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Narrow Nationalisms and Third Generation Nigerian Fiction

Committee:

Barbara Harlow, Co-Supervisor

Neville Hoad, Co-Supervisor

Aaron Bady

Toyin Falola

Snehal Shingavi

Narrow Nationalisms and Third Generation Nigerian Fiction

by

Meredith Armstrong Coffey, B.A., M.A.

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Narrow Nationalisms and Third Generation Nigerian Fiction

Meredith Armstrong Coffey, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Co-Supervisors: Barbara Harlow and Neville Hoad

The last decade or so, many literary critics hold, has witnessed a substantial shift in African fiction: nationalist commitments, integral to older African writers' work, have faded from younger Africans' literary visions, which often engage wide transnational networks instead. In contrast to this dominant critical narrative, however, the dissertation contends that younger writers have not rejected nationalism, but have revised it in myriad ways to meet contemporary needs. Moreover, I argue not against the existence of a transnational turn, but rather that there is an additional, local dimension, which has received little attention. In the texts I examine, withdrawals into smaller networks function hand in hand with reconfigurations of nationalism, ultimately resulting in what I term "narrow nationalisms."

To make this case, the dissertation focuses on a selection of novels by third generation Nigerian authors—those born after the country's 1960 independence—about three interrelated areas of crisis: oil conflict in southern Nigeria, the rise of cybercrime, and the so-called "brain drain." I analyze how narrow nationalisms operate in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009), Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2012), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). Whether they are more about sovereignty, ideology, or belonging, the narrow nationalisms of the primary texts

all contest longstanding wisdom that nationalism is about imposing ideology from above, especially as characters retreat into smaller communities from which they attempt to catalyze bottom-up, grassroots change.

What, then, are the implications of Nigerian fiction's continued engagement with nationalism for the study of contemporary African literature? Further, in a country that is already fractured in terms of political control and allegiances, and in an era in which the role of the nation-state remains uncertain, what might narrow nationalisms suggest about Nigerian sovereignty? Examining narrow nationalist spaces in third generation Nigerian writing not only complicates literary critical conversations but also reveals new insight into challenges for the present-day Nigerian state—and for Africa and the global south more widely.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 "Keep This Island Free": Niger Delta Women's Resistance in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* 34

Imperialism and Oil in the Niger Delta...52

Zilayefa's Struggles as Allegory 65

"No One Wanted to Be the Next Ken Saro-Wiwa" 75

Boma Heals on Irikefe 82

Everyday Forms of Women's Resistance...95

Chapter 2 "Family Always Came First": The Yahooze Generation in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* 98

Advance Fee Fraud 111

A Revision of Earlier Nationalist Narratives 115

Three Nationalisms 120

Kingsley on Religion, Ethnicity, and Family..127

419 in the World 138

Nwaubani's Yahooze Generation 143

Chapter 3 "Checkin' In": Diasporic Networks and Return Migration in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* 146

African Diaspora and "Brain Drain" Anxieties..160

"Too Huge and Fractured" 165

"The Tarzan Complex" 176

Coming Home 194

Caveats and Consequences 204

Conclusion 207

Works Cited 216

Introduction

> This generation incorporated in their literary imaginations disdain for colonialism and distrust of nationalism that had animated earlier generations of writers who bemoaned the cultural agonies of colonialism and the aborted dreams of uhuru. The new generation had decidedly more cosmopolitan visions of the African condition, cultural production, and the subjectivities of gender, class, and sexuality.
>
> —Paul Tiyambe Zeleza

In 2007, Malawian scholar of history and literature Paul Tiyambe Zeleza became one of the first critics to describe the departure of "third generation" African writers—those "born after 1960"—from some of the thematic concerns of previous generations ("Colonial Fictions" 13). One reading of Zeleza's analysis suggests that younger writers have traded out their predecessors' commitment to nationalism in favor of wider "cosmopolitan visions," a notion that many critics have embraced (13). Third generation Nigerian author Helon Habila, for example, understands Zeleza's argument in this way: "Taking my cue from Zeleza's phrase 'distrust of nationalism,' I call this generation of writers the 'post-nationalist' generation" ("Introduction" viii). Habila thus casts his own generation as writing *after* the era of nationalism, which implies a significant break from the decidedly nationalist emphasis of previous generations' writing.[1]

In addition to the reading that Habila puts forth—and not, I hold, at odds with it—is a second possible interpretation of Zeleza's analysis, and by extension third generation African writing. Habila calls attention to the phrase "distrust of nationalism," but

[1] Habila notes that his use of "post-nationalist" is "aspirational"—a desirable and reachable goal, if not a precise reflection of current circumstances ("Introduction" viii).

Zeleza's sentence does not end there. Rather, he elaborates on the nationalism(s) of which young writers are suspicious: "nationalism that had animated earlier generations of writers who bemoaned the cultural agonies of colonialism and the aborted dreams of uhuru" ("Colonial Fictions" 13). As Habila reads it, the words that follow "nationalism" comprise only a rehearsal of what constitutes nationalism, but what if instead these additional phrases are identifying specific *forms* of nationalism that younger writers reject? That is, if we read "cultural agonies of colonialism" as a reference to the oft-cited cultural nationalism embodied by first generation writers like Chinua Achebe, and "aborted dreams of uhuru"[2] as a nod to the "Marxist-Nationalist" leanings of the second generation, then Zeleza's claim leaves room for another form of nationalism to emerge alongside or in conjunction with growing cosmopolitan perspectives (Coker 38; Garuba "The Unbearable Lightness" 60). And indeed, my dissertation argues this very point: that younger writers' distrust of earlier iterations of African nationalisms has brought about not the rejection of nationalism wholesale, but rather a revised—and as I contend, a highly localized—approach to nationalism.

More specifically, I focus on recent Nigerian writing to make this case. Due to Nigeria's vast population—with over 180 million people—and diversity—with approximately two hundred and fifty ethnic groups represented and over five hundred indigenous languages spoken—the country's literatures offer numerous and varied perspectives ("Nigeria"). In addition, Nigerian writing has occupied a prominent position in the global literary scene since African literature was first published overseas in the 1950s, amidst the final years of the formal colonial era, and it remains especially

[2] "Uhuru," the Swahili word for "freedom," has long been associated with international socialism, and it continues to serve as the name for the movement embodied by the international African People's Socialist Party (Page xviii; "Omali Yeshitela Speaks").

prominent in the current global literary moment, enabling me to situate my readings within various ongoing critical conversations. A focus on Nigerian literature therefore keeps the dissertation focused without limiting it excessively; thorough contextualization of my readings is more manageable with a single-country concentration.

Nigeria's contemporary diversity and population, of course, have their roots in a long colonial history, as is the case for much of the global south. The borders that demarcate today's Nigeria, like almost all of those throughout Africa, are products of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European imperialism. European territorial claims in Africa mushroomed during the nineteenth century during the so-called "Scramble for Africa." At the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, leaders from thirteen European countries[3] and the United States gathered in Berlin—in the absence of any Africans—to draw arbitrary boundaries across the African continent, dividing it up for rule by European powers, without any regard for African peoples or their political realities (Shepperson 37; Reader 551). As a result, each new colony's borders clustered together a variety of disparate—and sometimes antagonistic—ethnic groups under a single administration, and every boundary divided at least one ethno-cultural area into multiple administrations (Mutua 1136; Reader 575). As a result of this process, Britain's longtime presence in the region that now comprises Nigeria was formalized (Chamberlain 51). Then, in 1914, British colonial administrator Lord Frederick Lugard merged the protectorates then known as Northern and Southern Nigeria, creating the geopolitical area that constitutes today's Nigeria—the most populous and ethnically

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[3] Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Italy, and Spain walked away with agreed-upon colonial claims on the African continent (Chamberlain 82). Also in attendance at the Berlin Conference were Austria-Hungary, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Sweden-Norway (Shepperson 37).

diverse of any African country, with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups (Nwankwo and Ifejika 21-22; Nayar 324; Olusanya 1). These groups had long "had trading, cultural, religious and other links," but they had not previously been bound under a single administration, let alone one imposed by a foreign power for its own advantage (Olusanya 6, 7). The diversity of each colony resulted partly from colonizers' disregard of African peoples as they strategized in their power struggle amongst each other, and partly from their conscious effort to "divide and rule" (Mutua 1136). For the latter reason, European administrators also purposely solidified ethnic distinctions within each colony, even though African ethnic categories had historically not been so rigidly defined (Ranger 260).

Given Nigeria's large population and exceptional diversity, the consequences for rising interethnic conflict were especially high. The most populous of Nigeria's ethnic groups had long been the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo peoples, but their large numbers did not necessarily lead to political domination, especially since approximately 40% of the colony's population belonged to minority ethnic groups (Ekeh 95, 96). This dynamic changed, however, in 1946 with the Richards Constitution. In a British effort to constrain burgeoning Nigerian nationalism following World War II, the colony's previously unitary administration took on a federal structure with three regions, each of which was dominated by one of the three majority ethnic groups: the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East (O. Lawal 42; Forsyth 18). The borders that defined the new regions had no more historical precedent than did those drawn during the Berlin Conference, but with this administrative change, the three majority ethnic groups suddenly "emerged as the ruling groups" (Ekeh 94-95). Subsequent constitutions in 1951

and 1954 solidified their political power (Amoda 50; J. Lawal 266). Although members of the majority groups lived throughout Nigeria, their ethnic identities became increasingly associated with the regions where each was most populous, and calls for ethnic solidarity became more and more politically expedient (Osaghae 240). Dissatisfaction with regional borders escalated such that the North and the West each threatened succession, in 1953 and 1954, respectively (Amoda 54, 55; Ekeh 100). Ethnic nationalisms thus came to compete with wider Nigerian nationalism. As a result of the same processes, minority groups rapidly lost political sway, to the point that British administrators convened the 1958 Willink Commission of Inquiry into Minority Fears and Means of Allaying Them, which acknowledged serious interethnic ethnic tensions but resulted in little action (Nwajiaku-Dahou 52). The same year, exacerbating ongoing problems, Shell began retrieving and exporting oil from the eastern Niger Delta, a region predominantly populated by ethnic minorities and that would soon, due to its natural oil wealth, become a hot spot for domestic and international conflict (Peel 23).

These local challenges developed within the context of growing international agitation for decolonization. A high point of the pan-African movement that had begun around the turn of the century, the 1945 Pan-African Congress, for example, brought together delegates from Britain, the Caribbean, and Africa—including prominent African nationalists like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta, Sierra Leone's I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, and Nigeria's Obafemi Awolowo—in conversation about formal decolonization, the role of the nation-state, and the struggles of working peoples internationally (Adi 89, 81, 90, 92). India's independence in 1947[4] and Ghana's

[4] Despite India's geographic distance, its independence was a watershed moment for those living under British colonial rule. The reasoning went that, "If the deadlock in India could be successfully resolved by

becoming the first decolonized West African nation in 1957 heightened anticipation of Nigeria's independence, as activists demanded control over their own "full parliamentary democracy" (Cohn 209; Achebe *There Was a Country* 41; O. Lawal 43). International networks thus provided ideological and political support for Nigerian nationalism, even while interethnic and regional conflict threatened to divide the soon-to-be independent nation.

Forming a crucial part of the nationalist movement, Anglophone Nigerian novels were published and widely read overseas for the first time in the 1950s.[5] Amos Tutuola (1920-1997) became "arguably modern African literature's first internationally celebrated novelist" with the publication of his controversial and foundational first novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), acclaimed by the likes of Dylan Thomas (Whittaker x; Gikandi "Tutuola" 752; Low 15). While Tutuola, who drew from Yoruba folk tales in his work, was hailed as a representative "folk writer," the novelist Cyprian Ekwensi (1921-2007), and slightly later Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), were soon recognized as prominent realist "foils" to Tutuola's work (Low 17; Akinbajo; Adichie "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on the Joy"). Indeed, the 1958 publication of Chinua Achebe's seminal *Things Fall Apart* would indelibly shape Nigerian and African literature. As Nigerian independence approached, Achebe's project of asserting that "we had a past," in contrast to historian Hugh Trevor-Roper's infamous 1963 denial of any African history without Europeans'

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the British Government after these many years, then a new era had dawned in British colonial policy" (*West African Pilot* qtd. in Olusanya 34). Moreover, as Nigerian historian G.O. Olusanya has argued, Nigerians felt especially connected to the Indian cause, given their vast populations (Nigeria's ranked second only to India in the Commonwealth) (34).

[5] As scholars have emphasized, "scribal African literature is at least 5000 years old," and Nigerian publishing in English began as early as the 1930s, with short form Nigerian writing published in local newspapers (Adesanmi; Low 17). My discussion begins with the 1950s, however, since the focus of the dissertation is on developments in the Anglophone Nigerian novel.

presence, gained tremendous traction, making cultural nationalism a key priority in this phase of Nigerian writing (Achebe *There Was a Country* 58; Wheatcroft 12).

Tutuola, Ekwensi, and Achebe were among the earliest members of the group now known as "first generation Nigerian authors." Mostly born in the 1920s and 1930s, these writers first published[6] in the years right before and after Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960 (Hewett 76; Guseh and Oritsejafor 140). Today, the generation's most internationally recognized authors are the late Achebe and the playwright, critic, and poet Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), who in 1986 became the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature (N. Clark; Flood). Other influential first generation Anglophone Nigerian writers include the satirical novelist T. M. Aluko (1918-2010); poet and children's author Mabel Segun (b. 1930); novelist Chukwuemeka Ike (b. 1931); the "mother of African literature," Flora Nwapa (1931-1993); "the leading poet" of the first generation, Christopher Okigbo (1932-1967), who died fighting for Biafra in the Nigeria-Biafra War; playwright and novelist Elechi Amadi (b. 1934); and poet and playwright John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo (b. 1935) ("T. M. Aluko"; "Mabel Segun"; Gikandi "Ike" 329; Quadri; Garuba "Okigbo" 568; Gikandi "Amadi" 26; Gikandi "Clark-Bekederemo" 162-163). They prioritized in their work an "anticolonial defense of national culture" in order to "write back against empire," as *Things Fall Apart* so famously did, and often they critiqued various obstacles to national success like corruption, as Achebe does in his second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960) (Dalley 17; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 96).

[6] To be sure, many of these authors have published *since* the 1960s. As recently as 2012, for example, Achebe published his memoir *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* and Wole Soyinka published his essay collection *Of Africa*. The "generational" designation does not mean to encompass the years of an author's entire corpus, but rather to highlight the contexts of the authors' formative years.

Having grown up under colonial rule, these writers embraced burgeoning nationalism and were optimistic about what formal independence would bring.

Despite such optimism, though, as the 1960s wore on in Nigeria, escalating interethnic tensions turned into interethnic violence and culminated in war. Events came to a head in January 1966 with a coup in which mostly Northerners lost their lives, and an Easterner, the ethnically Igbo Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, became the new Head of State (Forsyth 37, 47). As a result, many Northern Nigerians viewed the coup as an "Igbo conspiracy," while most Eastern Nigerians understood it as an indication that Northerners had occupied the most prominent government positions (Reader 669). Shortly thereafter, in May, Ironsi restructured the federal government, replacing the regional system with a centralized unitary system, a move that again resulted in disparate reactions from disparate regions: where Northerners mainly saw a push for an Igbo-dominated government, Easterners largely supported what Ironsi's effort to "remove the last vestiges of the intense regionalism" (Forsyth 52, 49; Ironsi qtd. in Prescott 133). This conflict brought about yet another coup in July, at which time an ethnically Ngas Northerner named General Yakubu Gowon became the country's new Head of State (Forsyth 52; Reader 669). Gowon restored the federal system, but none of his efforts deterred the ensuing violence (Prescott 133). Estimates indicate that, among Easterners of Igbo and minority ethnic backgrounds, as many as 30,000 lost their lives, over 50,000 were injured, and approximately two million had to flee the North for the East, including many who had never lived in the East—a consequence that further strengthened the association between ethnic and territorial identities (Nwankwo and Ifejika 207-208; J. Lawal 273). Dangers to Northern Nigerian residents of the East intensified to the point

that, in October 1966, then-Governor of the Eastern Region Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared that his government could no longer ensure the safety of Northerners and mandated their departure from the region (Amadi 21). Efforts at negotiating peace failed, and in May 1967, Governor Ojukwu declared the secession of the East as the independent Republic of Biafra (Brandler 230). In July, the federal Nigerian government, led by Gowon, declared war to reclaim Biafra (Nwankwo and Ifejika 6).

The ensuing Biafran War, also called the Nigeria-Biafra War and the Nigerian Civil War, would cost two to three million lives, on battlefields, from air bombings, and from starvation in refugee camps (D. Jacobs 4). Photographic images of starving Biafran children pervaded international media, provoking sympathy and horror.[7] The economic stakes were heightened by the presence of oil in southern Nigeria, a Biafran territory populated primarily by ethnic minorities, whose allegiances were "sharply divided" (National Security Council). Britain and the Soviet Union agreed that federal Nigeria was more likely to cooperate with international oil interests, leading them to put aside their differences in the ongoing Cold War to support the federal Nigerian government (Achebe *There Was a Country* 154). With limited access to food and arms, Biafra conceded defeat in January 1970 (Falola and Oyeniyi 54). An amnesty policy helped the country rebuild but did not resolve underlying ethnic and regional tensions (Siollun 167).

The decades following the Biafran War saw the boom and bust of the oil industry, as well as the rise of centralized dictatorships. In the early 1970s, as the price of oil rose worldwide, Gowon's government took advantage of growing revenues by raising the federal government's share of the profits, marking the starting point of the increasingly

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[7] For more on the work of photojournalists in raising international awareness of the conflict, see journalism scholar Claude Cookman's article "Gilles Caron's Coverage of the Crisis in Biafra" (2008).

centralized government's growing control over the oil industry (Okonta and Douglas 25). The country's sudden prosperity enabled a sharp rise in spending by Gowon's government, a trend emblematized by the Head of State's now-infamous remark to an international journalist: "The only problem Nigeria has is how to spend the money she has" (qtd. in Akinola 26). The tides soon turned, however, and the global oil industry's collapse in the early 1980s, coupled with destructive IMF and World Bank policies, led the once prosperous country into serious debt (Soremekun 99). At the same time, other related domestic problems, including an alarming increase in armed robberies and a deadly religious riot that cost over four thousand lives, created anxieties that led the Nigerian government to scapegoat the country's undocumented immigrants and in January 1983 to demand their immediate expulsion. Then-President Shehu Shagari's government's decision to give between two and three million people only two weeks to leave the country solved no real problems and instead created probably "the worst international crisis for Nigeria since the end of the Civil War" (O. Aluko 540-541).

For the most part, average Nigerians fared no better during the rest of the decade, which saw only further centralization, escalating corruption, and inflation, most clearly embodied by the 1985-1993 regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, or "IBB" (Adebanwi *Authority Stealing* 35). Frustration with opportunities available in Nigeria led to increased emigration from the country, especially on the part of the most educated, to the extent that the government launched a campaign to discourage its youth from leaving the country to seek better opportunities elsewhere (Oberabor). This series of short propaganda films for television encouraged young Nigerians *not* to follow the lead of their protagonist, Andrew, who declared his plan to "check out"—that is, to leave Nigeria

to escape unemployment, declining infrastructure, and growing crime (Oberabor). The propaganda campaign did not turn the tides, however, and Afropessimism began take hold. Observers from within and beyond Africa worried that, given decreasing standards of living throughout the continent, Africa's future "was likely to be far worse than its past" (Rieff 10).[8]

Into this pessimistic post-Biafran context of increasingly centralized and increasingly corrupt dictatorships emerged Nigeria's "second generation" writers. Born in the 1940s and 1950s, these writers were the primary contributors to the new genre of Biafran War literature, and elsewhere they reckoned with a corrupt and repressive government. Perhaps the most internationally recognized second generation author was the environmental activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995), who was later executed based only on a sham trial and to the world's horror by the notorious Sani Abacha dictatorship, with the covert support of Shell Oil (O. Okome ix; Boyd xiii; Okonta and Douglas 35). The generation's writers in English also include such figures as novelist and critic Isidore Okpewho (b. 1941); Buchi Emecheta (b. 1944), a prolific novelist known especially for her critiques of gender inequalities; Soyinka protégé and playwright Femi Osofisan (b. 1946); Niyi Osundare (b. 1947), widely viewed as "the leading poet" after the Biafran War; Marxist novelist Festus Iyayi (1947-2013); the prolific poet Tanure Ojaide (b. 1948), who has in the last decade begun also to write novels; and internationally acclaimed novelist and poet Ben Okri (b. 1959) (Gikandi

[8] The Afropessimism to which I refer here and throughout the dissertation encompasses the ideas that developed in the 1980s and 1990s that offered a bleak prognosis for the future of the African continent. These Afropessimists noted how standards of living throughout Africa had improved in the 1960s following independence, and lamented the decline of those standards since the 1970s, worrying that quality of life for average African people would only continue to deteriorate (Rieff 10). This version of Afropessimism is *not* to be confused with the more recent phenomenon that goes by the same name, which condemns all people of African descent to "ontological death"; for this group of Afropessimists, structures of racial oppression cannot ever be altered or defeated (Wilderson).

“Okpewho” 568; Eke 239-241; Gikandi “Osofisan” 587-588; Garuba “Osundare” 590; Gikandi “Iyayi” 343; Garuba “Ojaide” 566; B. Cooper “Okri” 574). These authors, whose perspectives were shaped by the “disillusionment and stasis” of the postwar, post-oil boom years, nonetheless continue to engage questions of nation and nationalism, often through a Marxist lens (Adesanmi and Dunton 14 “Nigeria’s Third Generation Writing”; Krishnan 75; Garuba “The Unbearable Lightness” 60).

Despite hopes for a transition to democracy, the period of disillusionment continued when Babangida declared the annulment of the June 1993 elections aimed at selecting his successor; the subsequent power vacuum enabled Sani Abacha to seize power that November, soon becoming Nigeria’s most notorious dictator. Abacha’s five-year rule dramatically exacerbated the country’s existing corruption, economic, environmental, educational, and human rights problems. As noted, the oppressive dictatorship’s possibly most infamous act was to silence environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists by murdering them—an atrocity that inspired such international outrage that Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth and became a global pariah state (Peel 7). The murders became representative of the Abacha regime’s unprecedented assault on Nigerians’ freedom of speech and its atrocious human rights record, as well as the alarming results of growing dependence on oil (which, under Abacha, climbed such that the industry comprised 90% of export earnings (Falola 198)). Other consequences of Abacha’s rule included the wrongful detention or assassination of dissidents (or even those within his own government whom Abacha deemed a threat), extreme censorship, tremendous national debt, crumbling infrastructure, unprecedented acquiescence to exploitation by multinational corporations, the closure of many

publishing houses, and extremely poor funding of the university system—a problem that caused extensive faculty strikes and stalled higher education, which in turn inspired Abacha only to ban national university unions (Falola 202; Ogbondah 231; Olukotun 60; Falola 65, 198; Habila "Introduction" x; Mittelman 47). Nigerians celebrated in the streets when the "regime of terror" came to an end with Abacha's sudden death on June 8, 1998 (Falola 202, 204).[9]

Following Abacha's demise, many Nigerians felt optimistic about the return to civilian government in 1999. The first democratically elected leader after Abacha, Olusegun Obasanjo, abandoned a tentative plan to modify the constitution to permit himself a third term, instead following the will of the National Assembly and leaving office peacefully in 2007; just last year, departing president Goodluck Jonathan became the first incumbent Nigerian leader to step down peacefully after losing an election (Nathaniel; Okeowo). Yet, the shift to democracy has not been as much of a turnaround as many had hoped. The recently elected Muhammadu Buhari—sworn off the violence and extremist strategies of his 1983-1985 administration—has embarked on a prominent anti-corruption campaign, but so far, corruption persists in many arenas (Kazeem); the oil-rich, environmentally devastated Niger Delta has become a hotbed for violent conflict between militant extremists, the army, and oil interests; many educated Nigerians continue to move overseas; and perhaps most notoriously, religiously based conflict, from growing Pentecostalism in the south to Islamic extremism in the north, as embodied by Boko Haram, continues to threaten Nigerian lives and national stability.

