both Eugene and Jaja from *Purple Hibiscus*, but instead of being irrevocably punished for his sins like Eugene, he is allowed to atone. He is "redeemed as the subject of the re-born nation after the war, [thus] Adichie suggests that betrayals, gender violence and all the passions of the personal in peace time shrink, become absurd and are swept into the abyss of public and distorted war realities" (Cooper, 2008: 148). Further, Cooper argues of the womanist approach that "[t]he problem of ascribing this role of men as also oppressed by colonial racism to a character who participated in a gang rape is to sacrifice the abuse of women to some kind of bigger, male canvas of issues around colonial inheritances, war and soldiering" (Cooper, 2008: 148). Thus, in order for Ugwu to emerge after the war as 'hope of the nation', sacrifices must be made by deflecting the issue of the rape onto a bigger, national scale, and it is in this deflection that "rape loses its visceral concreteness and becomes symbolic of the abnormality of war", of atypical behaviour and provocation (Cooper, 2008: 148). It is in this problematic duality between Adichie's feminist critique of men and her womanist approach to include men in the national healing process where "the novel's gender politics come apart" (Cooper, 2008: 150).

In terms of Odenigbo's masculinity, we have already observed how he battles to reclaim the space of his home in Nsukka back from his mother in Part One. Initially, in the time of war however, Odenigbo deals with the changes in their circumstances and living conditions much better than Olanna: "His calmness bewildered her. The tranquil tone he used to confront their new world, their changed circumstances, bewildered her" (Adichie, 2006: 261). He is calmly confident in the war effort, perhaps even disconnected: "'We'll get our life back soon, in a free Biafra,' he said, his usual

words lined with his usual forceful reassurance, and sipped his tea” (Adichie, 2006: 261). In Olanna’s view, he is still quite the idealist:

The long walk to the Manpower Directorate, the sheer mindlessness of compiling names and addresses day after day, exhausted him, she knew, yet he came home each day with lit-up eyes. He had joined the Agitator Corps; after work, they went into the interior to educate the people. She often imagined him standing in the middle of a gathering of rapt villagers, talking in that sonorous voice about the great nation that Biafra would be. His eyes saw the future. (Adichie, 2006: 262)

However, Odenigbo’s mother’s death seems to mark a turning point for him, in which he distances himself from Olanna. It also marks the beginning of his inability to deal with the changing circumstances of war and forced migration. He begins to leave for work too early and afterwards drink at Tanzania Bar. Indeed he seems completely dislocated from their reality both of place and circumstances: “When he did talk, he spoke of his unpublished research papers left behind in Nsukka, how they were almost enough to make him a full professor, and heaven knew what the vandals would do with them” (Adichie, 2006: 322). However, he still maintains a sense of pride, no matter the cost. For example when Olanna suggests that he ask an old friend, Ezeka, to help him to find another job, the response is one of disapproval: “She recognised his expression: He was disappointed. She had forgotten that they had high ideals. They were people of principle; they did not ask favours of highly placed friends” (Adichie, 2006: 336-337). His drinking becomes a problem. Unlike the drinking sessions in Nsukka in which he discussed ideas that commanded the attention of the room, Odenigbo’s habitual drinking in Umuahai dulls his mind from the situation at hand and reveals his inability to cope:

she could still smell that cheap, vapour-heavy scent of local gin. It trailed him, it clouded the paths that he walked. His drinking in Nsukka – his auburn, finely refined brandy – had sharpened his mind, distilled his ideas and his confidence so that he sat in the living room and talked and talked and everybody listened. This drinking here silenced him. It made him retreat into himself and look out at the world with bleary, weary eyes. (Adichie, 2006: 380)

Through Odenigbo's deterioration, the novel offers a critique of dominant Nigerian masculinity. By contrast, it is Olanna's less confident approach which seems better suited to deal with the upheaval and dislocating effects of war. Whilst Olanna at first struggles with the changing locations, she eventually begins to negotiate the adverse conditions she encounters and occupies. However, it is Kainene who provides a positive image of women and what they can accomplish in adverse conditions. Initially Olanna finds it difficult to cope with the changing domain and what she has lost in the move:

She could hear some villagers exchanging greetings, in the same loud-voiced way that the women in the sewing group did ... She felt bitter towards them at first, because when she tried to talk about the things she had left behind in Nsukka – her books, her piano, her clothes, her china, her wigs, her Singer sewing machine, the television – they ignored her and started to talk about something else. Now she understood that nobody talked about the things left behind. (Adichie, 2006: 185)

It is the loss of these material objects which symbolise the disintegration of the everyday and ordinary life for Olanna. Further, “she did not tell him that she grieved for the past, different things on different days, her tablecloths with the silver embroidery, her car, Baby's strawberry cream biscuits” (Adichie, 2006: 262). However, a new resolve is created in Olanna with the realisation of the very inconsequentiality of her existence, and the existence of her family:

If she had died, if Odenigbo and Baby and Ugwu had died, the bunker would still smell like a freshly tilled farm and the sun would still rise and the crickets would still hop around. The war would continue without them. Olanna exhaled, filled with a frothy rage. It was the very sense of being inconsequential that pushed her from extreme fear to extreme fury. She had to matter. She would no longer exist limply, waiting to die. Until Biafra won, the vandals would no longer dictate the terms of her life. (Adichie, 2006: 280)

This marks a change in Olanna, who finally embraces the circumstances forced upon her and makes the necessary changes, something which Odenigbo is unable to do and which leads to the rift between them. Olanna learns to fight her way through a queue at the relief centre, consistently

haggles with hawkers selling their wares, and generally seems to be the pillar of support for Baby and Odenigbo. Whilst her actions are not of national consequence, she does what is required to keep her family alive, and that is its own strength. However, it should be noted that the space which they occupy is still distinctly middle-class, as Olanna can still afford to buy meat at the marketplace (and they have a place to live):

She stood before a table with graying pieces of raw chicken and imagined grabbing them and running away as fast as she could. If she bought the chicken, it would be all she would buy. So she bought four medium-sized snails instead. The smaller, spiral-shelled snails were cheaper, piled high in baskets, but she could not buy them, could not think of them as food; they had always been, to her, playthings for village children. (Adichie, 2006: 329)

Kainene, by contrast, displays a much more active feminism. After her home in Port Harcourt is destroyed in an air raid, she wholeheartedly throws herself into work at a refugee camp:

There was a manic vibrancy about her, about the way she left for the refugee camp each day, about the exhaustion that shadowed her eyes when she returned in the evenings. She no longer spoke of Ikejide. Instead, she spoke about twenty people living in a space meant for one and about the little boys who played war and the women who nursed babies and the selfless Holy Ghost priest Father Marcel and Father Jude. (Adichie, 2006: 318-319)

Kainene readily faces the challenges of this new space created by the war, helping those who are less fortunate to find a safe haven. And it is she who insists that Baby (Chiamaka) is allowed to interact with her new surroundings, and to learn the skills which are necessary to their new way of life in this space. When Baby joins the other children in the refugee camp in picking up shrapnel, Olanna immediately confiscates “the cold leftovers of things that killed” (Adichie, 2006: 388). However, Kainene returns them to Baby as she realises that these objects are the reality of the space which they occupy:

But Kainene asked her to give them back to Baby. Kainene gave Baby a can to store the shrapnel. Kainene asked Baby to join the older children making lizard traps, to learn how to mat the palm fronds and place the cocoon full

of *iddo* ants inside. Kainene let Baby hold the dagger of the emaciated man who paraded the compound, muttering, “*Ngwa*, let the vandals come, let them come now.” Kainene let Baby eat a lizard leg. “Chiamaka should see life as it is, *ejima m*,” Kainene said, as they moisturized their faces. “You protect her too much from life”. (Adichie, 2006: 388)

The sisters reinvent the space of the refugee camp as a place of female solidarity. As Ugwu describes: “He listened to the conversations in the evenings, writing in his mind what he would later transfer to paper. It was mostly Kainene and Olanna who talked, as though they created their own world that Master and Mr Richard could never quite enter” (Adichie, 2006: 399).