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[9] In an obvious effort to hide the cause of death, Abacha's body was buried promptly and without autopsy. The official government story attributed his death to a heart attack, but many suspect he was poisoned (Weiner A4).

Producing their first work in this context are Nigeria's third generation writers. Born after Nigerian independence, with little to no memory of the Biafran War, they grew up witnessing a series of military coups, the institutionalization of corruption, the aftermath of the oil bust and destructive World Bank and IMF policies, flourishing Afropessimism, and finally, the atrocities of the Abacha regime. Anglophone authors of this generation include novelist Okey Ndibe (b. 1960); novelist and short story writer Sefi Atta (b. 1964); novelist Chris Abani (b. 1966); novelist and filmmaker Biyi Bandele-Thomas (b. 1967); novelist, poet, and critic Helon Habila (b. 1967); Jesuit priest and short story writer Uwem Akpan (b. 1971); activist and creative writer Kaine Agary (born c. 1973); humorous novelist and poet Lola Shoneyin (b. 1974); novelist and public intellectual Teju Cole (b. 1975); poet and short story author Uche Peter Umez (b. 1975); author and medical doctor Eghosa Imasuen (b. 1976); satirical essayist and novelist Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani (b. 1976); novelist, short story writer, and public intellectual Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (b. 1977); A. Igoni Barrett (b. 1979), most famous for his short stories; author and medical doctor Uzondinma Iweala (b. 1982), whose novel *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) was made into a film released last year, starring Golden Globe winner Idris Elba; novelist and playwright Helen Oyeyemi (b. 1984), who published both a novel and a play before the age of twenty-one; and attorney, right-wing social commentator, and short story author Ayo Sogunro (b. 1984) (Ndibe "Q&A"; Nkem-Eneanya; Hartwiger 236; Bandele-Thomas 91; Tenshak 55; Akpan "Interview"; Dike; Shoneyin; Kassel; "Umez"; "Eghosa Imasuen"; Dada; Tunca "Biography"; Barrett "Interview"; Hawley 18; Harris; Wicks; Ness; Adebare).

To be sure, the generational framework for Nigerian literature has its shortcomings. It is useful in that it enables critics to draw out patterns and shifts in literary productive over time, and because my argument directly engages existing scholarship that uses this model. Nonetheless, as with almost any system of categorization, it risks simplifying complex historical realities by placing them in tidy, either/or boxes. I have placed Okey Ndibe among third generation writers, for example, even though his birth in the year of Nigeria's independence was only one year after the birth of Ben Okri, whom I have listed with second generation writers. Nonetheless, I stand by my association of Ndibe with the younger generation, not simply because Ndibe was born in the year of Nigeria's independence, but also because he did not begin to publish until much later. Okri's first novel, *Flowers and Shadows*, appeared in 1980, and his most famous novel, *The Famished Road*, came out in 1991. Ndibe, by contrast, did not publish his first novel, *Arrows of Rain*, until 2000. Though both authors continue to write, their most prominent literary moments stand about two decades apart. Not only an author's age, then, but also the history of their literary production, plays a role in such a framework.

Moreover, unlike previous generations, for whom Nigerian independence and the Biafran War are, respectively, often considered definitive, the so-called "children of the postcolony"[10] have no single major event viewed as representative, but rather a range of interrelated areas of ongoing crisis. If independence fostered nationalist optimism, and civil war fractured those dreams, today's various crises result in third generation

[10] Originally coined by Djiboutian writer Abdourahman Ali Waberi to describe the parallel third generation of African Francophone writers ("les enfants de la postcolonie"), the term has found widespread currency (Adesanmi and Dunton "Nigeria's Third Generation Writing" 15; see also Hartwiger 236, Hewett 76, Krishnan 74, etc.).

Nigerians' sometimes disparate and fragmentary responses to received notions of nationalism—an ideology itself in crisis. In the way that the second generation often wrote about the Biafran War, which they witnessed in their youth, some third generation writers have depicted the excesses of the Abacha regime, in novels like Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). In other cases, the nickname "Yahooze generation" links Nigerians in this age range to cybercrime, since the moniker refers to the "yahoo-yahoo boys," or the notorious email scammers who frequently use Yahoo! email addresses (Adebanwi *Authority Stealing* 36). Elsewhere, others focus on the role of the oil boom and crash, an event that offered different experiences to different subgroups of the third generation. In her novel *A Bit of Difference* (2012), for example, Sefi Atta suggests the term "oil boomers" to describe those born in the 1960s, "because they came of age during the oil boom and benefited from it […] dancing through dictatorships" (62-63). In contrast, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani depicts the experience of only slightly younger third generation Nigerians, who were born in the 1970s and came of age only to witness a decline in their standard of living; in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009), her narrator Kingsley—born, like his creator, around 1976—laments of the late 1990s: "When we were children, my father usually returned from work with […] imported treats. Gradually, they had gone out of reach of the common man. I could not remember the last time I had eaten any McVitie's biscuits" (146). In this way, the oil industry's trajectory holds a different, though no lesser, significance even among members considered part of the same generation. From the physical landscape of the Niger Delta to cyberspace, these areas of crisis shape young Nigerians' visions of nation and national possibilities.

In addition, as I noted at the beginning of the introduction, the third generation's move away from its predecessors' nationalism has become a major focal point of scholarship on third generation Nigerian and African literature; this aspect provides the argumentative thread that guides this dissertation. In contradistinction to the first generation's cultural nationalism and the second's Marxist-Nationalism, many critics hold, third generation writers have distanced themselves from potentially "restrictive and confining" nationalist engagements (Habila "Introduction" viii). According to this line of thinking, after decades of insistence on the need for literature to contribute to nationalist projects, coming from both older Africans and international audiences, younger writers have the flexibility to write about a wider range of topics, political or otherwise.

Many of those who celebrate a deemphasis on the nation call attention to a trend in negotiating among multiple specific localities. Perhaps the most famous of the thinkers in this camp is the London-born Taiye Selasi (b. 1979), a writer of Nigerian and Ghanaian descent ("Taiye Selasi"). In 2005, her seminal and controversial essay "Bye Bye Babar" brought widespread attention to the term "Afropolitan," which she applies to people of African descent—mostly those whose parents moved overseas in the 1960s, '70s and '80s—who were brought up in multiple contexts and now readily navigate between (mostly urban) settings in Africa, Europe, and/or the US, without viewing any one place as "home." Selasi's 2014 TED Talk furthers this idea, as she emphasizes the irrelevance of nationality to her experience and asks to be identified as "multi-local," rather than "multinational"; that is, she identifies with "New York, Rome and Accra," but not the United States, Italy, and Ghana ("Don't Ask"). Though this vision of Afropolitanism has come under fire for its socioeconomic privilege, reductive potential,

and tendency toward consumerism,[11] it remains influential in ongoing conversations about contemporary African writing.

Others have celebrated some form of multi-locality as a means of moving beyond the nation without explicitly discussing Afropolitanism. South Africa-based literary scholar Brenda Cooper, for example, reiterates the claim that third generation African writers have demonstrated a "rejection of the quest for nation" and argues that their work offers a type of "transnational" guidance and "broker[s] translation between cultures" (165, 7). In this reading, young African writers not only negotiate among different specific contexts in their own experiences, but also construct at least partial roadmaps for others to do the same. Service as a "cultural broker," in this line of reasoning, precludes national engagement.

For still others, a shift away from nationalism means not necessarily a complete replacement of national filiation with other types of affiliation, but rather an opportunity to explore the circulation of ideas and people throughout and beyond the African continent. Eminent Cameroonian public intellectual Achille Mbembe, for instance, has favored Afropolitanism for its transcendence of national boundaries. In a 2010 essay, Mbembe links the concept to what he calls "l'esprit du large," suggesting a far-reaching mindset uniquely enabled by Afropolitanism (Mbembe *Sortir* 233). In other words, for Mbembe, Afropolitanism is not so much a matter of "multi-locality" as it is an opportunity to move away from ideas of Africa as a site of stasis and to analyze ongoing migration and exchange.

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[11] For more critiques of Afropolitanism, see Stephanie Bosch Santana's "Exorcising Afropolitanism: Binyavanga Wainaina Explains Why 'I Am a Pan-Africanist, Not an Afropolitan' at ASAUK 2012" (2013), Marta Tveit's "The Afropolitan Must Go" (2013), and Emma Dabiri's "Why I'm Not an Afropolitan" (2014).

Quite recently, some scholars have called attention to African literature's "transnational turn" as bringing out a relationship between the highly localized and the global. In 2014, literary scholars Oluwole Coker and Alexander Greer Hartwiger each published arguments along these lines in the same special issue of African Studies series *Matatu*. Coker contends that recent Nigerian novels display a "transnational humanistic agenda" by focusing on a specific national issue—in his case study, underdevelopment—with an eye toward provoking global "change" in similar arenas (50). That is, for Coker, novels by Ndibe and Nwaubani explore underdevelopment in specific contexts in order to comment on underdevelopment throughout the global south. Hartwiger offers a similar argument, arguing that the "singular experience" of Elvis Oke, the Elvis Presley-impersonating, slum-residing protagonist of Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004), calls for greater attention to those Hartwiger calls "spectral populations"—individuals or groups rarely at the center of literary or political analyses (249). These arguments thus foreground connections between the highly local and the global, a tension I examine in this dissertation.

Despite the numerous claims of departures from nationalism, a few critics have argued that third generation African writing offers a revision to earlier understandings of nationalism, rather than a rejection of the concept wholesale. My argument will fall into this camp, though, as I will show, it diverges from others' in key ways. In 2008, literature scholar Adélékè Adéèkó identified one specific way in which recent Nigerian novels offer a more flexible understanding of national identity. In earlier writings, Adéèkó explains, Nigerians were compelled to remain within national boundaries at all costs, committed to "dying for the nation" if necessary (20). Recent fictional works, in contrast,

allow their characters to move overseas without becoming any less Nigerian or committed to the Nigerian nation (20). Further expanding understandings of Nigerian nationalism, African literature expert Madhu Krishnan identifies nationalism in recent texts as one of a network of affiliations, which in her readings can include immediate family, one's city, or the African continent (86, 91). For her, a multiplicity of affiliations does not mean a rejection of nationalism, but rather the "ongoing evolution of national commitment" (76). In this way, Krishnan, like Adéèkó, makes the case that while recent Nigerian fiction may indeed exhibit *transnational* tendencies, it does not necessarily constitute the *post-national* turning point that Habila seeks.

My argument builds from Krishnan's assertion that third generation writing portrays different, shifting national commitments, rather than an abandonment of nationalism altogether. In contrast with Krishnan's and others' focus on broad, transnational linkages, however, I identify and analyze in third generation Nigerian texts a turn to highly localized commitments to family, neighborhood, and city. I argue not against the existence of a transnational shift, but rather that there is another, local dimension, that has so far received little attention amidst the vocal claims of transnationalism. These narrow nationalisms, as I term them, are shaped by global contexts and do not necessarily signify the malicious exclusion of others, but they can reveal a disinterest in forging broader connections. Our era of interconnectivity can thus contribute to the construction of newly narrow networks.

To construct this overarching argument, the dissertation examines several recent Nigerian novels that explore three key interrelated areas of crisis in the country today, each of which forms the focal point of a chapter: the conflict over oil in the Niger Delta,

the rise of cybercrime, and the so-called "brain drain." These ongoing issues all create serious challenges for Nigeria, whether they are administrative, military, environmental, financial, legal, or educational. Despite these texts' cynicism about possibilities for effecting large-scale change, they nonetheless depict characters committed to survival and resistance via narrow nationalisms. Each of the authors whose work I discuss is writing back against international media narratives of Nigeria as chaotic and unlivable. The chapters are ordered such that they analyze the primary texts in roughly their chronological order of publication—all within the last ten years—and the relative socioeconomic privilege of the characters on which I focus increases with each essay. In terms of setting, they also forge a general movement outward; although global factors shape all three contexts, their focal points shift from insular networks in the Niger Delta, to Lagos cybercafés that enable characters to connect to scam victims all over the world, to diasporic migrations among continents.

The first chapter, "Niger Delta Women's Resistance in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," examines two novels about Nigeria's notorious environmental and political crisis in the Niger Delta. In the early 1990s, Saro-Wiwa's ethnic solidarity-based movement gathered a lot of momentum, marking the Niger Delta as a site for broad solidarity and international coalitions of support. The execution of Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues fractured the movement, however, and Agary's and Habila's novels reflect a pessimism about possibilities for solidarity and resistance in the aftermath of Abacha's regime. Utilizing political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott's ideas of "everyday forms of resistance," my analysis focuses on female characters' attempts at resistance, since women—both in reality and

within the novels—are most affected by the crisis but receive little attention in media narratives.

I read the protagonist of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), a teenager named Zilayefa, and her relationships with wealthy older men as an allegory both for gendered exploitation in and beyond the region, and for the Niger Delta's exploitation by both international and domestic political and economic forces. Trying to leave behind her unnamed Niger Delta village and improve her economic standing, Zilayefa earnestly pursues affairs with these men, but she eventually determines that they cannot offer a real escape, pursuing instead a narrow feminist nationalism centered around emotional and financial support networks. Her refusal to participate in the exploitative systems represented by these older men indicates that she is willing to "die for the nation" if doing so is the only escape (Adéèkó 20). By concluding with the teenaged Zilayefa breaking free of her cycle of emotional and financial dependence on men, the novel makes the case that individual personal acts of resistance can make a larger impact in larger structures of exploitation, and that the peoples of the Niger Delta must find a way to remove the region from the exploitative relationships bringing about environmental and political chaos. As I show, the novel also argues that, because exploitation of the environment goes hand in hand with the exploitation of women, political sovereignty for the Niger Delta becomes inextricable from women's rights. Taking the allegory to its logical conclusion, however, raises several serious questions. The fact that Zilayefa is able to rely on and commit to a small network of women who can provide emotional and financial support invites the question as to how the Niger Delta might separate itself from centuries of subjection to imperialism. Especially if those who exploit the Niger Delta's oil wealth are as

incorrigible as the characters who seduce the teenaged Zilayefa without a second thought, then to what extent does the novel problematically place responsibility on the peoples of the Niger Delta to end the crisis? And, given the novel's publication near the end of the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo, the first democratically elected leader after Abacha, in what ways is *Yellow-Yellow*'s conclusion a lament for opportunities lost in the immediately post-Abacha moment, rather than an expression of hope for real possibilities for change?

In contrast with *Yellow-Yellow*, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), less overtly demands that its readers attend to its female characters, as the two main characters are men. Set amidst the peak of Niger Delta militants' violence in 2009, the plot is driven by two main events—an oil industry-related fire in a fictional Niger Delta town, and the kidnapping of a British petroleum engineer's wife by militants—each of which has a female character's victimization at its heart. As I argue, the novel juxtaposes white British kidnapping victim Isabel Poole and the substantial press coverage her story receives, with the fire victim Boma and her relative invisibility within any sort of media narrative. Boma's peripheral narrative position is underscored by the fact that her own brother, a journalist and the novel's protagonist, appears disinterested in understanding her as a multifaceted personality and makes assumptions about her helplessness and victimhood. Though a minor character in the novel, Boma becomes the novel's only participant in meaningful resistance when she joins a small, eco-spiritual community committed to protecting its island, Irikefe, from the advancement of oil interests. Like Zilayefa, Boma turns for support to a small network committed to survival, at least within the small geographic space they can occupy, despite the chaos around them. The location

of Boma's chosen community on a small island in the rural Niger Delta, though, emphasizes its separation from other efforts, suggesting the continuing futility of broad coalitions like those that Saro-Wiwa led. Despite such isolation, however, I argue that Boma finds on Irikefe a nationalism that offers her belonging and emotional support and enables her to work with others to resist environmental and political violations of the island.

Ultimately, the chapter contends, both *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* reflect an inclination to revert to narrow networks of alliance, given a relative dearth of pragmatic options due to domestic failures and factors of globalization alike. Both Zilayefa's personal network and Boma's religious group on Irikefe function as a microcosm of the nation; Zilayefa's assertion of control over her body and Boma's defense of the island, both at the risk of their own safety, indicate that these narrow nationalisms are still about political sovereignty. But to what extent, the chapter inquires, are the characters' strategies effective modes of resistance, and to what extent are they about bare survival? Are their narrow nationalisms indicative of a resignation to the status quo, or can they reveal new ways to challenges the fragmentary political situation in the Niger Delta?

Shifting focus to another arena of apparent lawlessness, the second chapter takes on the only Nigerian novel to date about cybercrime. In "'Family Always Came First': The Yahooze Generation in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*," I examine Nwaubani's protagonist Kingsley's multiple alliances as he defies his ardently first generation nationalist, devotedly law-abiding father Paulinus's wishes by pursuing professional email scamming. As in Agary's and Habila's novels, this shift is partly borne out of a feeling of limited options in post-Abacha Nigeria. Economic

collapse, caused largely by corruption and the oil bust, prohibits the recent university graduate Kingsley from obtaining his dream job as a petroleum engineer, which in turn brings about his resort to criminal activity. He is also particularly desperate to earn money, though, out of devotion to his family—an ideological commitment that he inherited from his father, Paulinus. As a result, pragmatic (financial), ideological (prioritization of family), and personal (pride) reasons drive Kingsley's engagement with a narrow nationalism characterized by inherent criminality. *I Do Not Come to You* casts its protagonist as representative of at least some part of his generation, implying that his attitudes are characteristic among a frustrated subset of highly educated, underemployed young Nigerians. Concurrently, a technology of globalization—the internet—comes to support a traditional and local network in the family.

The 2009 novel emphasizes Kingsley's and by extension his (and Nwaubani's) generation's shift away from earlier versions of Nigerian nationalism. Where Paulinus sacrifices his and his family's well-being to his nationalistic ideals, Kingsley engages a form of nationalism that retains his father's patriotism but also adapts to evolving realities. Risking one's life or even denying oneself creature comforts become unnecessary in Kingsley's formulation. I investigate to what extent the novel implies that earlier generations' idealism—which an increasingly cynical Kingsley comes to view as simply a lack of pragmatism—is responsible for Nigeria's current economic challenges. Especially given its satirical tone, does *I Do Not Come to You* condemn such idealism, pity it, or do something else?

Further, in pursuit of substantive solutions to his real financial obstacles, Kingsley embraces the prevalent and often damaging stereotype of pervasive Nigerian criminality,

where Zilayefa and Boma aim to combat the oppressive status quo, at least in some small way. In the 1980s, Achebe famously lamented, "Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage; and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed" (Achebe *The Trouble* 47-48). In keeping with Achebe's call to recognize the spread of corruption, Nwaubani's 2009 novel ceases to "pretend" that it is merely a "slight" problem—but instead of offering a corrective, it proceeds to embrace and advance the trend, casting it as a mode of national survival, rather than a threat. In what ways, though, is the text's satire of Nigeria without concern for repercussions liberatory (by enabling writers to work beyond certain ideological and political boundaries) and in what ways might it prove harmful (by promoting a stereotype that costs financial, educational, and emotional damage to many Nigerians and others around the world)?

Finally, the dissertation's third chapter examines texts about young, educated Nigerians who have moved overseas, seemingly contributing to the "brain drain." "Diasporic Networks and Return Migration in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" argues that the primary texts use their protagonists' migration as a starting point for analysis of global networks like international aid, internet discourse, and enduring global inequalities and racism. I reveal how these novels suggest both that pan-African alliances have become outdated and that the internet can replicate global imbalances—factors that work together to foster highly localized communities. Though the socioeconomic advantages of the protagonists of Atta's and Adichie's endow them with more options and opportunities than are available to residents of the Niger Delta or even the struggling middle-class Kingsley, I argue that

they still make the case that even privileged Nigerians remain structurally disadvantaged in global intellectual and humanitarian conversations. Further, while Atta, Adichie, and many critics have depicted these novels as pushing back against the demand for African literature to be about nationalism—a pressure that comes both from earlier generations of African writers and from international literary audience—I contend that these texts nonetheless offer models for localized nationalisms, despite and in some ways because of their protagonists' global trajectories.

A Bit of Difference (2012) tells the story of "Nigerian expatriate in London" Deola, who becomes increasingly frustrated with the ways that her employer, an international aid organization, perpetuates rather than combats systemic global inequalities (5). As a result, she decides to devote herself instead to helping "the people she loves" and concurrently, to return to Nigeria to live among those who have a "share history" with her (106, 44). Even if the "shared history" of Nigerians is in some ways a colonial invention, as Terence Ranger would suggest, Deola's newly embraced community is narrow—limited to her handful of friends and family members—and nationalist—as least as she imagines it, as she frequently emphasizes the precedence of "Nigerian" identity over ethnic identities. Where Benedict Anderson has (somewhat idealistically) argued that nations inspire love, *A Bit of Difference* suggests that love can inspire or renew national commitment. To what extent, the chapter asks, is the novel's attitude overly optimistic or idealistic, or a problematic abdication of responsibility? In what ways is the novel distancing itself from earlier generations' overtly political nationalist commitments within and beyond literature, and in what ways is it critiquing

this inclination in Deola? How else does this "reorientation"—to borrow an oft-repeated term in the novel—reconfigure nationalism for a younger generation?

Another diaspora novel from an acclaimed Nigerian-born author living in the United States, Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), narrates protagonist Ifemelu's thirteen years in the US and eventual decision to return to Nigeria. Like Deola, Ifemelu grows exhausted by structural inequalities, which in her case limit her participation in intellectual conversation as well as her professional opportunities. Her increasing sense that she "should" be in Nigeria, and her later work to foster political and cultural conversations there, factor into what I argue might look like localism, but is ultimately a form of narrow nationalism. Arguably the least "nationalist" of the dissertation's five primary texts, *Americanah* serves to test the bounds between localism and narrow nationalism.

To be sure I do not intend to argue that narrow nationalisms appear in all third generation Nigerian writing, but I do hold that it is a widespread event. In part to make this point, the dissertation draws on work from writers with a diverse range of backgrounds. Kaine Agary, whose parents came from two different southern minority ethnic groups (Ijaw and Isoko), spent her childhood in Port Harcourt, the largest city in southern Nigeria; Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, both Igbo, grew up in Igbo-majority southeastern Nigeria; Helon Habila's southern Christian Tangale family raised him in the Muslim-majority north; and Sefi Atta, whose father was Ebira, a northern Muslim minority group, and whose mother was Christian and Yoruba, lived in Lagos until she moved to the UK for boarding school (Aminu; Agary "In an Interview with Nigerian Writer"; Dada; Tunca "Biography"; Cowley; Owomoyela 81).

Agary and Nwaubani live in Nigeria today, while Habila, Atta, and Adichie divide their time between Nigeria and the US (Agary "In an Interview with Nigerian Writer"; Dada; Tunca "Biography"; "Bio"; Owomoyela 81). They range in age from Atta, born in 1964, to Adichie as the youngest, born in 1977 (Owomoyela 81; Tunca "Biography"). The dissertation will attend to the specificities of each author's background, but in sum, engaging this range of writers will also enable me to illustrate that the third generation's portrayal of narrow national frameworks is not limited to any particular geopolitical, ethnic, religious, or other perspective.

The fact that five of the six writers of my primary texts are women reflects the unprecedented prominence of Nigerian women writers today. While earlier generations' most famous authors were almost always men—with only "Flora Nwapa and Mabel Segun as lone voices" in the first generation—women writers have come to the fore in recent decades (Adesanmi and Dunton "Everything Good" xii). An additional implication, then, is that women writers have played a primary role in shaping the literary narrow nationalisms I trace. Though nationalism is often viewed as "a male phenomenon," and women have historically served only as sexualized and/or domestic "supporting players"—often as wives, daughters, mistresses, and/or victims—my selection of novels, both in their majority-female authorship and their majority-female protagonist lineup, place women at the forefront of these adaptive approaches to nationalism (Özkırımlı 204; Eley and Suny 27).