In conclusion, *Half of a Yellow Sun* provides a rich site of analysis for the exploration of fictional inscriptions of gendered identity and experience and how this is mediated by space, especially in terms of the domestic space. The initial demarcation of space between the ‘town’ and the ‘country’ provided insight into how gender is performed in both spaces. The ‘town’ is represented as a space of greater female liberation and a space to reinterpret traditional gender roles (signifying Westernised gender roles and identities). The ‘country’, by contrast, is associated with more traditional gender roles and expectations. However, these are not always clear-cut demarcations. These spaces are also contrasted with the chaos and breakdown of space experienced in the later sections of the novel and which elicit new forms of action from the characters, predominantly empowered feminine energy.

Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this research to integrate an awareness of space/place into an analysis of the texts' representation and negotiation of gendered identities and relations. By exploring the demarcation and enunciation of space within my chosen texts, I hope to have provided new perspectives into questions of gendered identities and relations. I would like to end with a comparative analysis of the novels which, as Andrade states, provides value in terms of "points of conversation as well as potential or visible differences" (2011: 94). A comparative analysis between the novels of Mariama Bâ and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has revealed the differences and/or similarities between the authors' negotiation of gendered space. This is complicated by the differences in location and thus the differences in the social and historical 'spaces of writing' – for Mariama Bâ, Senegal in the early to mid-1980s, and for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, twenty-first century Nigeria.

What has become evident in this analysis is that space is not a neutral site: it is imbued and invested with meaning. It is the investment of meaning in space by the characters which transforms it into place: "[i]t is through the cultural processes of imagining, seeing, historicizing and remembering that space is transformed into place" (Darian-Smith et al, 1996: 3). Space in the novels is also a site where values and relations of power are constantly contested and negotiated, particularly in the entrenchment and negotiation of gender relations. A gendered reading of spatial relations within the novels has led to a number of inter-related concerns that can be explored through a comparative analysis. It is interesting to contrast the reading of particular places as expressive of power relations, gender identities and roles, how space/place is experienced and lived in by men and women, and lastly, how these space/places and the power relations which they encode come to be negotiated and contested.

A comparative analysis will firstly consider readings of particular spaces within the novels, such as the home, the village and the street. The principal site of inscription in all of the novels is the home. Since it is an inhabited space, it is ideologically productive and thus shapes and represents dominant social relations, becoming expressive of power relations, gender identities and roles. What has become clear in an analysis of the texts is how spatial ordering is an important means of securing

dominant power relations. In this way spatial sites are encoded with specific values which govern social relations. Thus, we can consider the way in which particular relations of domination and subordination are inscribed in space/place. A second important aspect in a comparative analysis of my chosen texts is the gendered experience of place – the different ways in which space/place is experienced and inhabited by men and women. What is also important to consider in the gendered experience of place is the way in which women may feel displaced whether as a result of changing economic, social and cultural circumstances, or as a result of changes due to migration and travel. These movements are often necessarily tied up with a renegotiation of gender positions and relations as material changes affect the “links between place and identity” (McDowell, 1999: 2). Finally, in a comparative analysis of the novels, I will consider the ways in which constructions of space/place are negotiated or contested and how space is negotiated and appropriated by ordinary people in the everyday practice of their lived space.

In Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981), the main protagonist Ramatoulaye writes, reflects on and renegotiates her gendered identity within the suburban home. The very fact of Ramatoulaye's confinement within the home is governed by the patriarchal dictums of both her society and religion. The house itself acts as an important site for the exploration of gender and patriarchy. The initial reading of this space reveals it as accepting and enforcing of dominant gender identities and roles: Ramatoulaye regards her home as a place which she has nurtured in accordance with her role of mother and wife, and it is her reluctance to break with these estimations of her identity and subjectivity which leads to her displacement. In this way, the home operates as the means by which Ramatoulaye has been interpellated as a subject, as she seems to agree that her rightful place within the social hierarchy is within the confines of the private and domestic space of the home. In this way, the dominant patriarchal structures assert control over women's identity through the control of space. Space thus emerges as an important element in the constitution of gender and gendered identity.

So Long a Letter focuses on women's experience of the home. The space of the home had previously acted as a space/image of female fulfilment and stability for Ramatoulaye; however, her husband's second marriage brought significant economic, social and cultural change. This marriage forces a shift in Ramatoulaye's experience of the home, a process which is reflected in the process of her letter/diary-writing. She and her children are abandoned and it is up to her to renegotiate the

space and her own gendered identity and subjectivity. She begins to negotiate dominant constructions of the home and her role within it. She negotiates this new identity for herself partly in relation to her relationship with Aissatou and her choices, and the letter writing/diary which also affords her a means of reflection. Against the constraints of imposed traditional values and representations of women's spaces, Ramatoulaye defines a new space of female solidarity and new ways in which to invent and use space: the farm in Sangalkam, the school, the village of their youth. In this way, the letter writing reflects the ability of discourse to create new spaces for women. In her everyday practice of the lived space of her home, Ramatoulaye negotiates new gender roles and identities as she takes on the role of both father and mother. In this way, Ramatoulaye begins to negotiate the choices she believed were available to her. The social relations and gender dynamics which are encoded in particular places shift when Ramatoulaye eventually begins to take control of the environment for herself, as a space of female liberation. Bâ never overtly criticises traditional Senegalese beliefs, but the novel reveals a more dynamic vision she has for her society, in social and political reform.

Bâ uses the domestic space in *Scarlet Song* as the dominant site of the breakdown of the marriage between Ousmane and Mireille: it is a site of contestation in which the tensions between contrasting cultural definitions of power relations, gender identities and roles – even the use of space itself – are played out. However, unlike *So Long a Letter*, *Scarlet Song* moves from the confinements of domestic space to the more public locations of the street, the neighbourhood and the village. The novel begins with a verbal mapping of the village and neighbourhood from which Ousmane originated, a place from which he tries to escape and a place to which he wishes to return. In this ambiguous relationship, combining attraction and repulsion, the novel explores an on-going tension between indigenous and Western identities. This theme is also key to the other locations explored in the novel, the communal spaces of Ousmane's home and the more private space of Ousmane and Mireille's suburban flat. It is in these varying inscriptions of the public, domestic and communal spaces that different understandings of social relations, gender identities and roles are tested and explored.

The novel begins with Ousmane's mapping of his neighbourhood, a move forward which both indicates his wish to leave this space and the trajectory he believes his education is pushing him towards. It is in this process of mapping the space that Ousmane exerts control over it. Once

Ousmane and Mireille marry and the newlyweds initially move in with Ousmane's parents, the traditional communal space and the culturally unprepared Mireille clash, as the space is experienced and interpreted very differently by the French expatriate. In Yaye Khady's interpretation of a daughter-in-law, Mireille falls distinctly short in the expected gendered roles she is expected to undertake in the household, in which are encoded the ideas of male dominance in a traditional Muslim Senegalese society. Once the couple have moved into their own suburban home, the rift created by the different understandings of space and gendered roles continues and Ousmane, unwilling to compromise on his expectations of social relations within the home, eventually returns to the district of Usine Niari Talli, where he marries and sets up a separate home with Ouleymatou. The novel thus appears to set up a contrast between 'western' and 'Senegalese' space, a difference which is also registered as a contrast between modern and traditional gender roles. Ousmane thus rejects the home in which Mireille expects to be treated as an equal, and prefers the household of Ouleymatou in which he is treated as husband and master and she conforms to her expected role of the subservient wife.