In addition, partly because the texts I write about are recent—all published after Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton first laid out the concept of "third generation Nigerian writing" in 2005—few of them have received extended scholarly attention. They also

open up disparate and interdisciplinary academic conversations. *Yellow-Yellow*, for example, has been fairly popular in Nigeria but has received little international attention, whereas *Americanah* will soon become a movie produced by Brad Pitt (Child). The dissertation makes the case for this particular set of texts to be read alongside one another.

My primary texts are less diverse, however, with regard to their genre and language, as they are all novels originally written in English. I focus on Anglophone authors chiefly due to my own linguistic limitations. I add, though, that even though critics have not yet placed this set of novels in conversation with one another, they nonetheless participate in similar literary conversations because of their shared language. As Anglophone novels, they target at least a pan-Nigerian audience, if not always an international one, as English is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria ("U.S. English Foundation Research"). Among possible English-language texts, the dissertation focuses on novels because they have been the focus of much of the dominant literary critical conversation surrounding third generation Nigerian writing, and in fact Anglophone African writing since the 1950s. Moreover, following Benedict Anderson, novels have long enabled readers to imagine national communities.

As Anderson also shows, however, nationalism is "modular," adaptable to different contexts, and as even this relatively small subset of third generation Nigerian novels shows, nationalism takes on a variety of forms to meet the variety of needs and contexts in the face of multiple twenty-first-century areas of crisis in Nigeria (Anderson 4). As historian Prasenjit Duara has argued, "Nationalism is rarely the nationalism of the nation, but rather represents the site where very different views of the nation contest and

negotiate with each other" (2). Indeed, as I show, third generation Nigerian writing has become a site for such contestation; many third generation texts, rather than locating nationalism in the past, work to piece together various shifting and contingent nationalisms. Each of the chapters' primary texts offer some possibilities for different nationalisms: for the novels of Chapter 1, nationalism is largely about political sovereignty; in Chapter 2, nationalism emerges tied to both personal dignity and political ideology; and for the fictional return migrants of the last chapter, nationalism has to do with dignity and belonging. Throughout the dissertation, narrow nationalism functions as an umbrella term in that it can encapsulate both what might be legible as civic engagement—for example, Ifemelu's aim to increase awareness of key political issues—but it can also describe Kingsley's efforts to improve life for his family while furthering stereotypes of Nigerian criminality—hardly an instance of civic engagement. In each of these cases, though, nationalism entails a withdrawal into smaller networks to help make sense of ongoing crisis—including crisis in the inherited notion of nationalism.

Another key similarity among all the primary texts is that they each make the case that nationalism in the twenty-first century is *not* "constructed essentially from above," as Eric Hobsbawm has argued of earlier nationalisms, nor is it fading out of public consciousness so much as it is fracturing and evolving as the relationship of people to the nation-state is doing in the current moment of unprecedented global migration and technologically enabled interconnection (Hobsbawm 10). Seizing or maintaining control of the state, at least among these Nigerian writers, is no longer the central facet of nationalism that it once was (Breuilly 381).

The dissertation therefore invites various questions about the state of Nigerian and African literatures. In what ways, it inquires, does the continued engagement with nationalism—even rapidly adapting nationalisms—contest narratives of Afropolitanism, and in what ways might a nationally specific focus serve to supplement such cosmopolitan visions? Given African literature's growing popularity in the global literary market, in what ways might reiterating a specifically Nigerian literary identity carry special cultural capital? How do novels aimed at primarily Nigerian audiences, African audiences, and international readerships negotiate these issues differently, and to what effect? And how might new and quickly evolving technologies affects these dynamics?

In addition to an intervention in the conversation about contemporary Nigerian literature, the dissertation also carries larger implications for the nation and the continent. In a country that is already fractured in terms of political control and allegiances, and in an era in which the role of the nation-state remains uncertain, what are the implications of narrow nationalism for Nigerian sovereignty? That is, concerns about the government's effectiveness largely fuelled the results of last year's presidential election, in which Muhammadu Buhari, a former military head of state, defeated sitting president Goodluck Jonathan—widely perceived as a weak leader in the face of national security threats like Boko Haram. To what extent might these novels' narrow nationalisms enable strategies for effecting change from the bottom up, and in what ways might they potentially be destructive? Do narrow nationalist alliances have the capacity to expand or combine with one another, or will they entrench existing divisions? Do they preclude or complement possibilities for broader alliances? With the loss of faith in state-led or other top-down solutions, what remains as the role for broader organizations? Can narrow nationalisms

leave room for optimistic narratives, such as the "social pan-African" possibilities of social media, recently highlighted by the young Botswana-born writer Siyanda Mohutsiwa ("Is Africa's Future Online?")? Indeed, an attitude of resignation runs through all the primary texts I discuss, whether it is resignation to exploitation by the oil industry, to criminal behavior, to racism and global inequalities, or to the apparent impossibility of effecting top-down change either globally or nationally. In what ways is this resignation a matter of cynicism, and when is it a matter of pragmatism? Might it constitute a twenty-first-century variation on the Afropessimism of the 1980s and 1990s, and if so, why is it behaving that way? Examining understandings of narrow nationalist spaces in the work of third generation Nigerian writers has the potential to reveal alternative routes for political organization or new insight into challenges for the present-day Nigerian state—and for Africa and the global south more widely. With the various challenges Nigeria faces, it is urgent to consider what the youngest writers of the youngest continent have to say about the so-called Giant of Africa.

Chapter 1: "Keep This Island Free": Niger Delta Women's Resistance in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*

In July 2002, two thousand women gathered at the Escravos Tank Farm, the largest Chevron oil terminal in Nigeria, and demanded that the multinational company listen to the voices of those most harmed by its profiteering: ethnic minority women from the oil-rich Niger Delta. Predominantly ethnically Itsekiri, and ranging in age from their thirties to their nineties, the women refused to let anyone in or out of the facility, sang solidarity songs, and threatened to break taboo to "shame" oil companies by taking off their clothes if anyone interfered with their demonstration (Mukoro 91; Daniel; "Deal Reached"). In so doing, the women were participating in a longstanding tradition of visible women's protests in southern Nigeria, most famously emblematized by the 1929 women's war. At that time, tens of thousands of women destroyed property symbolic of men's power, demonstrated in little or no clothing to upend gender expectations and thereby shame (male) witnesses into addressing to their grievances, and repeatedly marched en masse to protest the actions of those behind women's declining social and political standings: local chiefs, "the colonial government and the European businesses" (Matera, Bastian, and Kent 143, 145, 132). Like their predecessors in 1929 and on other occasions, the Escravos protestors of 2002 succeeded in many of their goals: they (temporarily) halted Chevron's business operations and obtained key concessions, including more jobs for women and more funding for community infrastructure from the company (Mukoro 91; Daniel). The success of the Escravos demonstration soon inspired thousands of other Niger Delta women from various ethnic backgrounds to take action.

Making similar demands—typically for jobs, potable water, and improved access to education—women occupied a total of eight regional oil facilities that summer (Daniel; Ekine "Women's Responses" 78). The largest of these demonstrations took place in August, when three thousand Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Ilaje women occupied the headquarters of Shell and Chevron in Warri (Mukoro 92).

This recent series of events rightly received substantial attention in both scholarly articles and the mainstream media, which otherwise suffered from "an obvious gender gap" in their approaches to the Niger Delta crisis (Omotola "Women" 39). For decades, oil companies like Chevron and most notoriously Shell have wreaked environmental, economic, political, and social havoc on the Niger Delta. Almost all members of the region's oil-producing communities have suffered as a result, but women have been disproportionately affected, financially, medically, and socially. Yet, the Escravos protests marked the first time that women clearly took center stage in media narratives about the ongoing conflict, as most scholarly and activist work on the Niger Delta crisis focuses on the roles of men—whether they are leaders in the Big Oil projects devastating the region; workers on oil rigs; activists or militants rising up against Big Oil, from famed nonviolent environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa the early 1990s to Asari, the leader of the extremist Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF); or soldiers combating the so-called rebels (Saro-Wiwa *A Month* 13; "Leader"). In contrast to these male-dominated narratives of the conflict, then, the Escravos protests offered a very visible instance of women's successful collective action, and they received the substantive coverage they deserved.

Unfortunately, many media and scholarly narratives have cast the women's demonstrations of Summer 2002 as largely isolated incidents, rarely discussing women's coalitions before of after that cluster of highly visible events. Journalist Michael Peel, for example, writes of the relationship between the 1929 and the 2002 protests: "More than 70 years later, the women of the oil-rich delta are stirring once more"—as if women had taken no meaningful action between these two major events (Peel "Peacefully"). Similarly, an Associated Press piece asserts, "The women's blockade marks a departure in the Niger Delta, where armed men frequently resort to kidnapping and sabotage to demand jobs, protection money and compensation for alleged environmental damage" (Doran 14). Here, the author sets up the women's protest in contrast to male-dominated militancy to dub it a "departure," rather than acknowledging its context within other moments and forms of women's resistance. In these ways, media accounts have cast the Escravos protests as anomalous. Some scholarly treatments have been more nuanced, but they still tend to focus on the same series of specific, relatively visible historical events. International relations scholar Charles Ukeje, for example, focuses on particular "significant social protests by women," while legal expert Iyenemi Norman Wokoma examines a series of women's uprisings from 1929 to 2002, and international studies scholar Iwebunor Okwechime analyzes moments of direct "confrontation" between women and oil companies (Ukeje "From Aba" 609; Wokoma 173, 175; Okwechime 87). These and other writers' attention to these historical instances of Niger Delta women's protests against Big Oil are much needed and commendable, but they tend to rehearse the same particular events, thereby implicitly forging a narrative in which certain key

years—1929, 1984, 1986, and 2002, most often—witnessed Niger Delta's women's brief emergence from a general state of passive victimhood.

A few researchers have gone beyond these seminal events to investigate other aspects of women's solidarity in the Niger Delta. Political scientist Augustine Ikelegbe, as well as labor studies expert Edlyne Ezenongaya Anugwom and social work scholar Kenechukwu Anugwom, have drawn attention to the role of women's community organizations not only in their backing of formal protests, but also in the everyday financial and social support for their members (Ikelegbe 251, 252; Anugwom and Anugwom 343). Through extended interviews with individual women in several Niger Delta communities, social justice activist Sokari Ekine has explored both mass protests and individual women's acts of resistance, which she argues can even include acts like participating in interviews to spread awareness of their hardships ("Women's Responses" 27). In this way, this handful of scholars goes beyond the major visible events to explore other ways in which the most disproportionately affected group of people in the Niger Delta crisis work to survive amidst and to resist environmental and political devastation.

The reasons for the focus on major events like the Escravos protests lie partly in the political realities of the region. With the exception of activists like Sokari Ekine, who works in the area full-time, most researchers cannot safely travel into the violence-ridden Niger Delta, where the army, various militant groups, and local governments are variously at odds and in alliances with one another. Consequently, fiction offers a mode for writers to explore spaces where journalists or academics cannot get funding to visit due to safety concerns—and novels, in particular, can do so at length. Fiction can also go beyond numbers or "newsworthy" stories to investigate what political scientist and

anthropologist James C. Scott has called "everyday forms of resistance," which "make no headlines" but nonetheless play essential roles in shaping the ongoing conflict—perhaps, as Scott has suggested in a Malaysian context, even more influential roles than the numerically fewer but more sensational events that make headlines (xvii). In addition, neither those engaged in the everyday acts of resistance nor those at the receiving end of these actions may want them reported; for the former, "Their safety [often] lies in their anonymity," and for the latter, public attention to these actions might undermine their perceived authority or dominance (Scott 36).

With these factors in mind, I argue in this chapter that two recent Nigerian novels about the Niger Delta crisis, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) call attention to possibilities for women's resistance beyond large scale, highly visible events like the Escravos protests. Beyond these two novels, the significant body of creative writing on the region's crisis—while it does much commendable work—remains overall lacking in attention to women's issues. Poetry by second generation authors Tanure Ojaide and Ibiwari Ikiriko and third generation authors Ogaga Ifowodo and Uche Peter Umez, for example, offers varied and nuanced approaches to the crisis in mourning damage to oil-producing communities and asserting Nigerians' rights to control their own resources, but so far Nigerian poetry has not directly addressed the unique challenges Niger Delta women face.[12] In theater, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo (b. 1935) has written the most prominent plays about the Niger Delta: *The Wives' Revolt* (1985) and *All for Oil* (2000). Notably, *The Wives' Revolt* portrays a successful example

[12] For more, see Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986), one of the earliest literary works commenting on the region's condition; Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1997); Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* (1999); Umez's *Dark through the Delta* (2004); Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* (2005); and Umez's *Aridity of Feelings* (2006).

of women's collective action, narrating a fictional revolt against the men of their oil-producing village because of the sexist distribution of their oil revenues. Though the women characters are protesting local men's misogyny—rather than, for example, the oil company's policies—the play nevertheless stands out in its focus on Niger Delta women's agency. Short stories by A. Igoni Barrett (b. 1979) and Uche Peter Umez (b. 1975) are among the first works to depict twenty-first century militant activity in the region, making them groundbreaking in that sense, but they remain male-dominated. Barrett's story features no female characters at all, and the only woman in Umez's text is the narrator's mother, who worries about his safety but otherwise contributes little to the story.

Finally, *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* join a small group of novels commenting on the crisis. *Tides* (1993), by Isidore Okpewho (b. 1941), investigates ethnic alliances and laments environmental damage but does not touch on gender dynamics. In contrast, Ojaide's *The Activist* (2006), second generation writer Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet* (2008), British author Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away* (2011), and second generation writer May Ifeoma Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery* (2013) clearly call attention to women's issues. Of these texts, all but *Love My Planet* specifically feature major women's demonstrations that evoke the 1929 and 2002 protests, as the characters sing and remove their clothes in collective protest. While the women of *The Activist* are tear gassed and raped in retaliation for their actions,[13] those in *Tiny Sunbirds*[14] and *Oil*

[13] The conclusion of *The Activist* is troubling in that, despite the novel's seemingly positive depiction of Niger Delta women engaging in substantive collective action, it ultimately denies them the ability to impact company or government policies. Worse, where they are brutally punished for their activist efforts, the novel's highly educated male protagonist soars ahead with his successes, achieving many concessions through his apparently skillful negotiations and eventually winning the governorship of Niger Delta State in a landslide election (318). The novel's depiction of women's resistance thus proves pessimistic at best and dangerously misogynistic at worst.

Cemetery successfully obtain concessions, like their real-life counterparts in Escravos. By doing so, these novels successfully portray women's collective agency in response to the Niger Delta crisis. Aside from *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water*, though, these depictions have been limited to reiterations of the Escravos events—which, while important, do not tell the full story. Especially in an era of growing cynicism about the possibilities for mass resistance in the Niger Delta—a shift I discuss below—other possibilities for solidarity and other strategies for resistance have become increasingly important to consider.

In this chapter, I draw out the ways in which Agary's and Habila's female characters not only face tremendous hardships as members of oil-producing communities, but also grow empowered to take action in response to their circumstances, often in subtle, yet no less meaningful, ways. Each text also offers a narrative of Niger Delta women's resistance during key historical moments that bookend the 2002 Escravos protests. *Yellow-Yellow*, the coming of age story of a teenager named Zilayefa, takes place from 1996 to 1998, approximately the time frame between the Nigerian state's notorious murder of nine environmental activists in November 1995 and the death of dictator Sani Abacha in June 1998 (*Yellow-Yellow* 34, 175). Tremendous governmental suppression of political opposition occurred during this period, and in response, formerly nonviolent activist movements became increasingly militant. Set about a decade later, most of *Oil on Water* occurs during August 2009, near the peak of militant insurgencies, which entailed attention-grabbing tactics like kidnappings (*Oil on Water* 236). With its plot catalyst drawn from the period's sensationalism, the novel's protagonist Rufus, a

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[14] While *Tiny Sunbirds*'s position representation of Niger Delta women's knowledge and agency is commendable, the novel depicts Nigerian men in highly problematic ways, as male characters are either abusive abandoners, like the protagonist Blessing's father, or violent school dropouts, like her brother.

journalist, travels through the Niger Delta searching for the kidnapped wife of an oil executive. These two historical moments—the post-Saro-Wiwa phase of Abacha's dictatorship and the 2009 military insurgencies—are critical to understanding today's situation. Both novels convey some pessimism about possibilities for resistance after Saro-Wiwa's death; *Yellow-Yellow* laments that the end of Abacha's military dictatorship in 1998 did not bring about greater change in the Niger Delta, while *Oil on Water* calls attention to the necessarily fragmentary nature of resistance amidst the militant insurgency. As I show, though, both also continue to offer some hope through narrow nationalisms, whether through Zilayefa's feminist commitment to her local network or through Rufus's sister Boma's participation in an eco-spiritual community devoted to combating environmental damage.

My reading brings together the novels to advance conversation about women's resistance within the conflict, but the two texts arose out of distinct authorial contexts. For her part, Nigeria-based public policy expert Kaine Agary pursued a specific political project to make Niger Delta women's struggles more visible. Born in the 1970s in the United States to Nigerian parents from different southern ethnic minorities (Ijaw and Isoko), Agary grew up in Port Harcourt, the Niger Delta's largest city (Aminu). She moved to the US to earn her BA in Sociology and Economics at the all women's Mount Holyoke College and her MPA with an emphasis on public policy at New York University ("Interview with Kaine Agary"). After completing her degrees, Agary returned to Lagos, where she is currently studying law, writing her second novel, and working as managing director of Dtalkshop, a Nigerian company that "aims to increase legal literacy and awareness in Nigeria" through print and digital publications—including

Yellow-Yellow (Feghabo 315; Njoku; Agary "In an Interview with Nigerian Writer"). Her other published fiction includes short stories about the Niger Delta, such as "My Blessing, My Curse" (2008), narrated as a memoir from the perspective of the region personified as a long-suffering mother. This story makes explicit the type of linkage between environmental damage and women's bodies that I draw out in *Yellow-Yellow*.

Agary's only novel to date, *Yellow-Yellow* was published by Dtalkshop as part of its mission to build awareness of the situation in the Niger Delta. Inspired by Ken Saro-Wiwa's posthumously published prison memoir *A Month and a Day* (1995), the novel pays tribute to the late activist by critiquing both international and domestic forces at play in the exploitation of the Niger Delta (Agary *Yellow-Yellow* 179). Further, as Agary has explained of her decision to produce a work of fiction:

> *Yellow-Yellow* was my response to the frustration I felt from meeting many Nigerians who were ignorant of the issues in the Niger-Delta and why there was so much agitation in the late 1990s. What most people, even Nigerians, knew was based on media propaganda, which highlighted the youth violence and portrayed everyone talking about the Niger-Delta as militants or rabble rousers. ("In an Interview")

With the publication of *Yellow-Yellow*, Agary was self-consciously contributing to a more complex, nuanced narrative of the crisis, aiming at a primarily Nigerian readership. In addition, she also prioritized her work in calling attention both to women's issues in a context where she believed "women's issues were rarely in contemplation" and to the situation of biracial children like Zilayefa since, in the author's words, it "is a reality of the Niger Delta that we rarely speak about" ("In an Interview").

Indeed, *Yellow-Yellow* departs from its predecessors in its unprecedented focus on women's issues in the Niger Delta crisis—an aspect of the novel of which scholarship has rightly taken note. Literary critic E. D. Simon, for example, has argued that Agary's novel fills a substantial narratological gap by depicting the crisis through a feminist lens (158). Similarly, literature professor Sunny Awhefeada shows how *Yellow-Yellow* aligns the exploitation of women with the devastation of the Niger Delta environment, while creative writer and world literature expert Ngozi Chuma-Udeh observes how the novel casts girls and women as most victimized by the oil industry's effects (Awhefeada 98; Chuma-Udeh 110). In addition, ecocriticism scholar Charles Cliff Feghabo has shown how Agary's novel casts Zilayefa's experience as representative of the distinct plight of single women in the Niger Delta (323, 325). In these ways, literary criticism has embraced *Yellow-Yellow* as a much-needed corrective to depictions of the Niger Delta crisis as a male-dominated space.

The novel immediately received high praise in Nigeria and has won several notable prizes, including the 2007 ANA/Chevron Prize for Environmental Writing and the 2008 NLNG Prize for Nigerian Literature, one of the most prestigious literary awards in Africa ("In an Interview"; Feghabo 315). Strikingly, these lucrative prizes are both sponsored by major oil companies: the first, sponsored by Chevron, is the most profitable of the Association of Nigerian Authors' awards at US$2,000, and the second, sponsored by Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Limited, was worth an impressive US$50,000 at the time of Agary's win (Olantunbosun; "The Nigeria Prize"). On one hand, these awards seem to constitute a commendable and "substantial investment in literature" (Wenzel "Petro-Magic-Realism" 461). On the other hand, however, the funds spring from the

exploitation of Nigerian peoples and resources, and they go toward not just literary patronage, but also the shaping of the intellectual conversation around Big Oil (Wenzel "Petro-Magic-Realism" 460). While the texts eligible for the NLNG Prize portray environmental devastation and other negative effects of the oil industry, writers have stayed quiet about various bribery scandals, for example (Wenzel "Petro-Magic-Realism" 461). *Yellow-Yellow*, then, is both a novel critical of Big Oil's activity in the Niger Delta and a text that steers clear of naming names or directly assigning blame. Indeed, as I will argue, the novel's conclusion assigns greater responsibility for change to Niger Delta people than it does to the multinational corporations or corrupt government officials who perpetuate environmental and other damage in the region.

In contrast with Agary's novel's (perhaps partly oil-tainted) domestic acclaim, Habila's *Oil on Water* has become an international bestseller, aided by its author's global fame. Unlike Agary, Habila is not from oil-rich southern Nigeria, but rather the northeastern region of the country, where he was born in 1967 and where his Christian Tangale family was both a religious and an ethnic minority (Cowley). As a young adult, Habila completed a degree in English at the University of Jos, located in central Nigeria (Habila Interview with Ramonu Sanusi). He soon began to win prestigious awards and fellowships for his creative writing,[15] and he now resides primarily in Virginia, where he teaches creative writing at George Mason University, though he travels often to Nigeria. He has published three novels, edited several anthologies, served in administrative roles

[15] Habila's most notable honors include the 2001 Caine Prize for African Writing, awarded to African short stories; the first African Writer Fellowship at the University of East Anglia in 2002; the 2003 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Novel; the first Chinua Achebe Fellowship at Bard College, offered to him in 2005 by none other than Achebe himself; and one of the 2015 Windham-Campbell Prizes, for which Anglophone writers in fiction, nonfiction, and drama are all qualified—and which grants an astonishing $150,000 to its recipients ("Helon Habila"; "Bio"; "Yale Announces 2015 Prizewinners").

for African writers' organizations, and co-created Cordite Books, a publishing company for African crime and spy novels ("Bio").

Shortly after Habila's move to the US in 2005, a UK-based film company invited him to write a script about the Niger Delta conflict. While the author had not shied away from political writing before—his first novel, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), depicts the oppressive Abacha regime—Habila has acknowledged that he had previously "never thought of" writing about the ongoing environmental disaster (Habila "Bookshelf"). The invitation piqued his interest, and he drafted a script. Ultimately, however, the company rejected the script, and thus the author's third novel, *Oil on Water*, was "accidentally" born (Habila "Rivers of Oil"; Habila "Bookshelf"). Where Agary aimed in her novel to disrupt the focus on male actors in the Niger Delta conflict, Habila was concerned that media depictions had concentrated overly on the roles of oil companies and the government. He explains of his goals for *Oil on Water*, "I wanted to draw attention to the environment and the people who are living on that land and who are really suffering" ("Rivers of Oil"). Like *Yellow-Yellow*, then, *Oil on Water* was at least partially conceived as an effort to bring greater public awareness of those profoundly impacted by the conflict but who have received little media attention.[16]

The work of these two novels is only a start in complicating popular understandings of the multifaceted Niger Delta crisis, where oil-producing communities face a variety of environmental, social, political, and economic problems throughout the vast, diverse, and ecologically fragile region. Almost the size of South Dakota at just under 29,000 square miles, the Niger Delta encompasses nine of Nigeria's thirty-six

[16] Curiously, Habila claims he wanted to avoid writing "too much of a political novel" with *Oil on Water* ("Rivers of Oil"). Whether such a goal is desirable or even possible is debatable, but as my argument will show, I read *Oil on Water* as decidedly political.

states and is the largest wetland in Africa (Obi and Rustad "Introduction" 3; Oluduro and Durojaye 772). The region is also home to "one of the highest concentrations of biodiversity in the world" (Okonta and Douglas 69). As a consequence of oil companies' activities, however, many of the region's ecosystems have been disrupted, damaging land beyond repair and driving certain animal and plant species to extinction (Okonta and Douglas 69). As mangroves are torn up, for example, the soil underneath them erodes, further disrupting the ecological system (Okonta and Douglas 69). Given that about 70% of federal revenue comes from the sale of crude oil, though, neither oil companies nor the Nigerian government has indicated serious interest in restricting oil-producing activities (Gallucci).