In *Scarlet Song*, the experiencing self, and thus the dominant perspective, is male. It is Ousmane Gueye who relays his experiences of the Usine Niari Talli district and his various experiences of home. Thus, it is his experiences of space/place which are given prominence in the novel. Indeed Mireille's experience of space seems mostly relegated to that of the domestic space. It is in the experience and different interpretations of the space of the home that Mireille and Ousmane clash. Yaye Khady's integration of traditional elements into the home, and the Gueye's sense of family in the home, reveals Mireille's true feelings about the intrusion. Ousmane partly resents the equality Mireille expects in their relationship and home. This differing experience of place reveals both Mireille and Ousmane's different views on the social constitution of gender and place. Mireille's sense of displacement thus emerges from different cultural definitions of domestic roles, a position which is compounded by her migration from France to Senegal. Ousmane neither culturally prepares her for the role of his wife within a Senegalese community, nor tries to assimilate elements of her culture. It is the combination of all of these factors that leads to the disintegration of their marriage, and it is the failed relationship and Mireille's inability to invest meaning in this space which contributes to her breakdown. His second marriage to Ouleymatou, based on his wish to return to his own culture, contradicts the kind of monogamous relationship he promised Mireille. In

contrast to *So Long a Letter*, *Scarlet Song* does not afford the protagonist either the chance to renegotiate a new gendered identity for herself or her social position. Instead what is foregrounded is an unresolvable contradiction between ‘Western’ and ‘Senegalese’ values, a contradiction to which Mireille and Ousmane fall victim.

In *Scarlet Song*, the domestic space is represented as a site of conflict over cultural definitions of gender. In *Purple Hibiscus*, by contrast, it appears as a site of patriarchal and gendered oppression, under the father figure of Eugene Achike. Eugene exercises his rights as patriarch through his attempts to exert control over space: he attempts to confine and isolate his wife and children to the domestic space and thus to assert social control over their identity. What is important to note about the domestic space of Eugene’s home is the contrast between his persona in the private and public space, the family and social space. The benevolent benefactor who fights for political independence is a tyrant within his home, and it is in the spatial ordering of the home that Eugene exerts control over his family. Such is his control over the domestic space that Kambili often refers to the suffocating effect of the ordering of the furniture in the large spacious rooms, and the choking experience of being unable to speak. Eugene is a patriarch who expects complete subordination and submission from his family in the home. In this way, it is evident that the control of space is one of the means by which patriarchal dominance is exerted. Thus, the psychological dimensions of patriarchal oppression are explored largely through the experience of space.

In *Purple Hibiscus* the space of Eugene’s home is oppressive and patriarchal. However, Jaja and Kambili are invited to stay with their paternal aunt Ifeoma, and it is within this space that they experience a more feminised and liberated home environment. It is in this space also that they are able to negotiate new identities for themselves outside of the enforced estimations of their identities and roles given by Eugene. In *Purple Hibiscus* the oppressive patriarchal domestic space is negotiated through the experience of the liberating environment of Aunty Ifeoma’s home, which opens new possibilities for individual subjectivity and gender identity. Jaja and Kambili begin to negotiate and contest the space of Eugene’s home by their own form of resistance, both through the influence of the space of Aunty Ifeoma’s home and the possibilities represented in the heterotopic space of the garden. These spaces represent alternatives to the dominant social ordering of Eugene’s home. The possibilities represented by the garden also aid in their reconstitution of the self and away from

normative “the scripts of identity” (Rossetto, 2006: 446). Thus, domestic space is revealed as a site of both gender oppression and resistance.