The ecologically unique, predominantly rural setting is home to almost a fifth of Nigerians: approximately thirty-one million people, almost all of whom belong to ethnic minority groups, a factor that further shapes and complicates the crisis (Iaccino). Some of these ethnic groups are quite large—the most populous group, the Ijaw, number about twelve million—but due to the structure of Nigeria's government, the country's political power remains primarily in the hands of the three largest ethnic groups, whose populations are geographically concentrated outside the Niger Delta region (Ekine *Blood and Oil* 23). Despite the relatively large number of Ijaw people, for example, state boundaries divide up their population such that they become minorities within each state (Ibaba 73). In addition to the Ijaw, the approximately forty ethnic minority groups of the Niger Delta include the Ogoni, Etche, Urhobo, Efik, Ibibio, Ikwerre, Abua, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ndokwa, Andoni, and Edo (Watts "Sweet and Sour" 40; Ibaba 73; Okonta and Douglas 5). Even within these ethnic groups, people sometimes speak different

languages; in fact, about a hundred of Nigeria's approximately four hundred languages are spoken in the region (Okonta and Douglas 5; Darah 102).

Almost all of these diverse peoples are adversely affected by oil production in their region, receiving few benefits but facing horrific, preventable hardships. Despite deceptive "greenwashing" narratives—or, to borrow a term from the late Saro-Wiwa, "shellspeak"—the numerous major, preventable environmental problems caused directly by oil production include oil spills, fires, and poisoned mudbanks and bodies of water. Oil spills can cause, among other dangers, difficult-to-control fires that destroy farmlands, homes, and other property (Ekine "Women's Responses" 68). Water for drinking and washing is often unsafe, in some places clocking in at over 900 times the safe level of benzene, a chemical that can cause a range of health problems that include nausea, convulsions, irregular heart beats, fertility problems in women, anemia, and cancer (Oluduro and Durojaye 773; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Even rainwater, once a convenient source of fresh water during the rainy season, is too polluted for use, to the point that it will leave black stains on clothes or dishes left outside (*Daughters* 29:59-30:29).

While the lack of safe drinking and washing water affects all residents of oil-producing communities, it presents women with additional risks to their health and safety. First, interaction with oil-polluted water can affect women's reproductive systems and ability to breastfeed safely (Oluduro and Durojaye 780). Prescribed gender roles make women primarily responsible for retrieving water for the household; when they have to travel further to obtain clean water, they lose valuable hours that could have been spent toward earning money and are at greater risk for sexual assault (*Daughters* 29:15-

29:19; Oluduro and Durojaye 779). Rape is alarmingly common in the region, sometimes perpetuated by oil workers passing through the area, and sometimes even by soldiers assigned to guard oil stations (Oluduro and Durojaye 781). In some areas of the Niger Delta, as many as ninety percent of women have been sexually assaulted (Ijorogu-Reed).

Like its land and water, the region's air is also severely polluted by oil companies' practices. In a procedure called gas flaring, oil workers burn off undesired natural gas byproduct from local stations into the air (Okonta and Douglas 73). The ensuing air pollution leads to health risks like dehydration and harm to reproductive organs; damage to land and homes from scattered oil droplets; and constant light in some communities, severely disrupting residents' sleep cycles (Oluduro and Durojaye 779; Jones). An instance of what critic Rob Nixon has termed "slow violence"—the "long dyings" of the poor—the damages caused by gas flaring appear gradually but are no less devastating for Niger Delta communities than more "spectacular" events like massive oil spills (2). Again, women of the Niger Delta often face greater health risks due to gas flaring: the pollution damages women's reproductive systems and puts post-menopausal women, whose bodies cannot regulate their internal temperatures as well, especially at risk for dehydration (Oluduro and Durojaye 780).

The oil industry's societal impacts are similarly alarming. Many people from oil-producing communities see little future for themselves in these exploited, rural towns, so they have migrated en masse to urban centers, especially nearby Port Harcourt. As a result, competition for limited jobs has escalated in cities, while Niger Delta communities become increasingly unstable due to shrinking populations (Ahonsi 30). Even more people will eventually have to leave their homes in the Niger Delta as rising sea levels

cover more and more land (Okonta and Douglas 111). Moreover, due to the high numbers of transient workers and subsequent increases in both sex work and rape, the Niger Delta has one of the country's highest HIV/AIDS rates (Akubor 28).

Environmental devastation has also led to the collapse of many Niger Delta people's traditional sources of livelihood, like farming and fishing. These industries produce diminishing returns not only for the perhaps obvious reason of frequent oil spills, but also because companies like Shell build pipelines and canals right through otherwise usable farmland and indiscriminately dump waste in communities (Saro-Wiwa *Genocide* 81-82; Okonta and Douglas 2). These problems are almost entirely avoidable, as policy analyst Ike Okonta and the late attorney Oronto Douglas have emphasized: "Whereas Shell takes great pains to bury its oil pipelines out of sight in other countries, [in Nigeria] the company simply lays them right across farmland and people's homes" (77).

While all residents of the Niger Delta's oil-producing communities suffer from the loss of viable farmland and fishing waters, women often bear the brunt of the financial cost. Historically, women in the region have been primarily responsible for farming and fishing, and among fishers of both genders, women are more likely to fish in the more polluted rivers and creeks, whereas men are also deep sea fishers—out where pollution is more diluted. In addition, Niger Delta men have also worked with lumber, and as builders and welders—jobs that pollution does not make obsolete, and skills that are transferable to more urban areas as well (*Daughters* 31:38-32:16; Oluduro and Durojaye 774). Exacerbating these problems, local elites and oil companies sometimes work together to exclude women from receiving oil revenue (Oluwaniyi 150).

While communities suffer from collapsing infrastructure, oil revenues go into the pockets of industry executives and corrupt politicians. Tragically, pervasive corruption is a major factor that prevents funds from reaching the infrastructure projects that oil-producing communities are promised (Peel *A Swamp* 167). Rather than supporting the peoples whose historical homelands produce the oil, in fact, this money has instead gone to costly international efforts like the 1990s ECOMOG wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as urban domestic projects such as the development of Lagos and more recently, Abuja (Darah 114).

With so much at stake, advancing the conversation surrounding the diverse experiences and the modes of resistance of the peoples of the Niger Delta is more urgent than ever. Consequently, this chapter analyzes how *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* portray their female characters' varying responses to their circumstances. As literary scholar Charles Cliff Feghabo has lamented of literary representations of the crisis, much like in in scholarly and activist writings, "in most of the body of writing that has emerged from the Niger Delta, female characters are shadows of or mere adjuncts to male characters" (319). While neither *Yellow-Yellow* nor *Oil on Water* depicts women's collective action as visible as the Escravos demonstrations, both texts depict female characters who exercise agency to survive and even improve their circumstances against the odds. In so doing, I hold, they make the case that, although their characters' modes of resistance do not occur on the scale of the Escravos protests, they still play an important role in shaping the ongoing crisis. In other words, while these novels' characters do not have access to the option to participate in mass demonstrations, they continue to pursue modes of resistance that *are* available to them, even if as individual acts, they do not

make a massive impact on their own—but, perhaps over time and "multiplied many thousand-fold," they forge an element to the story that risks being overlooked (Scott xvii). *Yellow-Yellow*'s Zilayefa insists on self care and eventually risks her life to avoid participation in the patriarchal system that would, in the short term, benefit her. Reading Zilayefa's individual struggles and acts of resistance as an allegory, I argue that Agary's novel links women's reproductive and other rights to the Niger Delta's political sovereignty. The localized feminist nationalism *Yellow-Yellow* promotes seems in some ways liberatory, but it also places responsibility for change with average Niger Delta residents, rather than the political and economic powers that have created the crisis. In *Oil on Water*, Boma joins an eco-spiritual community that refuses to give up its tiny island. Again, though their territorial claims are small, their willingness to risk their lives for at least the sovereignty of their island helps make legible a nationalism that prioritizes sovereignty. Through Boma's group and in other ways, Habila's novel argues that the most visible forms of resistance are often not the most effective. That said, I wish to avoid exaggerating the impact of these acts, as they fact that they are taking place on such a small scale also serves as a reminder that possibilities for resistance are indeed very limited for many people in the Niger Delta. I thus read the novels against the popular media and critical narratives that focus almost exclusively on a set of major and visible events, and instead, following James Scott, I draw out the "everyday forms of resistance" that the novels suggest are available on a day-to-day basis to women in the Niger Delta. Before doing so, I first offer an overview of the historical and political context essential to understanding the cases that these novels make.[17]

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[17] My overview often relies on key dates, which risks reiterating the pattern of the existing scholarship I hold that *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* are arguing against in their emphasis on less visible acts of

IMPERIALISM AND OIL IN THE NIGER DELTA

Since the fifteenth century, the Niger Delta has been a particularly significant site for European, and later Euro-American, exploitation of people and resources. The region's people came into contact with Europeans as early as 1444, when early Portuguese imperialists first arrived to steal human beings to sell as slaves (Okonta and Douglas 6). As Okonta and Douglas have shown, this history was only the first phase of a system of exploitation that has culminated with today's oil economy (6). After the slave trade's abolition in 1807, European merchants pursued the palm oil trade instead (Okonta and Douglas 7). The superficially legitimate business, however, involved systematic scamming and even outright robbery of African traders—not unlike today's oil industry, though with less environmentally devastating consequences (Okonta and Douglas 8).[18]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British imperialists lay the formal groundwork for the exploitative economic structures in place today. Britain granted a series of royal charters starting in 1881, abandoning previous treaty agreements and enabling British commercial interests to strengthen their economic hold over the area (Falola and Oyeniyi 44-45). As Kaine Agary's novel suggests, this period led to the birth of an early generation of so-called "yellow-yellows": children whose European fathers traveled to Nigeria for financial profit and along the way took advantage of young Nigerian women, who found themselves pregnant and abandoned (74). From early on, then, the European exploitation of Nigeria's land and resources went hand in hand with the exploitation of young women—a trend that would continue, as Agary's protagonist

resistance, but in so doing I hope to orient my reader.

[18] For more on the relationship between the palm oil trade, the oil industry, and Nigerian literature, see Jennifer Wenzel's "Petro-Magic-Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature" (2006).

Zilayefa is a younger "yellow-yellow," a product of the 1970s oil boom. In 1914, the same year that then-Governor-General of Nigeria Lord Frederick Lugard officially merged North and South Nigeria, he also enacted Nigeria's "first oil-related legislation": the Colonial Mineral Ordinance, which gave exclusive oil prospecting rights to Britain (Okonta and Douglas 23). Lugard, the same figure often blamed for much of the country's ethnic conflict (often seen as a consequence of his unification of Nigeria) thus also initiated a century of Euro-American exploitation of oil resources in Nigeria. Many years later, first generation Nigerian writer John Pepper Clark (b. 1935) would portray this seminal, tumultuous moment in his play *All for Oil* (2000). Two decades after Lugard's Colonial Mineral Ordinance, as World War II approached, British leaders realized the unprecedented urgency of access to oil. In 1937 and again in 1938, new regulations granted all "exploration and prospecting rights" in Nigeria to Shell and to BP's predecessor, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (Peel *A Swamp* 41; Okonta and Douglas 23).

In the Niger Delta, the late 1950s witnessed the first discovery of oil—the highly coveted resource that has remained at the heart of conflict in the region—and, simultaneously, the first of many lackluster official efforts to assuage minorities' concerns about political underrepresentation. In 1956, Shell discovered oil in Oloibiri, located in the eastern Niger Delta; by 1958, the company was retrieving and exporting the region's oil (Okonta and Douglas 49; Peel *A Swamp* 23). Also in 1958, British administrators convened the Willink Commission of Inquiry into Minority Fears and Means of Allaying Them (Nwajiaku-Dahou 52). Among its few responses were to declare the Niger Delta a "Special Federal Territory"—a formal designation with little

practical consequence—and to form the Niger Delta Development Board, which would disintegrate by 1960 (Oboreh 22). Several minority-led political parties emerged,[19] but majority parties' interests often determined their successes (or failures). Sometimes a majority party from another region would support a minority group to disrupt the balance of power in that region, and in other cases a majority party might threaten to withhold basic resources, like water, if a minority group in their region did not support them (Okpu 139; Jervis 16). Meanwhile, the British administration, aware its formal colonial reign was coming to an end, passed the 1959 Petroleum Profits Tax Ordinance, which guaranteed that all oil profits from the Niger Delta would be split fifty-fifty between the federal Nigerian government and the oil companies (Okonta and Douglas 23).

By the mid-1960s, the newly independent Nigeria faced major challenges, and the Niger Delta was a hotbed for conflict over ethnic differences and oil resources. The January 1966 coup was the next month followed by Ijaw activist Isaac Adaka Boro, with his group the Niger Delta Volunteer Service, declaring the Niger Delta Republic in a secession that would last for twelve days (Rowell, Marriott, and Stockman 71; Ako 45). Other movements in the Niger Delta, including the Calabar Ogoja Rivers State Movement (CORM) and the Conference of Rivers Chiefs and Peoples, also increased their activities around this time (Ukiwo 22). Amidst a context of escalating interethnic violence throughout Nigeria, including the July 1966 coup, the Igbo-dominated Eastern region increased its threats of secession (Achebe 82-83). In May 1967, the Eastern region

[19] Ijaw-led groups during this era, for example, included the Ijaw Rivers Peoples League, the Ijaw Union, the Rivers State Congress, the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference, and the Niger Delta Congress (Ibaba 75).

declared its independence as the Republic of Biafra, and federal Nigeria soon went to war to reclaim the region (Brandler 230; Nwankwo and Ifejika 6).[20]

Along with interethnic conflict, desire to control the Niger Delta's oil resources shaped the course of the Biafran War. The federal government prioritized resecuring its access to oil, and both Britain and Shell-BP—sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly—supported the federal government in the war, seeing it as more conducive to their business interests than an independent Biafra would have been (Okonta and Douglas 21, 23; Peel *A Swamp* 54).[21] Before the war began, Shell-BP had produced on average 487,200 barrels of crude oil a day in Nigeria, and Britain received close to forty percent of the oil produced in Nigeria, so the stakes were high; elevating Britain's energy needs, the June 1967 Six Day War "extensively disrupted" the transport of Middle Eastern oil to Europe, making access to the Niger Delta's resources all the more pressing for British interests (Uche 122, 113). Throughout the three-year war, the federal government increasingly tightened its control over the Niger Delta's oil resources as it reclaimed the valuable land. Beginning in 1968, all oil companies active in Nigeria were required to have their head offices in Lagos, then the country's capital (Darah 113). The next year, a new Petroleum Act mandated that all oil revenue would go directly to the federal government, which was to redistribute the money to states largely at its own discretion—which meant that much of this money went into politicians' pockets (Okonta and Douglas 19, 21). Throughout this time, minorities in the Niger Delta were between a rock and a

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[20] In January 1967, federal and Eastern leaders almost reached a compromise through the Aburi Accord, but for reasons that are still highly debated, the agreement fell through at the eleventh hour (Nwankwo and Ifejika 220). Notably, some scholars have speculated that the Aburi Accord's collapse was due to the federal government's concern that an independent Eastern region would control the Niger Delta's oil fields, thereby decreasing or even eliminating its access to oil profits (Okonta and Douglas 22).

[21] For a thorough history of the role of Shell-BP in the Biafran War, see Chibuike Uche's "Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War" (2008).

hard place: their choices were to face domination in the new Biafran state or in the old Nigerian one. Obtaining minority groups' support became crucial for each side; the federal government even pardoned onetime secessionist Isaac Boro so that he would help lead its forces through the difficult-to-navigate rivers of the Niger Delta (Darah 113). Like two to three million other Nigerians from all ethnic backgrounds, Boro eventually lost his life in the conflict (D. Jacobs 4; Darah 113).

In January 1970, the war ended, reuniting Nigeria at the start of the decade that would see a tremendous oil boom—and corresponding damage to the communities of the Niger Delta. The same year, the first major oil spill in the increasingly exploited region occurred in Bori, the birthplace of Ken Saro-Wiwa. The spill lasted three weeks, and it would mark the first of many times that Shell blamed local Nigerians' "sabotage" for a spill, despite the lack of evidence for such accusations (Okonta and Douglas 76). In 1971, Nigeria joined OPEC, and in 1973, a worldwide increase in the cost of crude oil benefited the oil companies and Nigerians at the center of government (Ayadi 203; El-Gamal and Jaffe 1; Okonta and Douglas 24). Taking advantage of these tremendous profits, a 1975 decree "increased the federal government's share of the oil proceeds from 50 to 80 percent, leaving the states with only 20 percent" (Okonta and Douglas 25). Despite growing demands from some communities, the government made few efforts to mitigate the increasing environmental, economic, and social damage to the Niger Delta (Ayuba 132).[22]

[22] In 1979, the government seemed to take action on behalf of communities by decreeing that oil companies had to end the environmentally and medically dangerous practice of gas flaring by 1984, but with few mechanisms to ensure compliance, companies continued to flare gas and simply paid some minimal penalty fines (Okonta and Douglas 73).

The Niger Delta's problems escalated in the 1980s. IMF and World Bank policies, in conjunction with dropping global oil prices, led to growing expenses for the Nigerian government, such that by the middle of the decade, 44% of the country's export earnings went to pay off international debts (Soremekun 99; Okonta and Douglas 31). Meanwhile, between 1986 and 1996, 2.5 million barrels of oil were spilled in the Niger Delta—a horrifying number that, as one researcher has pointed out, is "equivalent to 10 Exxon Valdez disasters" (Ekine *Blood and Oil* 19). Gradually, under President Ibrahim Babangida's administration (1985-1993), people from oil-producing communities began to organize demonstrations, including the occupation of oil facilities (Ayuba 132). Major women's protests against the American oil corporation Pan Ocean, for example, occurred in 1984 and 1986, using strategies including the mass occupation of Pan Ocean's production site while chanting, dancing, and during the 1984 event, removing their clothes, utilizing the shaming device made famous in the 1929 protests (Ukeje "From Aba" 610; Okwechime 73). Despite these significant efforts—the 1986 women's protest mobilized 10,000 participants—the federal government maintained its longstanding disinterest in alleviating the suffering of the peoples whose land it so eagerly exploited (Okwechime 73). In August 1990, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, presented the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which demanded the recognition of greater territorial, political, cultural, and social rights (Saro-Wiwa *A Month* 66, 69). Despite the government's lackluster response,[23] Saro-Wiwa's successful mobilization along ethnic lines—combating what he and many others understood as a

[23] One concession was the 1992 creation of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), which increased the amount of revenue the oil-producing communities received and gave them slightly more political power, but like the ill-fated Niger Delta Development Board decades earlier, few stakeholders considered OMPADEC a sincere effort to improve the lot of the oil-producing communities (Okonta and Douglas 32, 33).

gradual genocide against the Ogoni and other ethnic minorities in the region—would remain a key strategy for the region's activists (Saro-Wiwa *A Month* 75-76; *Genocide* 43). Outside Nigerian borders, the First Gulf War (1990-1991) raised the prices of oil and therefore the stakes for the faceoff between MOSOP and the Babangida administration (Okonta and Douglas 36).

Exacerbating the situation, and despite the protest movements' emphasis on nonviolent resistance, the government—with Shell's support—responded to increasing dissidence with increasing force and brutality. From 1993 to 1994, as many as two thousand Ogoni lost their lives, and another thirty thousand lost their homes—not to mention southern Nigerians of other ethnic backgrounds (Rowell, Marriott, and Stockman 89). Exemplary of this state-sponsored violence was the tragedy that occurred at Biara in April 1993 (Saro-Wiwa *A Month* 156). Many villagers—the majority of whom were women—appeared in peaceful protest, bearing twigs to signal the nonviolence of their demonstration (Saro-Wiwa *A Month* 156). In response, Nigerian soldiers sent to protect oil workers fired at the protesters, killing one person and wounding eleven more (Okonta and Douglas 120; Saro-Wiwa *A Month* 156).

The rest of 1993 was momentous and tragic for Nigerian history. Many communities in the Niger Delta, especially the Ogoni, continued to protest the destruction of their land; the women's branch of MOSOP not only demonstrated alongside the men who dominated the organization but also staged their own protest by refusing to perform their traditional roles, going on strike from their market stalls and farms and also prevented their children from attending school (Mukoro 91). In response, as part of a state project called "Operation Fire for Fire," Nigerian police killed over three thousand

people affiliated with agitation on behalf of the Niger Delta; Shell continued its activities unabated, and that June, oil spilled for forty days in Korokoro; and the same month saw the failure of an election that would eventually lead to Sani Abacha, the most notorious dictator in independent Nigeria's history, seizing power that November (Peel *A Swamp* 161; Okonta and Douglas 77, 39). Centralizing control over oil revenue to an even more extreme extent than his predecessors, Abacha promptly brought both the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company firmly under his own direction (Okonta and Douglas 39).

Under Abacha's dictatorship, the conflict escalated and rose to global prominence, especially with the tragic case of Saro-Wiwa. In May 1994, four Ogoni elders, all of whom were former MOSOP allies, were brutally murdered by a mob of MOSOP supporters (Orage 47). Despite the facts that Saro-Wiwa had always stressed the importance of nonviolence and that he was nowhere near this atrocity, the government—eager to suppress the protests that Saro-Wiwa so effectively led—accused him of plotting the murders (Rowell, Marriott, and Stockman 3). In February and April 1995, Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders were arrested for the crimes (Rowell, Marriott, and Stockman 4). Despite outrage from the international coalition Saro-Wiwa had built, all nine activists—known as the Ogoni Nine—were executed in November 1995 (Huggan and Tiffan 35). Shell was complicit in these atrocities; the company would, only years later, pay $15.5 million to settle legal action surrounding the murders (Pilkington).

The state's murder of Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues catalyzed a new era of protest in and on behalf of the Niger Delta, as oil-producing communities grew frustrated with the lack of results brought about by peaceful protest. Resistance movements became

increasingly violent in their activities, and militant groups mushroomed as power shifted "from local chiefs and elites to younger people" (Obi and Rustad "Introduction" 3). Correspondingly, the movements' goals changed. Demands were increasingly for control of resources, rather than assistance with the development of local infrastructure (Ayuba 133). This tumultuous period provides the setting for Zilayefa's coming of age in *Yellow-Yellow*. Upon Abacha's death in June 1998, many Nigerians believed that the return to democracy would improve the situation. Sadly, such views turned out to be overly optimistic. While later regimes were not as blatantly brutal as Abacha's, they still looked the other way as Shell and other companies ravaged the Niger Delta—as when the Jesse fire of October 1998 killed over a thousand people and injured many more—and sometimes perpetuated violence themselves—like when soldiers violently attacked a peaceful Ijaw Youth Council Protest in December of the same year (Ekine "Women's Responses" 68; Okonta and Douglas 147-153). Despite these dangers, women's demonstrations continued throughout the 1990s, although by the end of the decade, they increasingly focused on the sexual abuse of women in oil-producing communities (Ukeje "From Aba" 611; Omotola "Women" 45).

Complicating any potential effort at ameliorating the situation, the Nigerian government, Shell, and various militant groups sometimes strategically allied with one another. In the late 1990s—and possibly more recently—politicians paid militant groups and other gangs for their political support (Ukiwo 25). Shell has sometimes paid off the military to suppress dissidence, and in other cases paid armed militants to keep fighting with one another, as recently as 2010 (Vidal; Amunwa 6). As a result, some militant groups have become primarily profit-seeking entities, rather than genuine protesters of

the status quo (Bøås 116). As a result, as researchers Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad have argued, "the lines between militancy and criminality have become blurred or fluid" ("Introduction" 3). *Oil on Water* illustrates this complex web of alliances, as Rufus and Zaq travel through the Niger Delta and encounter militants and soldiers who murder arbitrarily with impunity, local chiefs whose power has diminished, and struggling villagers desperate to survive.

Out of this environment emerged the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), one of the largest and most militant Niger Delta-based movements, known for activities like the destruction of offshore oilfields and kidnappings of family members of people powerful in the oil industry (Peel *A Swamp* 21; Ukeje "Changing the Paradigm" 96; Bøås 119). In 2006—the year of *Yellow-Yellow*'s publication—MEND initiated an insurgency that would, according to a report by the nonprofit International Crisis Group, "claim[] an estimated 1,000 lives a year," "cut Nigeria's oil output by over 50 per cent," and "cost[] the government close to four billion naira (nearly $19 million) per day in counterinsurgency operations" (*Curbing Violence* 1, ii). The insurgency's peak in 2009 provides the context for *Oil on Water*, whose plot is driven by the kidnapping of Isabel Poole, the wife of a British oil executive.

In what many hoped would be a turning point, the Yar'Adua government—with its credibility strengthened by then-Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, from the Niger Delta and ethnically Ijaw—offered amnesty to the region's militants in June 2009 (Maiangwa and Uzodike 3). The deal included "presidential pardon, a rehabilitation programme, education and training" (Ayuba 141). Overall, amnesty successfully saved lives and money, as fifteen thousand militants accepted the plan (Obi and Rustad

"Conclusion" 204). An unanticipated result, however, was that some former militant leaders became local leaders thanks to government "sponsorship," and even so, MEND officially rejected the deal (*Curbing Violence* 4; Ayuba 141).[24] Clearly, more than one policy change would be necessary to do more than temporarily quell the violence; yet, President Buhari has extended the program until December 2017, in the hope that it will continue to ameliorate the situation (Odunsi).

Since amnesty, legal, military, and political efforts to address the Niger Delta's crisis have had mixed results. In 2009, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Jr., led an effort to prosecute Shell for culpability in his father's death in a US court (Peel *A Swamp* 204). The company continued to deny any wrongdoing on its part but still agreed to a $15.5 million settlement (Mouawad B1).[25] The next year, Habila published *Oil on Water*, and after President Yar'Adua's death from heart disease, Goodluck Jonathan assumed the presidency, becoming the country's first leader from the Niger Delta—a fact that pleased many Nigerians from the region (*Curbing Violence* 1). Despite the apparent failure of Jonathan's administration to improve life for oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta, militants in the region largely supported his bid for reelection in early 2015, even threatening further violence if he lost (*Curbing Violence* 14-15). The full consequences of Jonathan's loss to Northerner Muhammadu Buhari are yet to be seen, but so far, the military has increased its arrests of "regrouping" militants, while the new president has

[24] Among amnesty's harshest critics is the Port Harcourt-born third generation Nigerian author A. Igoni Barrett, who wrote about the deal in a piece memorializing the twentieth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death: "What Nigerians got from the brokered peace was increased piracy in our waters, continuing abductions of citizens for ransom payouts, disastrous oil spillages from vandalised pipelines, and security forces that had grown even deadlier from years of pillaging with impunity. As the Saro-Wiwa story had already shown, nonviolent activism could get you killed in Nigeria. All the government proved with its amnesty deal was that violence pays" (Barrett "'We All Stand'").

[25] Tellingly, even Yar'Adua, despite his willingness to negotiate with militants on many key issues, continued to defend the state's murder of Saro-Wiwa and the rest of the Ogoni Nine (Obi and Rustad "Conclusion" 200).

declared the Niger Delta crisis a priority for his administration, along with the battle against the similarly "lawless" chaos created by Boko Haram (Iaccino; *Curbing Violence* I; Agba). With more than six hundred oil fields in the Niger Delta today, and with "Shell's continuing dominance," the stakes for addressing the crisis are higher than ever—and certainly higher than when Buhari was previously Nigeria's Head of State, from 1983 to 1985 (Mukoro 86; Rowell, Marriott, and Stockman 60).

For now, militant groups' activities remain the most visible form of resistance in the media. In addition to MOSOP, the IYC, and MEND, numerous other activist and militant organizations have formed, sometimes serving as allies to one another and in other cases finding themselves in political or even physical conflict with one another. Today, one especially notable group is the predominantly Ijaw, notoriously violent Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), founded in 2004 as a revival of the late Isaac Boro's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force of 1966 (Iaccino; Darah 101). Led by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, usually known as Asari, the organization is notorious for its clashes with members of other ethnic groups, like the Itsekiri; stealing oil and selling it to outsiders under the pretense of delivering profits more directly to oil-producing communities; and in early 2015, threatening to increase violence if Goodluck Jonathan were not reelected (Peel *A Swamp* 3; Iaccino). Other prominent, highly militant groups have included the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF), weakened by a power vacuum after the death of its founder in 2011, and Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), which clashed with the NDPVF and resigned to accept the amnesty deal in 2009 (Iaccino). These and many other groups—such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Movement for the Restoration of Ogbia,

the Isoko Development Union, and the Urhobo Progressive Union—have mobilized primarily along ethnic lines (Mukoro 92; Ibaba 71). The Movement for the Survival of the Ethnic Nationalities in the Niger Delta (MOSEND) began as an Ijaw movement but is now pan-ethnic (Peel *A Swamp* 181). Still other groups have organized primarily according to age, like the youth-led Chikoko Movement, or gender, like the Bayelsa Women Forum (Okonta and Douglas 143; Mukoro 92). Nonetheless, the majority of the militant organizations run along ethnic boundaries, following Saro-Wiwa's lead.

In contrast with male-dominated militant groups, women have continued to engage in primarily peaceful acts of protest. Many local women's community associations throughout the region meet regularly to help members with farming strategies, family conflict, and other issues (Oluwaniyi 154). Among larger organizations, the most prominent are the Niger Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ), an NGO based locally in the Niger Delta, and the Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations (FOWA) (Ekine *Blood and Oil* back matter). The latter brings together women from many generations and, in keeping with Saro-Wiwa's legacy, combines fights for cultural survival and environmental justice (Oluwaniyi 151; Barikor-Wiwa). Branching out to develop solidarity among women from beyond the Niger Delta, Elsie Ijorogu-Reed founded the NGO Deltawomen in 2010 (Ijorogu-Reed). The most successful of these organizations are pan-ethnic and pan-regional (Omotola "Women" 48). While, as *Yellow-Yellow* notes, not all women in the Niger Delta have access to these types of networks, these developments still indicate the growth of various formal alliances among the region's women.

ZILAYEFA'S STRUGGLES AS ALLEGORY

Opening shortly after Saro-Wiwa's execution, still very much under the brutal Abacha regime, *Yellow-Yellow* takes place before the formation of organizations like Deltawomen, so seventeen-year-old protagonist Zilayefa has little access to resources beyond what her mother, Bibi, can provide. Although Zilayefa hears about oil company-sponsored scholarships on the radio, for example, she explains, "they were useless to us because no one in my village knew how to get them"—a fact that casts the scholarships as only a token gesture by Big Oil (11). Despite minimal access to opportunities like financial aid or women's community organizations, Zilayefa becomes increasingly determined to explore the world beyond her isolated, unnamed village. When she finishes secondary school, her mother's acquaintance connects her to Sisi, a seventy-something woman who has earned her own wealth as a businessperson and landlord. Zilayefa moves in with Sisi, who often sponsors young women like Zilayefa, by giving them a place to live, a temporary job, and funding for university education. Despite both Bibi's and Sisi's cautions against sexual activity, however, Zilayefa's romantic interests throughout the novel create obstacles to achieving her emotional, academic, and professional goals. The teenager sees relationships with older men as the solution to her emotional and her financial obstacles: the void she feels by growing up without a father—since her own father, a Greek sailor, abandoned Bibi before Zilayefa's birth—and the ecological impossibility of following in her mother's footsteps as a farmer, after years of damage to their property by Big Oil. Focusing on Zilayefa's two affairs, I read her relationships to wealthy men as allegories for the Niger Delta's relationships to exploitative international and domestic economic and political forces, from oil companies to local activists who

have Niger Delta peoples' best interests at heart in name only. Although, in contrast with Fredric Jameson, I do not hold that all "third-world texts" necessarily entail national allegory, I do contend that in the case of *Yellow-Yellow*, drawing out an allegory from Zilayefa's private life helps make the novel legible as a commentary on the "embattled situation" of the peoples of the Niger Delta (Jameson 69).

In fact, Zilayefa's individual story operates on two additional levels: it comments on wider gender-based exploitation, and it makes an argument about the Niger Delta's exploitation by international and domestic economic forces. Her birth during Nigeria's 1970s oil boom resulted from a short-lived affair between Bibi, her Ijaw mother, and Plato Papadopoulos, a Greek sailor who takes advantage of Bibi's naïve assumption of their mutual affection (7, 108). In this backstory, Bibi stands in for earlier generations of Niger Delta women—dating back to the first mothers of "yellow-yellows" in the nineteenth century—as well as for the Niger Delta region during the 1970s; correspondingly, Plato represents decades of colonizers and European oil interests. After an affair of a few months, Plato departs without warning, leaving Bibi to care for their daughter with minimal resources, as she has insufficient time to complete her education prior to her pregnancy, much as oil companies abandon sites of production and leave Niger Delta communities to deal with the environmental consequences. Bibi's relationship with Plato barely affects his life—before ever meeting his daughter, he returns home and never contacts Bibi again—but it is life-altering for Bibi, who loses professional and financial opportunities and must care for an unplanned child. The power imbalance between these two characters is representative of a common dynamic between men in the oil industry traveling through the region, taking advantage of much younger

women, and leaving the women with unwanted pregnancies, STIs, and other burdens. Indeed, throughout Africa, and especially since the outbreak of HIV/AIDS around the time of Zilayefa's birth, migrant labor and its consequences—including disruptions to social structure and increases in sex work in resource-rich areas with transient populations—led to an "explosion" of STIs (Hunt 356). As the product of Bibi's and Plato's affair, then, Zilayefa represents the struggling peoples of the Niger Delta in the 1990s, whose condition was the consequence of gendered, environmental, and economic exploitation. As Zilayefa reflects at one point, further inviting a reading as allegory, "Inside me was my personal turmoil over Plato and outside was the turmoil of a nation" (109). Within Zilayefa (the Niger Delta), she suffers anxiety over her unknown father (in the way that the Niger Delta experiences "turmoil" due partly to European oil interests); beyond her personal case, she witnesses Nigeria's turmoil under Abacha's dictatorship, much as the peoples of the Niger Delta in the 1990s had to cope with both immediate environmental crises and the range of political catastrophes throughout Nigeria.

The two levels of allegory—one about gender, and one about geopolitics—work especially well together because *Yellow-Yellow* casts Niger Delta women's struggles as inextricable from the region's environmental challenges, as Sunny Awhefeada has noted (98). Specifically, the text directly links the degradation of the water and land to the degradation of women's status in Zilayefa's village. Bibi explains to Zilayefa how much local gender dynamics have changed since her childhood, or "the days" prior to such extreme environmental devastation, "when the Ijaw woman […] had a means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children" from farming and fishing profits (40). In those years, Bibi furthers, the village's men supported women's work, for instance by

crafting special canoes for their wives. Indeed, when "the rivers were teeming with fish," women could prepare "a fresh pot of soup every day," and when the plantain trees were "so fertile that there was more plantain than anyone knew what to do with—roasted, boiled, mashed, green, and yellow, the possibilities were endless" (40). Here, the word "possibilities" in an immediate sense refers to the different options for cooking the plantains, but it also suggests that the possibilities for *women* were also once "endless," when they had a real means of economic independence and mobility. "Nowadays," however, as Bibi laments, "the men were even more oppressive than the women alive could remember," demanding control over all household decisions and physically abusing their wives (40). As the landscape suffers from Big Oil, *Yellow-Yellow* suggests, so women suffer from male domination.

Nonetheless, Zilayefa's upbringing provides the groundwork for a feminist nationalism that she later embraces. As historians Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny have noted, "the nation has invariably been imagined via metaphors of family, and has accordingly replicated the patriarchy of conventional familial forms" (26). Instead of a "conventional" patriarchal family, Bibi and Zilayefa belong to a decided matriarchy. On multiple occasions, Zilayefa asks about her father, but Bibi always responds: "'Have I not taken good care of you? Why are you asking of your father?'" (19). To Bibi, Plato's biography is not even pertinent, as she was the one who shouldered the full responsibility for rearing Zilayefa. Similarly, when Zilayefa discusses her family's historical reliance on fishing, she highlights a strictly matriarchal lineage: "the occupations that had sustained my mother, her mother, and her mother's mother." Even though Zilayefa does

not remember her grandmother or great-grandmother any more than she remembers her father, men are nonetheless conspicuously absent from this family tree.

Though the most conspicuous absence is Plato, he elsewhere continues to pervade Zilayefa's narration and functions as a predecessor to her lovers in abandoning her. In particular, Plato's name deserves attention. His first name, of course, alludes to the philosopher credited with many ideas considered foundational to Euro-American thought (Chroust 26). The historical Plato was also the founder of the Academy, considered the first institution of higher learning in that tradition and designed to groom future political leaders (Chroust 26). By linking the protagonist's absent father to this figure, the novel suggests that exploitative sexual and economic behaviors are inherent in Euro-American thought. Zilayefa's father's surname, Papadopoulos, is the most common Greek last name, which further underscores the pervasiveness of his sort of behavior—as if he is only one of a type ("Greek Surnames"). Indeed, in the last half of the twentieth century, Nigeria had a substantial Greek population, many of whom were involved in shipping oil and gas, as Plato most likely was ("Political Relations"). By emphasizing his Greek-ness, the novel calls attention to a more recent phase of European commercial activity in the Niger Delta—a phase enabled by a longer history of European imperialism in Africa, but one that is continuously evolving.

Despite her awareness of the context of gendered exploitation, Zilayefa disregards the lessons from previous generations of Niger Delta women and still believes she can escape the frustrations of her life in the village by pursuing an older, wealthier man—suggesting, perhaps, that Niger Delta peoples are relying on futile strategies for improving their circumstances. The first such man Zilayefa finds is Sergio, a middle-aged

Spanish furniture dealer, who is involved in negotiations to obtain legal rights to her village's timber (22). That Sergio wants to remove one of the community's few remaining natural resources to make into furniture for sale in Europe evokes a much longer colonial history of Europeans taking resources from Africans for resale among Europeans, especially as his claiming of trees recalls European aggression in the palm oil trade (as palm oil, like timber, is of course a tree product). Like Plato with Bibi, Sergio briefly courts Zilayefa but then leaves without any warning, which emotionally devastates the teenager (28). Again like Plato, Sergio thus comes to stand for Western European imperialism, taking advantage of both Zilayefa and her community's resources when doing so is convenient, and leaving without warning or concern for the consequences. Moreover, his sexual exploitation of Zilayefa goes hand in hand with his economic exploitation of her village's resources.

Months later, in Port Harcourt, Zilayefa embarks on an affair with the retired Admiral Kenneth Alaowei Amalayefa (117). Aside from when they are first introduced, Zilayefa always refers to him as "Admiral," a generic moniker that underscores that this individual character could be any senior naval officer; that is, like "Papadopoulos," "Admiral" indicates the prevalence of his type of behavior and thereby invites an allegorical reading. The exact details of his work are ambiguous, but Zilayefa knows that he "was once a high-ranking government official and must have taken his share during his tenure to start his businesses," implying that he stole government funds for his personal coffer (122-123). Indeed, due to pervasive governmental corruption encouraged by Big Oil, much of the income from oil profits winds up going to private individuals in powerful positions, like Admiral's former job as a "high-ranking government official." In

Zilayefa's words, oil pipelines "moved the wealth from beneath my land and into the pockets of the select few who ruled Nigeria" (39). The implication about Admiral's personal wealth, then, is that it originated in villages whose exploitation he has perpetuated as a politician and later as a businessman.

Indeed, compared to Sergio's Western European background, Admiral's role is more complicated, as he is Ijaw like Zilayefa. His allegiances are difficult to trace: though he unethically profits off Ijaw land, in other instances he helps create much-needed jobs for Ijaw youth (121-122). Admiral's role in exploiting Niger Delta communities also complicates the historical reliance on ethnicity as a category for activism in the Niger Delta, as both his class and gender put him in a position of dominance and in the role of exploiter, not exploited. The complexity of his position, though, is part of the point. While the European Sergio's motivations are clearly exclusively self-interested, the Nigerian Admiral's varied allegiances reflect the frequently shifting alliances among Nigerian soldiers, local Niger Delta government leaders, and militant groups, especially in the post-Saro-Wiwa moment of the novel's setting, when stakeholders were reformulating their strategies and goals. Where Sergio (European economic interests) departs as soon as he has acquired the financial and sexual resources he desires, Admiral (domestic interests) remains, to ambiguous end.

Yet the similarities between Sergio's and Admiral's treatment of Zilayefa are significant, suggesting that international and domestic exploitation of the Niger Delta's resources in fact operate quite similarly. What Zilayefa primarily seeks from her relationship with Admiral is not affection between equals, but rather the "close paternal affection that [she] never had" because she never knew Plato (138). Zilayefa seeks a

substitute for Plato; if Plato stands for an earlier phase of European—and often paternalistic—exploitation of Africa, then Admiral in becoming that substitute steps into the role of exploiter. Indeed, Zilayefa gets frustrated with Admiral's condescending explanation of the Niger Delta crisis, and she complains that he sounds "like an old headmaster"—a phrase that echoes the terminology of African colonial "masters" and the titled "headmasters" at the heart of colonial education (139; Ranger 211; Sicherman 11). If Admiral is representative of the Niger Delta's various and conflicting local interests, *Yellow-Yellow* suggests, then the actions of these local actors are, in some ways, only echoing paternalistic, self-interested European imperialism.

In addition, Zilayefa's financial gain from the affair with Admiral, rather than being of clear net benefit to her, bolsters the one-sidedness of their relationship. Because of the money she receives from him, she feels increasingly indebted, like she "owed it" to Admiral to succeed with her university entry exams (154). Often, however, Admiral only gives her money to quiet her; she reflects unhappily on the "Days when he would meet me in his bedroom, hastily ask how I was doing, and put a wad of money in my handbag so that he could return to the discussions in his living room" (158). Admiral's financial contributions are in name for Zilayefa's educational benefits, but ultimately they seem like a token gesture to keep her complacent. Much as the oil companies mention their scholarships on the radio without explaining *how* to apply for the scholarships, Admiral pushes cash onto Zilayefa, as he occasionally does to Ijaw activists who request his help, without giving any guidance and mostly seeming to want both Zilayefa and the activists out of the way so that he can pursue "the discussions in his living room"—mostly about managing escalating violence in the Niger Delta. The fact that he continues his

presumably corrupt, behind-the-scenes work, while keeping Zilayefa complacent, suggests a condemnation by the novel of token financial gestures by oil interests and by the Nigerian government, as merely a distraction from their failure to effect systemic change.

The emotional aspects of their affair further the one-sidedness of the relationship, in turn furthering the novel's depiction of the relationship between Niger Delta peoples and their leaders as deeply unequal. At one point, when Admiral is first courting the initially shy Zilayefa, she says, "we sat quietly for what seemed like a month and a day, with Admiral looking at me and me looking down at my lap" (131). Besides indicating the awkwardness between the mismatched pair, the phrase "a month and a day" alludes to the title of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995), which Agary specifically cites in her novel's Acknowledgments as the inspiration for her work of fiction (179). Saro-Wiwa's title refers to the duration of his detention under false pretenses by the Abacha regime in 1993, an illegal endeavor aimed at deterring his environmental activism. By referencing the late leader's censure and imprisonment, Zilayefa's description situates her as being held captive by a dictatorial regime, as if Admiral initiating the affair is analogous to the Abacha regime's first detention of Saro-Wiwa. Even though Zilayefa seems excited about the affair, then, this phrasing suggests that it might be the beginning of the end for her independence. In this scene, the text casts Admiral as representative of the Nigerian government, even though other moments suggest he stands for local activist leadership or perhaps militant agitation. Again, the fact that what or whom exactly Admiral stands for is unclear serves to emphasize the complexity of alliances in the region; in the way that this aspect of the allegory is almost

illegible to the reader, so the network of forces shaping the Niger Delta's future is nearly undecipherable to most residents of the Niger Delta, *Yellow-Yellow* suggests.

As with financial and social power dynamics, the sexual element of Zilayefa's and Admiral's relationship also indicates a power imbalance. When they first sleep together, Zilayefa describes the event as an "invasion of [her] body by Admiral" (145). Reading Zilayefa's body as the land of the Niger Delta, the term "invasion" is striking here because if we read Admiral as the federal Nigerian government, then it would already have sovereignty over the Niger Delta and by definition could not "invade"; if we read him as local activism, then ostensibly it would already be working on behalf of the Niger Delta and similarly could not "invade." Raising questions about localism and sovereignty, the passage suggests that, for most Niger Delta peoples, the distinction between external and domestic forces is indistinguishable—it all feels like an "invasion" of their own homeland.

Through Zilayefa's relationships with Sergio and Admiral, *Yellow-Yellow* thus depicts the wealthy men—one European and one Nigerian—who take advantage of Zilayefa's desperation and naiveté on an individual level, while being precisely the same men who on a larger scale exploit the peoples and resources of the Niger Delta to their own financial advantage. The ways in which the novel characterizes Zilayefa's lovers indicate that the exploitation of the environmental goes hand in hand with the exploitation of young, vulnerable women. These men not only take advantage of the youthful Zilayefa in their personal lives, but they also exploit her village (and others like it) in their professional lives. Though Zilayefa identifies the oil companies as the major antagonist (138), she ultimately comes to consider them both as the problem. *Yellow-*

Yellow makes the case that a power imbalance will always exist, and that the older men (like larger political and economic forces) will always have the upper hand, leaving no way to improve life for most Niger Delta residents within existing structures without ultimately reinforcing them. Despite this pessimistic aspect, Zilayefa's youth seems to suggest that the Niger Delta still has a great deal of opportunity, as I discuss in the next section.

"No One Wanted to Be the Next Ken Saro-Wiwa"

To be sure, the novel is not only about Zilayefa's—and the Niger Delta's—"selling herself," but also about possibilities for resistance. Because exploitation takes a gendered form, *Yellow-Yellow* indicates, resistance must also take a gendered form. As a poor, uneducated young woman, Zilayefa does not have access to organizations like Deltawomen, but she nonetheless enacts what might be legible as "everyday forms of resistance," including self care and refusal to participate in the reproduction of exploitative patriarchal structures. Women's support networks are integral to this process, as Zilayefa draws from them for emotional, financial, and medical support, and at the same time is motivated by her desire to contribute to these networks emotionally and financially.

First, though, *Yellow-Yellow* depicts highly visible forms of protest as not feasible in the immediate aftermath of the murders of the Ogoni Nine. Zilayefa reflects, "No one wanted to be the next Ken Saro-Wiwa" (138). The phrase "next Ken Saro-Wiwa" might in another context have suggested a hero participating in an honored tradition of environmental activism, but here, Zilayefa means that any "next Ken Saro-Wiwa" would

necessarily die "in vain" (138). The novel also reiterates the sense of futility surrounding broad alliances and protest movements when describing boys who "wander[ed] about the village aimlessly, dropping the phrase '*Aluta continua*' [sic] at the slightest provocation" (34). The mention of the phrase "a luta continua" (meaning, "the struggle continues") explicitly links the boys' lack of direction to the struggle against the oil industry, as the phrase was particularly common in 1990s era Niger Delta activism. Rather than being a rallying cry as it was for Saro-Wiwa, "a luta continua" becomes a lackluster, directionless cliché in the face of the increasingly repressive Abacha regime. Even if Zilayefa had access to broader networks of alliance, then, the dangers of such overt resistance would be too great, especially given the unlikelihood of success in her political climate.