In contrast to the above, the domestic space in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is largely figured as a liberated space. The novel as a whole explores a continuously shifting domestic space which increasingly reflects the socio-political changes in the wider space of the nation. The initial domestic space is that of the middle-class suburban household of Odenigbo in Nsukka. It is figured as a liberated space in which traditionally defined notions of gendered identity and roles can be subverted and appropriated for different ends. Ugwu the houseboy, for example, is able to negotiate a new subjectivity in this space as he performs the tasks traditionally assigned to the women in his village, such as cooking. For Olanna, this liberated space affords her the opportunity of exploring new gendered identities not available to women in less affluent or more traditional communities. The novel also explores the homes of the ‘super rich’ in Nigeria, such as the Ozobias in Lagos, and contrasts these with the poor village (Ugwu’s home of Opi) and the peri-urban slum (the home of Olanna’s relatives in Kano). The liberated space in Lagos, which affords Kainene the opportunity to continue her father’s business legacy, also harbours negative aspects of gender relations such as the expectation of men in business that they have sexual rights over the twins, Olanna and Kainene. These liberated spaces are contrasted with the rural spaces, such as Kano, in which more conservative notions of gender roles prevail; however, it is in Kano that Auntie Ifeka subverts conventional expectations of traditional African femininity by advising Olanna that she should not grant her husband too much importance. In this way, the usual opposition between the liberated ‘West’ and conservative ‘Africa’ is undermined. Once the civil war breaks, the main action of the novel follows Odenigbo, Olanna and Ugwu as they traverse various domestic spheres in their bid to escape the encroaching war.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the sanctified space of the home becomes radically destabilised in the aftermath of the military coup and the outbreak of civil war. This dislocation is a culmination of economic, social and cultural circumstances. The novel displays severe displacement in its characters’ during a time of social crisis, revealing the relationship between self and place in terms of identity. The social and personal dislocation is reflective of the instability of the places they inhabit during this time of civil war, and this spatial dislodgement contributes to the breakdown of identity. This forced migration also shifts the characters concepts of borders not only nationally, but within

the domestic space. Initially, the constant relocation seems to be dealt with better by the men in the narrative. Odenigbo is positive, although in a seemingly disillusioned way. Ugwu's assessment is realistic. Olanna lives in constant fear of the changing circumstances of their existence. However, the death of Odenigbo's mother seems to mark a turning point for him, and he reverts to drinking and talking about the work he left behind in the home in Nsukka. Olanna, on the other hand, initially battles with the material changes of the constant relocation and displacement, but later becomes the stronger individual who takes control of her situation. This is even more evident in the character of Kainene, who takes it upon herself to run a local refugee camp. Thus the negotiation of domestic space is felt most prominently in the women's re-imaginings of the space, even in times of war. Space is negotiated and appropriated in the everyday practice of the space they have to work with and the disruption of space seems to lead to the formation of different identities.

In all of the novels under discussion, the textual inscription of space emerges as a significant entry point for the novels' exploration of gender roles and identities. Thus questions of gendered identity are partly explored through the novels' reading of space. What is also revealed in these novels is that the control of space is a key index of patriarchal power. In *So Long a Letter* the home is at one point appropriated as a public space which is governed by patriarchal norms: the women are allocated a specific space in the public domain by the men. Ramatoulaye's confinement within her own home is indicative of the patriarchal dictums of society and religion which control the space of her home, and her room acts as a space of female silence. In *Scarlet Song* the dominant perspective is male, and it is this perspective through which we view Usine Niari Talli and the most prominent experiences of the home. Mireille's perspective is somewhat limited to the experience of the home, thus the male seems to have control over the public and private space, while the home is the dominant site of woman's experience. In *Purple Hibiscus* Eugene exerts control over his family by controlling the space of the home. Beatrice, Kambili and Jaja's principal experience of space is within the private space of the home, where they are isolated and silenced, whilst the reader is aware of Eugene's status as editor, church man, and factory owner in the public space. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, by contrast, the space of the home is figured as a liberated space: Ugwu inhabits the spaces, and takes on the roles, generally ascribed to women. Characters such as Kainene are free to explore spaces beyond the home such as the public spaces of business and politics. In this way, the novels reveal that by taking control of space, or appropriating it in new ways, women are able to challenge or re-negotiate traditional gender roles. Ramatoulaye redefines gender roles by taking on an

authoritative role in the absence of her husband. Her confinement within the home becomes a site of privacy and self-reflection. Mireille's inability to take control and appropriate space in new ways means she is unable to negotiate a new gendered identity and role for herself. For Kambili, Eugene's home becomes a site of resistance in light of her experiences in Nsukka and Auntie Ifeoma's home. The heterotopic space of the garden also provides a space for fluidity and reclaiming of identities. For Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun* it means appropriating the new domestic and public spaces she is forced to inhabit. These new spaces forcefully encourage new gendered identities and roles.