Instead, *Yellow-Yellow* calls attention to self care as one key mode of resistance. The first chapter offers an example when an oil spill occurs in their village and destroys a significant part of Bibi's small farmland. Immediately, Bibi goes home, where Zilayefa tries to find out what happened, but Bibi is "void of words" (3). In contrast with the other villagers, who march together en masse to complain to the head of the village, Bibi "coolly" goes to clean herself at the river; rather than participating in collective action, Bibi thus distances herself from her village community and does not explicitly voice her complaint (4, 3). At first glance, this characterization might seem to suggest that Bibi is passive in the face of such events. While the other villagers attempt to demand action, however, Bibi instead focuses on removing the spill's physical effect on her body. Likely aware that the protests will achieve little—and could perhaps even give rise to violent retaliation, as occurred tragically at Biara only three years prior—Bibi knows she can at least care for herself so that she can continue to provide for herself and her daughter.

Realistically, "concerns of household survival" mean that Bibi cannot risk wasting time or endangering her physical safety by participating in the march (Scott 246). Especially since the oil industry has such a significant impact on the well-being of women's bodies, her focus on caring for her own body by cleaning off the oil is particularly legible as a means of resisting its life-threatening effects. Here, self care becomes "an act of political warfare"; where marching in broad solidarity seems unlikely to yield results, Bibi instead demonstrates her opposition and models it to her daughter in this more subtle way (Lorde 131).

The most dramatic instance of resistance in *Yellow-Yellow* appears at the novel's climax, when Zilayefa decides to end her three-month pregnancy by secretly inducing her own abortion. Zilayefa knowingly risks her life to avoid bringing a child, who would be the result of wealthy men taking advantage of its mother, into a world with such injustice. Significantly, she is unsure whether Admiral or Sergio (with whom she unexpectedly reconnected in Port Harcourt) would be the father, but this uncertainty plays no role in her decision. Zilayefa is keenly aware that motherhood is a major setback for women she has known, from her own mother's case to that of other girls in her village, who drop out of school due to unplanned pregnancies (34). She knows that, if she has a baby, she cannot continue to be a "workaday girl" like the childless Sisi and Lolo (68). Both Sergio and Admiral have taken advantage of her sexually—and, as the reader knows, of the Niger Delta financially—and Zilayefa realizes she would rather face a very real risk of death than be weighed down by the product of these men's exploitation. The fact that the father's identity makes no difference in her decision reiterates that both men have

exploited her, just as both European imperialism and domestic exploitation of the Niger Delta's resources have contributed to the ongoing environmental and political disaster.

To perform the abortion, Zilayefa utilizes knowledge from the women of her village and resources from Sisi, thereby drawing from various women's alliances. The fact that she draws from both of these networks is key. Charles Cliff Feghabo has argued that *Yellow-Yellow* specifically casts help from "the more privileged urban woman" as the solution for Zilayefa and therefore for the many women in her position to improve their lots—a contention that portrays the novel as somewhat elitist in its leanings (331). While I agree with Feghabo that Zilayefa's formal education and network with other single women in Port Harcourt play important roles, I show here how, in contrast with what he argues, knowledge from rural women without formal education—*not* the "privileged urban" female characters—plays a critical role. The text specifically states that Zilayefa searches for plants that look like those that "girls in the village" had taught her would induce abortion (176). Indeed, in many Niger Delta communities, women are the primary keepers of knowledge about plant medicines (Barikor-Wiwa). The resources that Sisi makes available to Zilayefa prove invaluable, as she finds the necessary plants on Sisi's street and uses her space in Sisi's house to perform the abortion (176-178). With this act, Zilayefa takes charge of her own body at a critical moment by utilizing knowledge and resources from women she has known throughout her life—and here, the rural women play a role no less significant than that of the urban women.

Not only is Zilayefa's abortion enabled by these networks, but she also conceives it as the beginning of her contribution back to her communities. Specifically, she sees the abortion as an act on behalf of herself and her mother, whom she can support if she

completes her education and gets a job in Port Harcourt: "I had to do this for myself and for my mother" (174). Zilayefa's abortion therefore proves essential to her resistance and to supporting her family commitment. Rather than allowing herself and her mother to be further weighed down by one of the men who exploited both her and her home, Zilayefa risks her life to improve her family's lot.

Although she knows the choice to abort her pregnancy might cost her life, Zilayefa feels liberated as she waits for the plants to take effect and decides to end her quest for approval from men. Zilayefa's waiting in the fetal position while she undergoes the abortion also reflects this change in her life by echoing an earlier moment in the novel. Earlier, when Sergio stands up Zilayefa in her village, she suffers her emotional distress in the fetal position: "I went to my room and climbed into my bed, enveloped by desolation. All I could do was pull my knees up to my chin and lie there, in the foetal position. My mother put a wrapper over me and lay down beside me; she held me tight and did not say a word" (28). In contrast, when abortion-related cramps awaken Zilayefa in Sisi's Port Harcourt home, she says, "I do not know for how long I lay in bed, unable to move because my legs refused to yield to my will, until somehow I managed to crawl to the bathroom. I lay curled up in the foetal position on the cold tile floor until my sweat and the blood that gushed from between my legs drenched my clothes, and I began to shiver from the cold and the pain" (178). In the first instance, upon her abandonment by Sergio, Zilayefa retreats to her bed to get into a fetal position; in second instance, despite her tremendous physical pain, Zilayefa is able to force her body to move away from her bed and into the bathroom. She exercises a physical greater control over her body that reflects a great emotional and social control; rather than mourning the departure of a man

in her life, she is destroying the evidence of her affairs. In addition, in the earlier scene, Bibi is present to comfort Zilayefa; in the latter scene, she is entirely alone, and as far as the reader knows at the moment, possibly dying. The stakes are consequently much higher and more dependent on Zilayefa's individual choices and the success of her medical effort.

The book's last paragraph reveals that Zilayefa survives, so the fetal position also comes to signify her rebirth as an independent, grown woman. In fact, the text explicitly links the protagonist's "rebirth" with that of Nigeria, as her abortion occurs shortly after Abacha's death. Just before Zilayefa picks the plants she will consume, she hears celebrants of the dictator's demise in the streets, finally excited for their future as a nation: "They talked about tomorrow as if they really believed in it, as though magically all the problems in their lives would be fixed tomorrow" (176). Later, as she waits in the fetal position on the bathroom floor, she sees herself starting over in a way parallel to the way that Nigeria will: "if I lived, it was an opportunity for a personal rebirth along with Nigeria. I promised God and myself that I would focus only on completing my education and making my mother, Sisi, and Lolo proud of me" (177). Zilayefa's *refusal* to give birth to the child of a man who has exploited her is thus tied to her own personal rebirth and the hopes for national rebirth upon Abacha's death. This explicit connection also means that Zilayefa, representing the Niger Delta, also stands for the political body of Nigeria as a whole. In this formulation, the plight of the Niger Delta is synonymous with the plight of the nation, and the effort to improve life for those in the Niger Delta becomes essential to improving life for all Nigerians. By ensuring that Zilayefa survives the procedure, *Yellow-Yellow* becomes a narrative of women's resistance under life-

threatening circumstances and under arguably the most oppressive regime in Nigeria's post-independence history. Though *Yellow-Yellow* therefore ends on an optimistic note—confirming its protagonist's survival—the conclusion is also an ambivalent, as the post-Abacha era did not bring about as many changes to the status quo as Nigerians had hoped. Even by the time of the novel's publication in 2006, the newly democratic Nigeria had not substantially changed most Nigerians' lives, and certainly not in the Niger Delta.

In the way that Zilayefa cuts off her relationships with Sergio and Admiral—and destroys the result—so the novel suggests that the Niger Delta must extricate itself from exploitative relationships with international and domestic political and economic forces. Several aspects of this reading are quite optimistic. Zilayefa's refusal to give up or to compromise suggests resilience on the part of Niger Delta peoples. The explicit connection between Zilayefa's "rebirth" and that of the nation indicates that individual agency and acts of resistance do indeed matter, despite the scope of the crisis. The text's embrace of women's rights—emblematized by reproductive rights—and its empowerment of Zilayefa, and by extension the peoples of the Niger Delta, is hopeful as well.

At the same time, however, the allegory also carries a number of troubling implications. It suggests, for example, that the responsibility lies with women to combat patriarchy and with the residents of the Niger Delta to break out of its current relationship to international and domestic oil interests. Zilayefa refuses to have either Sergio's or Admiral's child, but she also refuses to critique their behaviors, which comes to imply that these men could not be expected to behave any differently—in turn implying that multinational corporations, for example, cannot be held responsible for their actions.

Even in the lead-up to her abortion, Zilayefa dismisses Sergio as merely "a nice man" and reasons that Admiral "was not ready to have more children" (172, 173). The idea of a sixty-year-old man with two adult children being "not ready" for children is particularly ridiculous. In addition to this implication that purposely absent fathers and Big Oil cannot reasonably be held responsible for taking advantage of women and the Niger Delta's resources, the allegorical reading also invites questions as to how exactly the region's disempowered peoples should effect the type of systemic change that the novel clearly indicates will be necessary. That is, Zilayefa retains her support networks through Bibi and Sisi, but on what or whom should the Niger Delta rely? Further, Zilayefa's willingness to die as a consequence of her abortion, if read allegorically, seems to suggest that the peoples of the Niger Delta should be willing to self-destruct in pursuit of their rights—a strategy that is neither desirable nor realistic. This point, in conjunction with the placement of Zilayefa's abortion in a past historical moment that turned out not to offer as much opportunity for change as was hoped, substantially undermines any optimism in the conclusion. In other words, *Yellow-Yellow* may not be agitating for so much change to the status quo after all, if it places all responsibility for change on individuals in the Niger Delta, implicitly exonerates those behind the unequal system, and locates hope squarely in a past historical moment. The feminist narrow nationalism that Agary's novel embraces, then, is ultimately ambivalent.

BOMA HEALS ON IRIKEFE

In contrast with *Yellow-Yellow*'s clear foregrounding of female characters, *Oil on Water* focuses on two male characters, the protagonist Rufus and his colleague Zaq, who

journey together through the ravaged Niger Delta to search for the kidnapped wife of a British oil executive. Current scholarship on the novel echoes its emphasis on male characters, largely focusing on *Oil on Water*'s depiction of the complex allegiances of the various male actors involved in the conflict, including Nigerian soldiers, militant groups, and local chiefs. Women's Studies and literature scholar Leerom Medovoi, for example, traces how Habila's novel "attempts to map the structural conditions of violence" in the Niger Delta around the height of the 2009 militant insurgency (23). Delving into the implications of this complex web of violence, literary scholar Byron Caminero-Santangelo shows how *Oil on Water* not only criticizes militant groups' modes of operation—a critique that many others have launched—but also calls into question the enduring dominance of Saro-Wiwa's narrative of ethnicity-based solidarity. Ultimately, Caminero-Santangelo concludes, "Any hope in *Oil on Water* is associated not with armed resistance but with cultural narratives and practices which might enable healing and ground ways of life that challenge the fairy tale of oil" (232). Indeed, as I demonstrate in this section, Habila's novel calls for alternative means of resisting the conflict.

More specifically, I extend Caminero-Santangelo's argument by attending to gender issues in examining how Rufus's older sister Boma—ostensibly a minor character—most exemplifies the "hope" that Caminero-Santangelo identifies in the novel's suggested "cultural narratives and practices" (232). Boma is one of only three female characters in *Oil on Water* who get to speak in the text's main timeline, besides Isabel and Gloria, a nurse who cares for the dying Zaq and becomes a romantic interest for Rufus. Severely injured in an oil-related explosion approximately five years prior to the main action, Boma turns to Rufus when she is abandoned by her husband John and

loses her home. Without Isabel's socioeconomic advantages or Gloria's professional training, she initially seems to be the most disempowered of these three women characters. In contrast, though, I argue that she is in fact the novel's only character who demonstrates "everyday forms" of resistance and survival, emblematized by her joining a small, insular religious community she encounters on the fictional Irikefe Island, located in the rural Niger Delta. To provide context for Boma's efforts, I first offer an analysis of the two major events around which the narrative is structured: the kidnapping of Isabel Poole and the fire in Boma's village. I argue that the novel juxtaposes Isabel and Boma in order to highlight and critique the extreme disparity between the media's treatment of the kidnapped, wealthy white woman and the impoverished, rural Nigerian woman. As a minor character, Boma is at the sidelines of the novel in the way that Niger Delta women are often sidelined in media narratives; the fact that we view her mostly through Rufus—both the protagonist and a journalist—helps draw that connection. The novel invites us to look more closely at what Boma is doing, beyond the media-ready militants in the novel's (and the real-life mainstream media's) foreground.

From the beginning, *Oil on Water* offers numerous critiques of journalism's limitations in representing the Niger Delta conflict, notable especially given Habila's own background as a journalist. Some of the novel's concerns are inherent to the journalism as a genre—complex narratives are "neatly labeled and dated," and reporters often cannot create reliable accounts because they cannot safely enter the violence-ridden region (3, 7). Other critiques however, seem aimed at the drive for profit, like the complaint that newspapers exploit kidnappings for sales, focusing on sensational events rather than more quotidian realities (36). Taken together, the text's negative evaluations here assert the

role of novels in depicting the Niger Delta conflict, as novels can leave room for greater ambiguities (such as those created by the novel's purposely disorienting time jumps) and can allow writers and readers into otherwise largely inaccessible spaces.

One such event that *Oil on Water* enables us to witness is vandalism of oil pipelines by desperate characters—an act of "everyday resistance" that comes as almost a last resort (Scott 248). Rufus's father and John's father Emmanuel start a black market business in which they buy gasoline at a low price from "little children" (who have presumably stolen it) and resell it to drivers passing through Junction late at night (69). In this way, they claim for themselves a tiny fraction of the oil profits to which so many Niger Delta communities are entitled but never receive. They pursue this scheme because they have run out of other ways to earn a living, not because they see it as desirable or sustainable. They are keenly aware that eventually the police will want more bribes than they can afford, at which point Rufus's father acknowledges, "'They'll arrest us, or take over the whole business themselves" (69). Whether Rufus's father is directly responsible for the disastrous fire that injures Boma is unclear, but in keeping with his prediction, he receives the blame and goes to prison for causing the accident. *Oil on Water* is sympathetic to the frustration and desperation that lead the men to risk their freedom and lives for this small reward, but it ultimately associates no meaningful hope with such acts.

In contrast with the narratives of people like Rufus's father and Emmanuel, the novel's only white and female character, Isabel Poole receives a great deal of attention from both the media and the novel's male characters. The epitome of the "missing white woman meme" (Wenzel "Behind the Headlines" 14), Isabel becomes a kidnapping victim as a result of a soap opera-like series of events: her husband James (also white and

British) has an affair with their maid Koko, who was engaged to marry the couple's driver, Salomon; in retaliation, hoping to extract a financial penalty from James without physically endangering anyone, Salomon orchestrates Isabel's kidnapping; and eventually, militants take over the kidnapping and murder the naïve Salomon (218, 220, 230). Like with vandalism of the oil pipelines, Salomon initially sees the kidnapping as a means for obtaining reparations from James (220). These attempts at "reparation," along with Rufus's claim at one point that he, too, deserved "some reparation" from James, together suggest a situation in which everyone is trying to get what they feel they are owed financially, yet no one does so successfully—perhaps a critique of Niger Delta activists' longstanding emphasis on fighting for financial compensation, a strategy that has so far hardly brought peace or stability to the region (107). In any case, this backstory serves as a critique of twenty-first-century militant groups'—and especially MEND's—kidnappings aimed at seizing media attention and reaping financial rewards in the form of ransom (as well as the mass media's tendency to feed the phenomenon). Salomon's desire for vengeance, in conjunction with his incompetence, suggests a similar bumbling approach on the part of participants in the conflict. Meanwhile, the powerful militants' unblinking turns to violence, emblematized by their murder of Salomon, suggests that their kidnappings often go hand in hand with atrocities against the very people they are ostensibly trying to help.

Further, this entire conflict—which costs the lives of various bystanders—results from James's affair with Koko. That is, one wealthy white man's disruption of an apparently otherwise functional and healthy relationship between two Nigerians (and the text does indicates that James, not Koko, initiates the affair) brings about disaster for

many Nigerians whom James will never meet and traumatizes his wife (who likely but does not definitely survive the ordeal), all with effectively no consequence to himself. If we make the move of reading Koko as a “claim” by James over his Nigerian employee Salomon—a troubling move in that it eliminates agency and even humanity on Koko’s part, but nonetheless a move I think the text invites—the situation becomes allegorical to the Niger Delta’s history: white British men laying claim on a whim to resources to which peoples of the Niger Delta are entitled. By linking European imperialism to the kidnapping via the Pooles, the novel thus makes the case that decades of exploitation by Big Oil and other foreign interests, not Nigerian corruption, are truly at the root of militant violence in the Niger Delta.

Despite the numerous actors involved, though, Isabel becomes the media’s focal point. One television news program shows a full-screen “blown-up photo” of her in London and juxtaposes it with a “shot of picketing youths holding placards in front of an oil-company building,” as if the protestors have somehow caused her predicament (rather than her own husband). The protestors are numerous and anonymous, while Isabel retains her individuality in the media narrative, as if the missing white woman is the only (interesting) tragedy involved.

Oil on Water draws several links between the wealthy white Isabel, whose face is all over every news program, and Boma, the impoverished Nigerian character known to almost no one beyond her immediate family. The characters’ recent biographies align: Boma and Isabel each feel that having a child would have saved their respective marriages (106, 110). The fact that the novel reveals this information only four pages apart, especially in a text that jumps so frequently in setting, clearly invites the reader to

draw a link. The description of the damage to both characters' faces as a consequence of the Niger Delta conflict draws another such connection between them: the text repeatedly mentions Boma's facial cars from the fire, as well as how "red and blotchy" and "covered in rashes" Isabel's face became within a few days of the kidnapping (227, 197). The environmental and other physical dangers of the region thus make themselves legible on these women's faces. Significantly, though, Isabel's allergic reactions and sunburn will disappear from her face, whereas Boma's face will remain scarred, reminding the reader that Isabel's trauma—though serious—is only temporary, and she can return to safety in London, while Boma cannot escape the deeper impact of the conflict.

Furthering these characterizations, *Oil on Water* aligns the experiences of these two otherwise very different characters in order to highlight disparities between their treatments in narratives about the conflict. Indeed, Boma and Isabel also have in common that they immediately drive almost all of the protagonist's actions in the text's main timeline: Rufus is consistently torn between journeying further into the Niger Delta to find Isabel and returning to Port Harcourt to look out for Boma. Even though Boma is his sister, he often chooses his quest to find the complete stranger over care for his closest relative. Especially because Rufus is a journalist, this obsession with the white woman serves as a condemnation of disproportionate attention to the sensational and to the relatively few European victims of the ongoing conflict.

Moreover, at least partly because of his relative inattention to Boma, Rufus consistently underestimates her, seeing her as a passive and helpless victim. At one point, Rufus observes how, after the fire she barely survives, his sister consistently positions herself with "the burned, badly healed side of her face hidden. She did it unconsciously,

but the scar always dictated how she stood, how she sat" (94). The fact that her face was "badly healed"—not just "burned"—evokes the reality that medical facilities available to residents of oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta are often poor quality, despite decades of promises by oil companies to improve local infrastructure. Though Boma's movements are not in a strict sense physically restricted by her injuries, the fire's psychological damage continues to limit how she moves her body and incompletely engages even with her own brother, as she partially faces away from him. In Rufus's description of her stance, the word "always" emphasizes that these effects remain permanently with Boma—her temporal distance from the event does not diminish these limitations—and similarly, the verb "dictated" underscores the scope of the trauma's control over Boma, suggesting she has no option but to "obey" her scars and position herself uncomfortably, limiting her own visibility. This passage thus positions Boma as a passive victim—a characterization that echoes the weakness suggested by the fact that she only survived thanks to Emmanuel's intervention. As I argue below, the novel purposely establishes this perception in order to disrupt it later. As narrator, Rufus consistently conveys to the reader the extent of the Junction fire's impact on the women of his family, thereby underscoring how the devastation of oil-producing communities ("countless villages going up in smoke") disproportionately affects women throughout the region. While the novel's attention to this aspect of the conflict is clearly commendable, the emphasis on Boma's scars, her abandonment by her husband and subsequent eviction, and her extensive weeping with her mother at first seem to contribute to a picture of Niger Delta women as feeble victims.

A closer reading of the novel, however, reveals that this implication has more to do with Rufus's well-intentioned but patronizing attitude toward Boma. Since we access the story through his eyes, we, too, initially see Boma as tragically damaged but lacking in depth or agency. Only gradually does *Oil on Water* reveal that Rufus—our seemingly reliable narrator—has seriously underestimated his older sister's capabilities. One moment that particularly reveals Rufus's condescension and conversely Boma's strength of character is the scene where the two find each other on Irikefe Island. A group of law-bucking, violent soldiers have captured Rufus, insisting that they cannot be sure of the journalist's allegiances, and they bring him to Irikefe. Rufus has been on the island before, but since his last visit the peaceful, religious island community has been devastated by a battle between soldiers and militants. With the recent destruction as backdrop, Rufus learns that Boma has come to the island. Surprised by her ability to navigate the Niger Delta's network of rivers, he does not understand how she could have found the island on her own ("How did she get here?") and immediately assumes that she has endangered her own life to look for her ex-husband John, who may have joined a militant group (169). Without waiting to hear his own sister's explanation for her actions, Rufus informs her of his assumption: "'What are you doing here? I know, don't tell me. You're hoping to find John in the forest, waiting for you'" (170). As a journalist, Rufus is ostensibly experienced in waiting to hear answers to his questions in order to obtain accurate information, but here, he does not even pause before responding to his own question ("What are you doing here? I know"), despite the lack of evidence supporting his answer ("You're hoping to find John"). He assumes she is a victim looking for someone to rely on and is unable to adapt to an evolving situation.

The typically mild-mannered Rufus continues his lecture:

> My voice rose as I spoke, and I felt it rising even higher. I pointed around.
>
> —Look, they're fighting a war here. You could get killed, Boma. And all for what, for a man who walked out on you because he couldn't bear to look at your face anymore? It's time to move on. He's never coming back. He's gone. Accept it. (170)

Although Boma is Rufus's senior by several years, here Rufus is shouting at her as if she were a child—an implication reiterated when he later complains, "her presence only added to the weight on my shoulders," as if he were responsible someone who could not care for herself (171). His "point[ing] around" at the battle's damage, while explaining, "they're fighting a war," comes across as condescending and even silly. Boma is an adult from the region who sees the damages of the oil conflict in the mirror every day—clearly, she is well aware of the risks involved. Disregarding these facts, Rufus suggests that Boma is both oblivious to the ongoing situation and somehow less able to take care of herself than he is, despite the fact that he is the one under the trigger-happy soldiers' watch, while she is free to go at any time. Moreover, in addition to the fact that he has rashly assumed that John is the reason for Boma's appearance on Irikefe, Rufus frames her breakup with John in a way that is both cruel and patronizing: he reminds her of her scars, suggests that her physical appearance caused the breakup, and shouts simplistic, repetitive instructions ("move on," "Accept it") for moving forward after her marriage's dissolution—a traumatizing event that Rufus has never experienced and on which he has no authority to speak.