All the novels point to the importance of alternative spaces in the redefinition of gendered identity. For Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter*, the school and the university which she attended with Aissatou are important spaces which aid in her renegotiation of self. The same is true of the representations of the school and university in *Scarlet Song*, as they provide examples of harmonious gendered relations between Ousmane and Mireille. The garden and the feminised space of Auntie Ifeoma's home in *Purple Hibiscus* are the principal sites in which Kambili is able to redefine her identity. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, it seems that changes in gendered identity are encouraged by the disruption of ordered space, as is evident in the character Olanna. Thus dislocation, removal and relocation provide the means for the development of new subjectivities. The destabilisation of space accompanies changes in social norms and gendered identities.

Tensions between tradition and modernity, or indigeneity and the West, are also registered in terms of space. These tensions also have implications for gender roles and expectations. Thus the tensions between African communalism and Western expectations of privacy, for example, are experienced mainly in disagreements over the use and ownership of space. *So Long a Letter* shows an ambiguous response to African traditionalism or indigeneity, one which ends by offering a syncretic model which draws on elements of both as a way of forging new identities for women. In *Scarlet Song*, the feminist critique of patriarchy seems to take second place to the conflict between indigenous identities and Western aspiration. In this case, the return to 'Africa' is problematically represented as the return to an African woman. In *Purple Hibiscus*, simplistic readings of African and Western identity are complicated by the fact that the 'African patriarch' in this example is also a Christian who has become assimilated to Western culture and who enforces his patriarchal beliefs by insisting that his children conform to a Western, Christian code.

The importance given to questions of the nation over gender can be related in part to the influence of the discourse of ‘womanism’. This can be seen in the work of Mariama Bâ particularly. This approach recognises the limitations of Western feminism in addressing the particular concerns arising in colonial and postcolonial African contexts. The tenor of the African feminist theorising shares certain affinities with western feminism; however African feminists have also identified specific needs and goals which are based upon a consideration of the realities of women living in African societies. African feminists align themselves with African men, in so far as they share a common struggle against colonialism, racial domination and exploitation. At the same time, however, African feminism challenges men to be aware of gendered subjugations, which exist separately from generalised oppression. Further, African feminism recognises the inequities and limitations which existed (or still exist) in traditional societies as well as recognising that colonialism reinforced and introduced other inequities and limitations. This is recognised in Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* and the disequilibrium created for Ramatoulaye by her insistence on clinging to imported estimations of her culture. Womanism also examines which institutions in African society are of value to women, rejecting those which are detrimental, for example the privilege afforded to men in the relationship of marriage, and the position and status this places women in. This issue is of central concern in *So Long a Letter*. The attention to questions of racial domination and exploitation which define a womanist approach may have something to do with the subordination of women’s concerns to those of race which we find in *Scarlet Song*.

The persistent question of what should be prioritised – whether gender or the nation – returns in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, where the novel seems to gloss over the violence inflicted on the young bar girl by Ugwu. Instead, his actions are primarily viewed as one of the effects of the war. Ugwu’s atonement is granted in order to allow for a national healing project, and in this way the national project is privileged over women’s oppression. For the most part, however, Adichie’s work is characterised by equal attention to both gender and the nation. Indeed, her concerns with gender are generally given as much, if not more, prominence as the concerns with the wider context of the postcolonial nation.

In conclusion, the theorising of gender identities and relations through the theorising of space and spatiality has revealed the importance of space in constituting gender identities and roles and revealed important ways in which space can, and often must, be contested and negotiated. As

Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose state, “space [is] central both to masculinist power and to feminine resistance” (1994: 1).

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