After Rufus finishes his tirade, the patient Boma turns the tables by telling her younger brother that she has in fact come to Irikefe to help *him*. She explains to him, "'You were supposed to be gone [from Port Harcourt] for only a day. I went to your office to see if they had any news and they said no. Nothing. And then your editor said to tell you not to bother to show up at the office'" (171). Concerned for her brother's safety, Boma pursues a rational path to fact-finding. She trusts Rufus to return when he promises, but when he does not do so, she seeks information from his employers, who had given him the assignment to track Isabel Poole in the area around Irikefe. Only when Boma has exhausted all these avenues does she enter the dangerous area to ensure her brother's safety. Her rationality here appears in stark contrast to Rufus's erratic behavior. He has abandoned his original work assignment, gotten himself entangled in a potentially deadly conflict with no clear purpose in mind, and pursues his meandering quest so long that he loses his job. Where Rufus cast himself as a capable agent responsible for his overly emotional sister, Boma recasts the situation more accurately to reflect herself as the rational actor and her brother as the impractical character who has needlessly put his life in danger. With this reversal, *Oil on Water* reveals that the seemingly reliable narrator has been consistently underestimating his sister in viewing her as a passive victim dependent on men, whether John or himself. In the way that the narrator Rufus talks over Boma and overlooks her capacities, so too have media narratives about the crisis often written over women's voices and agency. The fact that Boma, not the protagonist-journalist (responsible for storytelling both within the novel and in the mainstream media), reveals the flaws in Rufus's and the reader's assumptions here, implies that a

closer examination of women's (and other) everyday forms of resistance has the potential to reveal information or alliances that dominant narratives cannot.

Though Boma travels to Irikefe in order to look out for her brother amidst regional violence, she also comes to find a means of resistance in the island's insular religious community. Practicing an ecologically based spirituality, the island's worshippers "believe in the healing powers of the sea" and that "the sun rising brings a renewal" (126, 90). Among their practical goals is to "keep this island free from oil prospecting and other activities that contaminate the water and lead to greed and violence" (129). In a region with unpredictable violence and that is so politically and geographically fragmented, broader alliances are—at least for the present moment—unavailable to Boma and the other worshippers. Though the island is a small claim, it provides a concrete and apparently manageable starting point for a nationalist project very much about political and territorial sovereignty. In this way, the religious group has specific political goals that entail combating the encroaching oil industry. The water and the large statues they have constructed indicate that the specific location of Irikefe is essential to their faith. Despite what is going on around them, they assert that they will not give up their land to the oil industry and related conflict—a highly political stance for which geopolitical location matters a great deal.

Like Zilayefa and unrestrained by any romantic relationship, Boma decides to remain permanently among Irikefe's worshippers. The novel approves her decision; for the first time in the narrative, Rufus feels that his sister "looked well" (237). As the novel concludes, he watches her from a distance as his boat departs. He describes what he sees: "Now the worshippers were in the water, swaying and humming; I strained my eyes,

trying to determine which of them was Boma. She'd be happy here, I was sure. This was a place of healing and soon she'd forget John, her scars would recede to the back of her mind and one day she'd look in the mirror and see they were gone" (239). In this scene, the worshippers' placing themselves in the water underscores their connection to the environmental and political causes they espouse. Bodies that bear the physical damage are visually integrated into the environment that also bears damage caused by the oil industry's excesses; like *Yellow-Yellow*, *Oil on Water* argues that the healing of bodies—here, regardless of gender—is intertwined with the healing and protection of the environment. Even though Boma has only been at Irikefe a few days, she is so integrated into their community that even her own brother struggles to distinguish her from the rest of the group, "strain[ing]" his eyes to identify her but unable to do so with any certainty. Among the worshippers, Rufus hopes, Boma will finish "healing" from the trauma of the Junction fire. He does not actually expect her scars to disappear at this point, but he does anticipate that they will no longer "dictate" how she interacts with others or sees herself, as they did back in Port Harcourt.

The insular religious community Irikefe thus provides a means of healing, survival, and resistance for the novel's most significant female character. While *Oil on Water* cannot confirm that the group at Irikefe will succeed even in their most immediate goals—an uncertainty compounded by Rufus's unreliability as a narrator of Boma's realities—it is nonetheless the closest that the novel gets to identifying hope in the region. Like the everyday forms of resistance Scott describes, the formation of the group on Irikefe is "unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of exploitation" perpetuated by Big Oil and related interests, the novel locates hope in the possibility that

perhaps, "multiplied many thousand-fold," such small alliances could together begin to combat the environmental, social, economic, and political destruction to the region—modes of resistance that "make no headlines" but, the novel argues, may well have a more constructive impact than those that do, like militant kidnappings (Scott 29-30, xvii).

Everyday Forms of Women's Resistance

In a struggle where sensationalist moves like kidnappings grab media attention but effect little change for oil-producing communities, and where even some of most seemingly radical elements have become drawn to the allure of petrocapitalism dollars, an examination of other possibilities becomes essential. Agary and Habila, both of whom would have been in their twenties at the time of Saro-Wiwa's death, write from third generation Nigerian perspectives that question the increasingly corrupt movements theoretically descended from those of Saro-Wiwa's era. *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* enable readers to consider less sensational aspects of the conflict and contest the presumption that Niger Delta women remain immobile—not even "stirring"—in between visible moments of mass protest (Peel "Peacefully"). Reading these texts within Scott's framework of "everyday forms of resistance" also reveals various gendered aspects to resistance—while both novels depict vandalism of oil pipelines as an act of rebellion perpetuated by male actors, for example, they also suggest that the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women suggests that women's alliances may reveal particularly productive strategies for resistance. The optimism embraced by each novel's conclusion at least partially (and perhaps pragmatically) counters their pessimism about effecting change on a broad scale.

Also reflecting practical constraints, Zilayefa's and Boma's modes of survival of resistance operate within narrow networks, as fear of retaliation and logistical impossibilities preclude broader alliances. While the small size of such networks can often translate into accessibility, enabling the inclusion of people who might otherwise not be involved in any resistance effort, groups like Sisi's network and the Irikefe worshippers are not building a broad coalition that would likely have the capacity to effect change on a larger scale—which will surely be essential to the ultimate survival of the Niger Delta's peoples and environment. Another potential limitation of these models lies in the fact that *Yellow-Yellow* in particular relies on a binary understanding of gender and a series of heteronormative assumptions in laying out its argument—a conception that risks obscuring the realities of many Nigerians, even while it calls attention to the plight of often overlooked young women like Zilayefa.

Despite these limitations, though, *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* still offer key contributions to popular and scholarly conversations about the Niger Delta crisis. Treating their subjects with nuance, Agary's and Habila's novels also cast Zilayefa and Boma, respectively, as simultaneously victims and agents of resistance in their assertions of political sovereignty, whether through feminist or eco-spiritual narrow nationalisms. Even if they cannot fight for sweeping change, their smaller claims—just to "this island," for example—offer some hope. The novels work together to highlight women's obstacles as well as their agency, add historical depth to narratives about women's participation, and offer models for resistance beyond highly visible protests—which, although important, are not the only way to take action against oil companies, despite what dominant narratives would suggest. With Zilayefa surviving her abortion and committed

to pursuing her education under Sisi's sponsorship, and Boma finding peace among the worshippers at Irikefe, *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water* both end on hopeful notes, even as they acknowledge the tremendous challenges facing the Niger Delta in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 2: "Family Always Came First": The Yahooze Generation in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*

In the late 1990s, a young Nigerian man named Osondiowendi emailed a Wisconsin resident named Mirabelle, asking her to help recover the fortune of a recently deceased businessman client of his. Osondiowendi explained that the late client had no immediate family, so if Mirabelle would officially claim to be his next of kin, Osondiowendi would share over half of the client's $19,000,000 (USD) with her. Mirabelle agreed to the fraudulent plan, and Osondiowendi went on to request some comparatively small advance fees from her in order to process the necessary paperwork: a death authorization form, a next of kin affirmation, a bank recognition form, and a deceased demise declaration. Unfortunately for Mirabelle, these fees eventually added up to about $23,000, and worse, she never received any of the promised sum. Osondiowendi—whose real name was Kingsley Ibe—had invented the entire story, so while Mirabelle thought that she was effortlessly profiting off a late businessman's fortune, Kingsley was starting to make his real fortune off the unsuspecting Mirabelle.

This particular story happens to be fictional: Kingsley is the protagonist of Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's 2009 novel *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, and Mirabelle is his first scam victim, or "mugu." Nonetheless, it bears many features of the notorious email scams so often associated with Nigeria, often called "419" scams after the section of criminal code that prohibits such activities. First, Kingsley invents a fortune for Mirabelle to receive—a hook that draws her into his narrative and persuades her to respond. Second, he ensures that the circumstances seem just unethical enough—Mirabelle knows

perfectly well that she is not the deceased businessman's next of kin—for the scam victim to keep the plan a secret. Secrecy is important, or else a friend of the victim might point out the riskiness or unlikelihood of the venture (Igwe 55). By offering up a fraudulent scheme, Kingsley also engages the common 419 strategy of playing to stereotypes about Nigerians: Mirabelle is more likely to believe the story because she probably already imagines Nigerians as corrupt (Krishnan 87). Third, Kingsley hides his identity from his victim to protect himself. Like many other scammers, he chooses a pen name with a meaning amusing to himself but opaque to his victim: in Igbo, "osondi owendi" means roughly, "while some people are wailing, others are rejoicing," or, "what is cherished by some people is despised by some people" (D.J. Smith *A Culture* 41; Sote; AndreUweh). This expression is humorous to Kingsley because Mirabelle thinks that the businessman's untimely demise ("wailing") is reason for her to rejoice, but in actuality Mirabelle's unfortunate gullibility and subsequent loss of her savings (her own "wailing") becomes reason for Kingsley to rejoice. Finally, Kingsley completely invents paperwork to extract a series of "advance fees" from Mirabelle, stringing her along until she runs out of money; documents like a "death authorization form" and a "deceased demise declaration" clearly do not exist, but drawn into the narrative and eager for her "inheritance," Mirabelle eagerly signs away and submits Western Union money transfers as requested.

As Mirabelle's case exemplifies, sometimes nearly indistinguishable layers of fiction and fact are integral to Nwaubani's novel (not to mention 419 scams generally): Mirabelle believes she is participating in a fiction by claiming to be a businessman's next of kin, but she is only participating in Kingsley's larger narrative invention, which in turn

all belongs to Nwaubani's work of fiction, itself based on very real events. And, in reality, 419 scammers invent their own fictions to deceive scam victims, who, like Mirabelle, often believe they are participating as beneficiaries of one fiction but turn out to be the victims of still another fiction. The scammer may claim, for example, to be a wealthy Nigerian widow trying to gain access to her inheritance, or perhaps a businessperson attempting to secure oil industry earnings, or any number of other character types (D.J. Smith *A Culture* 48-49, 44-45). Sometimes scammers even claim to be investigators who can help recover money lost to scammers, requesting one or more "advance fees" for the alleged investigation, only to disappear like any other 419er (Comaroff and Comaroff 15). As Jean and John Comaroff have explained of these layers of deception, in 419 schemes, "Forgery also begets forgery, in an infinite regress" (15).

Nwaubani consciously plays with this palimpsest of fictions. She remarked in one interview about the novel, "All the scams in my book are 'real'! Nigeria's best writers of fiction are definitely doing everything else except writing" (Nwaubani "Chance Happenings"). That is, the stories that her characters tell to their targets are based on stories that real-life 419ers have told. Borrowing further from these alleged "best writers of fiction," Nwaubani takes her novel's title from a common opening line for 419 emails. "I do not come to you by chance," the messages avow, suggesting to their readers that they are specially selected to take advantage of a rare opportunity. This single line embodies yet another set of fictions, as these messages are sent indiscriminately,[26] so the recipients are not special; the alleged "opportunity" is actually one of many just like it, so it's not rare to receive such a message; and, of course, the opportunity does not actually

[26] 419ers send massive email blasts using data from chat rooms, online company directories, personal ad sites, and more recently, email extractor software (D.J. Smith *A Culture* 36; Igwe 35).

exist, so it is itself a fiction as well. The title for Nwaubani's work of fiction thus draws from a real-world example of a tremendous set of fictions—emblematizing the complexities of the system of advance fee fraud.

Sometimes the overlapping fictions can even interfere with research on the scams. A company called Ultrascan Advanced Global Investigations, for example, claims to release reports with statistics and analysis almost every year. Many other sources rely on those statistics in their own documentation, including the journalistic publications *Washington Post* (2009), *Techworld* (2010), *Slate* (2012), *Quartz* (2014), *Geektime* (2014), the *Hindustan Times* (2014), and the BBC (2015), as well as scholarly sources, including Chidi Nnamdi Igwe's *Taking Back Nigeria from 419: What to Do about the Worldwide E-Mail Scam—Advance-Fee Fraud* (2007), an otherwise reliable book, which I cite in this paper. Unfortunately, however, Ultrascan AGI is itself a scam. It promises to get 419 scam victims their money back, but all it does is take more money in the form of "processing fees" and the like (Seliger). In addition, the figures that Ultrascan AGI presents are clearly fake, illustrated by the fact that significant portions of the reports are duplicated from year to year. The spread of this false information throughout otherwise reliable sources demonstrates the pervasiveness and global nature of this fraud—and it reminds us, too, that more of us can be fooled than we might like to think.

These various fictions have serious implications both for the scam victims and for Nigerians who operate outside the world of 419. While many email users today are immediately wary of these types of messages from strangers, promising tremendous financial rewards for relatively little effort, many still become victims of advance fee

fraud, much like Mirabelle.[27] Victims have lost their savings, family relationships, and even their freedom. One recent scam led an American woman named Audrey Elrod to funnel almost half a million dollars to Nigeria, as she was convinced that doing so would rescue the son of a man she believed to be a Scottish oil worker and her online boyfriend; for her crimes, the woman has now been held in federal custody for over two years, while her scammer is essentially untraceable (Koerner; U.S. Attorney's Office). The scams also harm honest Nigerians. Understandably, many Nigerians have grown alarmed at the world's growing association of their country with these infamous scams (D.J. Smith "Ritual Killings" 804). The damage to Nigeria's national reputation is not purely a matter of pride; the consequences for honest Nigerians range from having their email automatically marked as spam, to facing logistical obstacles in pursuing education abroad, to losing potentially hundreds of millions of foreign investment dollars (Igwe 110). Finally, Nigerians can also be direct targets of domestic 419 scams (D.J. Smith *A Culture* 28).

Given the stakes for honest Nigerians and scam victims around the world, many anthropologists, political scientists, and other researchers have pursued the subject. Some experts have focused on the role of individual action in the propagation of 419. Language expert Chidi Nnamdi Igwe, for example, identifies the crimes as the "unacceptable conduct of a few unpatriotic individuals," avaricious loners who are exceptions among a law-abiding majority (109). Detailing specific instances of such "unpatriotic individuals," anthropologist and political scientist Wale Adebanwi recounts the achievements of anti-corruption government official Nuhu Ribadu in bringing several 419 kingpins to justice

[27] Exact statistics are difficult to come by, largely due to the nature of these crimes: the perpetrators rarely get caught, and the victims are often too embarrassed to come forward.

in the early 2000s. Adebanwi underscores that prosecuting these individuals entailed many challenges—like physicians being paid off to assert that the scammers are not competent to stand trial—but ultimately argues that the work of committed officials like Ribadu is essential to hindering the spread of 419 (*Authority Stealing* 47, 80). Though both Adebanwi and Igwe note that systemic factors have enabled the growth of 419, they nonetheless home in on individual action in advancing their solutions.

Also deeply concerned about the work of particular individuals in perpetuating 419, anthropologist Daniel Jordan Smith has argued that 419ers' endeavors seriously disrupt longstanding community ties. He writes, "the perpetrators undertake actions to deceive others in schemes that ultimately benefit *only themselves*," and elsewhere, "The 419 men represent the consequences of power and wealth *unleashed from the obligations of kinship* and patron-clientelism" (*A Culture* 223; "Ritual Killing" 819; all emphasis mine). More specifically, Smith argues that many Nigerians today feel conflicted between the pull of personal ambition and that of "obligations to one's kin and community" ("Ritual Killing" 819). 419ers, he contends, are instances of individual ambitions winning this conflict entirely.

Alongside these analyses about individual actors, Smith and others also situate 419 scams within a larger global context. A major part of Smith's anthropological work portrays 419 emails as reflective of the scam-writers' interpretations of global inequalities (*A Culture* 29, 51). As Smith explains, they observe economic and political systems "intertwined" with corruption and reflect these realities back in their messages (51). In a similar vein, political scientist Harvey Glickman argues that many Nigerians observe a system of international commerce in which the global north is, quite

unethically, “draining Africa of natural resources in unequal partnerships with foreign governments and multinational corporations,” and some respond by competing by whatever extralegal means they can access—often in the form of 419 schemes (476). Witnessing, for instance, Shell’s blatant exploitation of the resources and peoples of the Niger Delta inspires some Nigerians not to defend their rights as Boma does, but instead to follow suit by participating in systemic crime. Considering a different facet of the global dynamics of 419, Glickman also highlights how profits from the scams can help to support illegal international weapons and drug trade (481). Finally, of course, is the fact that 419s only succeed because enough targets around the world are, like Mirabelle, willing to participate in unethical plots (Apter 274). In their analyses of such factors, researchers have drawn attention to the global contexts that motivate and enable the perpetuation of advance fee fraud.

While fairly substantial scholarly research has examined 419 scams, few creative representations of these (rather creative) schemes exist. Published in 2009, *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* was the first novel to focus on 419 scams, and it remains the only Nigerian novel to date that has done so. A short story by Sefi Atta, “Yahoo Yahoo” (2010), released shortly after Nwaubani’s book, narrates the teenaged protagonist Idowu’s brief foray into life as a scammer, but he ultimately backs out, fearful of potential consequences from his parents and law enforcement. The only novels that focus on 419 besides Nwaubani’s are South African writer Lauren Beukes’s *Zoo City* (2010) and Canadian author Will Ferguson’s *419* (2012). *Zoo City*, like *I Do Not Come to You*, is narrated by a 419er, in this case a young South African woman named Zinzi, who engages in various illicit operations to repay her debts. The dystopian text sympathizes

with her struggles but ultimately condemns her 419 involvement; Zinzi's lover, a Congolese refugee, criticizes her scam-writing not because of its direct effects on overseas victims, but rather because Zinzi exploits the real suffering of people in central Africa by inventing starving Congolese orphans to elicit sympathy from her unwitting email recipients (257). Deeply affected by this perspective, Zinzi later emails all of her contacts, confessing the scam and warning them to be less "naïve" in the future (276). Ferguson's *419*, in contrast, focuses on the story of a Canadian scam victim's daughter, Laura, seeking to avenge the wrongs against her father, who has died by suicide following his tremendous financial losses to a 419er. Laura's subsequent and unlikely journey to Nigeria results in the death of a young Nigerian only minimally involved, underscoring that the scams are disastrous for parties on both ends. Though "Yahoo Yahoo," *Zoo City*, and *419* emphasize distinct harms, they agree that the scams are destructive and eventually bring an end to the ones they portray, whether through Idowu's fear, Zinzi's penance, or Laura's revenge.

Their critiques stand in stark contrast to *I Do Not Come to You*, which ends with Kingsley's indefinitely continuing to pursue 419 under the cover of a legitimate cybercafé business. In the late 1990s, Kingsley is a young, unemployed university graduate whose parents are already struggling to support him and his three teenaged siblings when his father, Paulinus, goes into a coma and requires costly medical care. Despite his academic qualifications, Kingsley cannot obtain his desired job as a chemical engineer. As I will show, the novel uses his growing frustrations as a means to explore a variety of communities present in turn-of-the-millennium Nigeria, as he seeks both a practical safety net and a guiding ethical philosophy during these challenging times.

Ultimately, Kingsley finds what he seeks in his family: his Uncle Boniface (a 419 kingpin) helps pay for Paulinus's expensive medical care, and Kingsley continues to be driven by the moral imperative of supporting his family, particularly given his role as *opara*, the family's oldest son. In the face of his material need, Kingsley's initially fervent ethical critique of corruption goes out the window when, under Boniface's tutelage, Kingsley launches his career in advance fee fraud. Tensions grow between Kingsley and those around him who disapprove—particularly his mother, Augustina—but by the end, he is operating a successful cybercafé chain as a front for his thriving 419 outfit. In part, the novel is legible as a critique of the lack of options available to members of Nwaubani's generation; while the novel does not give formal approval to Kingsley's behavior, it nonetheless sympathizes with his frustrations and eventual decision to pursue crime. In so doing, it also offers rare insight into potential motivations for the perpetuation of 419, as real-life scammers must remain secretive in order to succeed, and even those who get caught have little incentive to show their cards. As with *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water*, *I Do Not Come to You* embraces the ability of the novel as a genre to let readers into a space otherwise difficult to access; where Agary's and Habila's novels offered glimpses into the dangerous physical terrain of the Niger Delta, Nwaubani's novel helps readers enter cyberspace to imagine the "real," almost always impossible to trace, author behind the ubiquitous messages.

Any reading of the novel must take into account that Nwaubani's wry, satirical tone can be difficult to parse, in her fiction and elsewhere. Born in southeastern Nigeria in 1976, the writer comes from an educated and fairly well-connected Igbo family; one of the most influential first generation Nigerian writers, Flora Nwapa, was Nwaubani's

mother's cousin (Nwaubani "Chance Happenings"). In contrast with the African novelists like Nwapa who first influenced her writing style, however, Nwaubani found herself as a young writer increasingly drawn to works that dealt with somber issues in a humorous tone. She has cited, for instance, Irish American author Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes* (1996) as an influence for its dry humor in narrating the author's tragic and impoverished youth (Nwaubani "Chance Happenings").[28] Now based in Lagos, she maintains this strategy across the genres in which she writes. *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* is her only novel, but she writes both serious journalistic pieces as well as satirical op-eds for publications including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the BBC, and Al-Jazeera. I rely on Nwaubani's interviews and other writings to inform, but not dictate, my reading of *I Do Not Come to You*. Nwaubani's 2013 *New York Times* op-ed on the treatment of domestic workers in Nigeria offers a useful example of the complexity of her tone, as she launches a serious critique using a seemingly lighthearted, humorous voice. In the piece, she describes "househelps" as giving off a "feral scent" ("In Nigeria" SR4). Many readers, including myself, understand the piece as using this phrase ironically, in order to mock a prevalent, condescending attitude toward domestic workers, but understandably, others have read her tone as patronizing and offensive (Ikheloa). A successful reading of *I Do Not Come to You*, then, requires substantial attention to tone and nuance, as Nwaubani's satirical framework invites us to ask how seriously we should take Kingsley's attitudes toward corruption, nation, and community in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*.

[28] Nwaubani has said of her reaction to McCourt's book: "It was one of the most dismal tales of hardship I had ever read, but the style was humorous. Eureka!" ("Chance Happenings"). Her novel *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, similarly, is no doubt a "dismal tale of hardship"—the financial, medical, and educational challenges that Kingsley's family faces are quite serious—but the text conveys these calamities in a humorous, often lighthearted voice.

Another factor that complicates any reading of the novel is Boniface's death. Near the end, as Boniface approaches his election to political office, a rival pays his chef to poison him, and three Indian prostitutes discover his corpse the next morning (385).[29] This fate almost exactly replicates the rumors surrounding the assassination of Nigeria's notorious dictator Sani Abacha, who died in 1998, shortly prior to the main action of *I Do Not Come to You* (Weiner A4; Orr 9). Although the novel treats Boniface as a humorous, often generous character, then, it ultimately condemns his actions by aligning him with the most violent, despised leader in Nigeria's recent history. Significantly, however, where Boniface dies, Kingsley gets to carry on with his actions, as long as he operates on a smaller scale than his uncle—suggesting that, while the novel does not promote such activities, it nonetheless sees them as pervasive and inevitable.

To date, four literature scholars have contributed critical analyses of this challenging novel, all situating it in conversation with other third generation African texts. Oluwole Coker and Shalini Nadaswaran contend that *I Do Not Come to You* serves as commentary on Nigerian political structures: Coker draws out a critique of feeble government leadership, and Nadaswaran reads Augustina's consistently upstanding ethics as condemnation of an enduring Nigerian patriarchy. I take issue with Nadaswaran's argument, though, as Augustina seems more oblivious than critical—an issue to which I will return. Hamish Dalley and Madhu Krishnan, on the other hand, focus on the novel's complex depiction of national affiliations. Ultimately making an argument about genre and literary categorization, Dalley contends that the complex "transnational context" of advance fee fraud demands that we consider the book in a more nuanced framework than

[29] Specifically, the chef poisons his dog meat, which Boniface eats because he believes that it will make him immune to disease and protect him from his enemies. Ironically, then, his belief in his ability to make himself invincible is precisely the cause of his death.

what the category of “Third Generation Nigerian Literature” typically allows (19). I contend, here and throughout the dissertation, that the category of “third generation Nigerian literature” already allows for more flexibility than Dalley believes. For her part, Krishnan makes the case that *I Do Not Come to You* evokes a twenty-first-century Nigerian nationalism more nuanced than its predecessors, due a complex web of local and global affiliations that coexist with national ties; moreover, Krishnan asserts that, in Nwaubani’s hands, “the scammer becomes the very embodiment of national commitment” (88).

In this chapter, I aim to extend Krishnan’s argument to show how *I Do Not Come to You* depicts a twenty-first-century nationalism that not only is multilayered, but also entails corruption as an integral part of “Nigerian social fabric,” as Jean and John Comaroff have suggested (15). While Krishnan sees Nwaubani’s scammers as “filling the void created by the failures of governmental policies,” I go further to argue that the novel casts 419 as doing more than bridging infrastructural gaps—it is pervasive and inextricable from the realities of many third generation Nigerians like Kingsley (Krishnan 88). Where Zilayefa attempts to extricate herself from a system of enforced inequalities, Kingsley ultimately shrugs his shoulders and joins in. To be clear, I do *not* mean to suggest at all that Nigerians, or any other group of people, are inherently corrupt. Rather, I aim to highlight the ways in which this particular novel depicts a particular variant of Nigerian nationalism as interwoven with corruption. Where former US Secretary of State Colin Powell cast Nigeria as a “nation of scammers” intending to disparage (French 35), *I Do Not Come to You* humorously embraces the stereotype, defying older Nigerians’ and the international community’s insistence on compliance with a particular ethics.

After a brief overview of the history of advance fee fraud in Nigeria, I begin by situating *I Do Not Come to You* as a rewriting of earlier Nigerian nationalist narratives. Nwaubani's novel, through its play with genre and tone, upsets the global inequalities and the earnest middle class ethics formerly at the heart of much nationalist literature, and in so doing, integrates criminality as a key component of at least one strain of third generation nationalism. One key intervention is thus my contextualization of *I Do Not Come to You* within a particular subgenre of Nigerian literature (a vertical analysis), rather than as an instance of third-generation Nigerian literature (a horizontal analysis), as criticism of the novel has so far exclusively done. I then draw out Kingsley's particular variant of nationalism, cast by the novel as distinct from previous generations' nationalism but representative for those of Kingsley's—and his creator Nwaubani's—generation. In particular, and as Krishnan has observed, this nationalism entails strong familial commitments; conversely, I also demonstrate that religion and ethnicity, often considered primary categories for Nigerian identity affiliations, remain in the background of Nwaubani's text. Significantly, and in contrast with the analyses that focus on 419 as a product of deviant individual actors, *I Do Not Come to You* suggests that the scammers' endeavors can be in fact quite closely tied to their local communities, and are even a direct result of their commitment to supporting their extended family networks. Far from "unpatriotic individuals" who selfishly disrupt longstanding kinship ties (Igwe 109), Kingsley and his peers are motivated by commitments to family and defend Nigeria against those who criticize the country. Finally, I explore how the novel situates Kingsley's criminal activities in a global context, especially as it depicts criminality as a means of empowering Nigerians in an imbalanced economic and political system.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of my argument for contemporary Nigeria. The new Buhari government and other Nigerians must reckon with a younger generation's views of corruption, criminality, nation, and community. If corruption is inextricable from many younger Nigerians' understandings of national affiliation, then deterring 419 will be a much larger project than a matter of stopping individual criminals. What possibilities exist for combating this fraud that remains detrimental to most Nigerians? Does the novel ask us to accept criminality as a mode of survival? What is the role of humor in representing the serious issues at stake here? To situate this investigation, the chapter first offers some essential background information on 419 schemes.

ADVANCE FEE FRAUD

While popular imagination tends to conceive of 419 as an internet age phenomenon, the practice of advance fee fraud—the umbrella term for this type of crime—actually originated in sixteenth-century Europe, most notoriously with the so-called Spanish prisoner letters. In this scheme, fraudsters asked their targets for an advance fee to help smuggle an innocent child out of a Spanish prison; the target would be promised a financial reward as well, since the fictional child would inevitably be from a desperate, wealthy family. Various, very much fictional, rescue attempts would fail, and the letter-writer would keep asking the victim for advances to keep trying for the rescue (Glickman 472). From these origins, advance fee fraud came to take on a number of forms, developed by a number of perpetrators from around the world.

Due to a variety of economic, political, and technological factors, advance fee fraud took off in 1980s Nigeria.[30] When Kingsley was born in the late 1970s, an oil boom had enabled major investment in education, which in turn increased the number of qualified university graduates (Igwe 30). Competition for desirable jobs grew and was exacerbated by an economic downturn around 1983 partly spurred by international structural adjustment policies, all providing incentive for financially strapped fraudsters (Igwe 30; Bayart 69; Apter 269). At the same time, the institutionalization of corruption in Nigeria, often attributed to Ibrahim Babangida's 1985-1993 administration, facilitated the conditions that allowed 419 to flourish (Adebanwi *Authority Stealing* 35). Some fraudsters used snail mail, but the spread of fax machines enabled early 419ers to reach more potential targets more efficiently (Glickman 473).

By the late 1990s, when Kingsley graduates university,[31] 419 schemes had escalated due to both technological and political developments. The advent of the internet, accompanied by the mushrooming of internet cafés and Western Union locations, enabled scammers to operate on a greater scale than faxes had permitted (Igwe 32, 67).[32] Around the same time, the 1998 death of dictator Sani Abacha and subsequent reinstatement of democracy brought about greater freedoms—in contrast with Abacha's extreme restrictions on internet usage—but not necessarily preferable job opportunities or

[30] Though the scams continue to be most famously associated with Nigeria, they originate from places all over the world, including elsewhere in Africa, as well as Singapore, China, and Russia (Glickman 472).
[31] Although the novel avoids mention of any specific dates, Kingsley mentions that Princess Diana's and Sani Abacha's deaths, which occurred in 1997 and 1998 respectively, are recent at the time that he finishes university and his father enters a coma (Nwaubani 21). Presumably, then, this part of the plot begins around 1998 or 1999, and it continues for a few years, as we learn that Kingsley's three younger siblings—each a year a part from one another—finish secondary school and go on to university during the course of the novel.
[32] Western Unions had existed since 1989, but their locations were few until the late 1990s (Igwe 67).

salaries (Green and Karolides 393; Igwe 23-24). As a result, a growing number of frustrated, young, educated Nigerians, like Kingsley, turned to 419.

The repertoire of 419ers' stories has evolved alongside political circumstances, staying up-to-date to remain convincing as well as one step ahead of the potential victim. As *Zoo City*'s protagonist Zinzi explains of her scam-crafting, not without irony, "It's all topical. All rooted in the hard realities of the world" (Beukes 37). In the mid-2000s, for example, events like the Iraq War and the Indonesian tsunami provided fodder for stories about stranded orphans who needed financial assistance (D.J. Smith *A Culture* 34). Like the common "next of kin" yarn to which Nwaubani's Mirabelle fell victim, other typical narratives engage Euro-American imaginaries of African corruption. After Abacha's death in 1998, for example, a plethora of messages allegedly from his widow appeared in inboxes around the world, asking for help accessing the late dictator's fortune. The story was that Abacha's jealous successors had blocked his widow's access to her rightful inheritance, but with the payment of some initial banking fees, the "lucky" message recipients could help restore her funds in exchange for a handsome reward (D.J. Smith *A Culture* 48-49). Another popular variation plays on global awareness of conflict over Nigeria's oil resources. The 419er claims to be a bureaucrat or executive who can only gain access to an overinvoiced petroleum contract with the help of someone with a foreign bank account. Again, the message recipient is assured a big fraction of the cash, an obviously unethical plan if it were to exist; the recipient is asked only to please provide the bureaucrat with full bank account access for a short window of time. In both of these scams, of course, the 419er asks for as many advance fees or as much bank account access as the recipient will grant, and then disappears.

More recently, a financially lucrative version of what Americans know as "catfishing"—luring someone into an online romantic relationship with a character of the catfisher's invention—has also been in play, particularly thanks to the growth of online dating services. In such "romance scams," the 419er develops a fictional persona to pursue a romantic relationship with the target. After weeks or even months of courtship, the 419er invents a costly disaster, like involvement in a car crash or an unjust legal situation, and asks for financial assistance. Once the victim runs out of money, sometimes even after having borrowed funds she can never repay, the scammer disappears. As Glickman has noted, since advance fee fraud's origins centuries ago, "the story to entice people has changed, [but] the basic principles of the scam have not" (472).

A witness to (and author of) these and other 419 subgenres, Nwaubani's character Kingsley is cast as representative of a certain group within his generation: those who are well-educated but unsatisfied by their more savory professional options. Like his creator, Kingsley is a third generation Nigerian, representative of the so-called "Yahooze generation," as some have dubbed his age group to emphasize the proliferation of false Yahoo! email addresses as a consequence of growing 419 schemes (Adebanwi *Authority Stealing* 36). To be sure, Kingsley's experiences and choices are far from representative of those of *most* Nigerians. Nonetheless, Nwaubani's novel presents them as reflective of the realities of a certain population whose frustrations matter. Indeed, as many as 23.1% of university graduates in Nigeria are unemployed—a reality that leads Kingsley, upon failing to obtain his dream job as a chemical engineer, to describe himself as "a component of Nigeria's rising unemployment statistics" (Makoni; Nwaubani 33).

A Revision of Earlier Nationalist Narratives

One key frame for *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*'s narrative of the young, frustrated university graduate is through its manipulation of a subgenre of first and second generation Nigerian writing that I call here the "moral decay" narrative. This type of narrative ultimately upheld the nation, even if critiqued particular aspects, and in fact, its effort to criticize corruption was part of a larger project of national improvement. *I Do Not Come to You* engages this subgenre only to reverse its ending, thereby casting criminality as part of a certain type of nationalist undertaking.

Among the most prominent Nigerian "moral decay" narratives are the first generation novels *No Longer at Ease* (1960) by Chinua Achebe and *Kinsman and Foreman* (1966) by T. M. Aluko, as well as second generation writer Festus Iyayi's novel *Violence* (1979). From elsewhere in Anglophone Africa, first generation Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) belongs to a similar genre.[33] These texts deal with corruption from the perspective of a protagonist—generally male—who starts off as an upstanding community member committed to particular values. Over the course of the novel, he feels the weight of increasing financial pressure (often financial obligations to his family or community; medical and education costs are frequent culprits), becomes frustrated by his career path, and discovers that many of his peers are engaging in criminal behaviors (like accepting bribes). In some cases, he in desperation commits the type of crime he had once scorned and must face the consequences (*No Longer at Ease*), and in others, he refuses to give in but remains

[33] As literary scholar Neil Lazarus has noted, *The Beautyful Ones* emphasizes that the initial decolonization period had offered (since missed) opportunities for "radically transforming Ghanaian society" (50). Forty years later, by the time of Nwaubani's publication of a comparable Nigerian "moral decay" tale, any such opportunities would have long since passed.

frustrated by the status quo (*Kinsman and Foreman*, *Violence*, and *The Beautyful Ones*). Either way, the novel pities the protagonist, casting his situation as one that has become tragically typical for those of his age, education level, and socioeconomic background. It thus serves as a call to action against corruption, ultimately to strengthen the nation.

Although the historical context of these earlier novels is quite different from that of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, Nwaubani has clearly adapted the generic form for a turn-of-the-millennium setting. Of these moral decay narratives, the storyline of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* most closely follows that of Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), given that both novels' protagonists eventually succumb to participating in systemic crime. In *No Longer*, the second book of Achebe's seminal African trilogy, protagonist Obi Okonkwo bows under financial pressures from his community, family,[34] and fiancée Clara, shifting in his initially outspoken, judgmental attitude toward corrupt civil servants, and begins to accept bribes. In all of these ways, Obi's plight appears highly similar to Kingsley's—except, in the end, Obi is caught by police, tried, and punished, whereas Kingsley continues to pursue his 419 schemes in a novel that treats his crimes as humorous, rather than tragic. *I Do Not Come to You*, then, lines up closely with this genre of the protagonist fallen to corruption, only to disrupt the ending, as Kingsley gets away with his crimes (or is not "made to face the music," to borrow a phrase of Achebe's from his nonfiction book on corruption, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (54)). No longer a problem to be eradicated, criminality instead endures within Kingsley's version of nationalism.

I Do Not Come to You also reverses several other aspects of first generation writing. Its play with characters' names from Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), the

[34] Much like Kingsley, Obi must pay a younger brother's tuition and a parent's substantial medical bills and later, funeral costs.

third book of the author's African trilogy, is one such reversal. Achebe's British colonial villain, Captain T. K. Winterbottom, becomes in Nwaubani's text an American "mugu" named Winterbottom. Where the earlier Winterbottom exploited Achebe's protagonist, Ezeulu, for his own professional advancement, the third generation Winterbottom is exploited by Nwaubani's protagonist for his own financial gain. Similarly, Captain T. K. Winterbottom's obedient and soft-spoken servant, Boniface, becomes the garrulous 419 kingpin that helps Kingsley exploit the American Winterbottom. By inverting the power dynamics among characters of each name, *I Do Not Come to You* underscores the notion of 419 scams as a means of empowering Nigerian actors in the face of a global order that has historically disempowered them.

Another key distinction between *I Do Not Come to You* and earlier nationalist narratives is that it willingly engages a negative stereotype that Nwaubani's predecessors would have sought to correct. As many scholars have noted, first and second generation African literature often "aims at countering the Western image of Africa in cultural and socio-political perspectives" (Ojaide "Examining Canonisation" 11). Achebe was at the forefront of this struggle, often emphasizing that one of his major literary goals "was to fight back the negative ideas of Africa propagated by the European colonisers and those sharing a similar imperial ideology" (Ojaide "Examining Canonisation" 11). Nwaubani, however, embraces the rather negative 419 stereotype in her novel. Although she thinks it is "annoying" and "a shame" that so many non-Africans associate the scams with Nigeria, she also finds the topic "quite amusing" ("Chance Happenings"). In addition, she has explained that she wanted to address the stereotype in fiction before non-Africans did, so that she could tell this particular story before "some white man from, say,

Nebraska or Louisiana, […] jumped out of the hedges one day with a novel about Nigerian 419" (Nwaubani "Chance Happenings"). At least in the realm of fiction, then, a Nigerian voice was able to take on this particular stereotype before "some white man" did, in contrast with the long preexisting stereotypes faced by previous generations. Nonetheless, Nwaubani's novel neither laments nor contests the association of Nigerians with 419, displaying a disregard for how others might perceive Nigerians. As she has explained of her writing process, "I wasn't worried about those Westerners who think everything Nigerian is 419; I wasn't worried about those Nigerians who are obsessed with changing the impressions of the West" ("Chance Happenings").

Moreover, Nwaubani treats her controversial subject with a humorous tone, rather than the solemnity of earlier Nigerian writers. In a 2010 op-ed for the *New York Times*, she reflected on some of her influences, "Achebe and Soyinka are certainly masters, but of an earnest and sober style. What about other styles? As a lover of humorous books, I'm often saddened that I can find hardly any by African authors" ("In Africa" WK9).[35] Though the novel takes Kingsley's family's problems seriously, it employs a dark humor to narrate their personal struggles. Early in the text, for example, Kingsley reflects on his father's illness, "For a poorly paid civil servant to get caught up in an affliction like diabetes was the very height of ambitious misfortune" (16). Here, the text simultaneously conveys a health concern it consistently takes seriously, as well as a dark, ironic humor about the diagnosis. With such cynical humor, then, *I Do Not Come to You* continues to distinguish itself from earlier Nigerian nationalist literature.

[35] One might contrast Nwaubani's tone and attitude in dealing with systemic corruption in *I Do Not Come to You* with an anecdote that Achebe shares in *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), also focused on systemic corruption. The late author recounts a family road trip during which the Achebes saw a police officer urinating onto the road and even onto some moving cars. Where Nwaubani would almost assuredly have made a crass joke, Achebe only goes so far as to say, "It was *almost* humorous" (44, emphasis mine).

Finally, while *I Do Not Come to You* is not the only third generation Nigerian novel to adapt the moral decay narrative, it still stands out as the only novel where the protagonist continues to engage in systemic criminal behavior *and* remains an integral part of his community in Nigeria. Protagonist Tolani of Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2010), exhausted by ongoing sexual harassment at her mediocre job, considers working as a drug mule but at the eleventh hour backs out. She remains in Nigeria but is forced to cope with the fate of her best friend, who goes through with the plan to swallow cocaine and dies as a consequence. In Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* (2014), the Nigerian-born New York City resident Ike is deep in debt due to a combination of factors: his obligation to send money back home to his family, the extravagant spending habits of his ex-wife (whom he had married to get a green card), and his gambling addiction. Like the overwhelmed Obi and Kingsley, Ike grows desperate, and his crime is to steal a god from his hometown to sell in New York. He does not face a formal legal punishment, as Obi does, but instead he is forced to cope with his own guilt and possibly, the novel implies, spiritual punishment as well. In this way, Ike faces punishment *and* is distanced from his home community in Nigeria, unlike Kingsley, who continues to operate as an integral part of his community without even a real threat of penalty.

I Do Not Come to You thus stands out from its predecessors and its contemporaries: while other texts acknowledge the pervasiveness of corruption, they punish those who commit the crimes, but Nwaubani's conclusion allows Kingsley's 419 outfit to thrive. As Nwaubani rewrites the ending of the moral decay narrative, what Nadaswaran has identified as "Kingsley's journey towards moral deterioration" continues indefinitely (390). While Nwaubani does not encourage or condone Kingsley's 419

schemes, the conclusion does treat them as an inevitable part of contemporary Nigerian life.

THREE NATIONALISMS

Corruption does not stand alone in *I Do Not Come to You*; rather, we come to learn that it is integral to the rather cynical form of nationalism that Kingsley comes to embrace—a form of nationalism that is quite distinct from its predecessors. Early in the novel, Kingsley begins to seek a source of community that offers both practical help—he really needs a job—and ethical guidance. He has become so unmoored because, up until his early twenties, Kingsley has unquestioningly adhered to his father's model of nationalism, which claims to offer both financial prosperity and personal fulfillment through hard work and allegiance to the state. Nwaubani's novel depicts this variant of nationalism as perhaps well-intentioned but certainly irrelevant for members of Kingsley's generation. In addition to this independence era nationalism still embraced by first generation Nigerians (those who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s, like Paulinus),[36] the text also portrays two versions of nationalism that exist among Kingsley's contemporaries: a simplistic and overly optimistic expatriate nationalism, and a cynical nationalism that is nuanced and adaptable.

Especially with priorities like formal education and meritocracy, Paulinus emblematizes independence era nationalism. In order to seize power from colonizers and build equality throughout the nation, early Nigerian nationalists like Chief Obafemi

[36] We know that Paulinus is an older father because he is already an adult when he first meets Augustina, who is still in secondary school (7). For this reason, Paulinus and Kingsley's age gap is such that the former is old enough to be a prototypical member of the first generation and the younger is a typical age for the third generation.

Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe prioritized access to and quality of education (Coleman *Nigeria* 116; Adebanwi "The Cult of Awo" 337; Grundy 4). Calls for the handover of political power went hand in hand with critiques of the inadequacy of existing educational systems throughout Africa and especially in Nigeria, where leaders called for universal primary education and for as much as 20% of the state budget to go toward education (F. Cooper 111). Moreover, many Nigerians of this era widely saw education as a key credential for obtaining a desirable job and improving one's economic standing, just as Paulinus believes (Coleman *Nigeria* 121; Nwaubani *I Do Not* 10). An engineer and civil servant, Paulinus prizes education above all else, always insisting that his four children excel in school, attend university, and get jobs for which they have been specifically trained at university (18, 79). As Kingsley explains, "To my parents, education was everything. She was the recipe for wealth, the pass to respectability, the ticket to eternal life" (18). This last phrase—"the ticket to eternal life"—is particularly ironic because, as the reader soon learns, Paulinus dies prematurely due to causes that the novel attributes to his nationalism.

Before he meets his fate, however, Paulinus suffers a tremendous lack of dignity, which is particularly ironic because nationalism, and above all early anticolonial nationalism, has historically been so much about dignity (Greenfeld 487; Fanon 103). When Kingsley finds his unconscious father after a stroke, he says, "My father was sprawled like a dead chicken by their bathroom door" (84). This description does not merely note that Paulinus has collapsed: it dehumanizes him. He has lost control of his body and mind so completely that his son compares him to the most stereotypically stupid of animals. In this way, the basic dignity that Paulinus believes that a good

education and a career in public service can bring to an individual and a nation is thus undone: all that he has striven for leads to his literal collapse and complete loss of dignity. In broader terms, the novel thus contends that the ideals of his generation of nationalists, in the twenty-first century, do more harm than good to the dignity that nationalists believed would accompany their work (Coleman *Nationalism and Development* 125).

Indeed, *I Do Not Come to You* depicts Paulinus's fervent idealism—and thereby the enduring beliefs of members of his generation—as impractical and even fatal in the twenty-first century. First, his commitments to the nation and public service puts him in a place of financial uncertainty, as his once-generous salary looks increasingly meager due to "years of rising inflation without corresponding increase in civil servant wages" (Nwaubani 16).[37] With diminishing resources, Paulinus is limited to a less healthy diet, which eventually contributes to his diagnosis with type 2 diabetes, which in turn causes a life-threatening stroke (16, 92). The novel thus depicts Paulinus as stuck in a dangerous cycle: his lack of financial resources causes his physical illness, which in turn causes him to spend more of his limited resources on preserving what remains of his health. The cycle ends only with his death. In her article on the novel, Shalini Nadaswaran argues, "Paulinus's life of diabetes and high blood pressure, and death from the lack of proper medical care, stands for the wasted body politic of Nigeria" (388). Indeed, his body not only stands for the "wasted body politic," as Nadaswaran says, but is also its direct

[37] Unfortunately, Paulinus's fictional circumstances echo many of the lived experiences of members of his generation. Following the economic crisis of the 1980s, the actual value of civil servants' salaries deteriorated such that by 2001, minimum wage for federal government employees was approximately equivalent to $2 (USD) per day, and less than $1.50 (USD) per day for state employees (Igwe 23-24). Simultaneously, the payment of civil servants' salaries was increasingly delayed such that by the turn of the millennium, they were paid as many as six months late (Igwe 98).

consequence. By calling attention to the relationship between Paulinus's unquestioning commitment to public service, his financial straits, and his health problems, *I Do Not* argues that, despite the ostensible appeal of Paulinus's earnest optimism, it can be impractical and even dangerous in the twenty-first century.

To be clear, while the novel is unafraid to include humorous moments alongside its depictions of Paulinus's suffering, it does not laugh *at* Paulinus's death. When Kingsley's Aunty Dimma comes to visit the family in the hospital, for example, Kingsley describes his revulsion at her beauty products in an amusing way. When she hugs him, he struggles not to recoil: "I felt a gooey substance on my right ear and hoped that it was simply some stray hair gel from her red-streaked pompadour" (101). Clearly, the reader is meant to smile through a cringe at the mysterious "gooey substance" dripping off the enthusiastic relative. In the same scene, however, Kingsley describes Augustina's sorrow in a somber voice: "She always looked drawn. And […] her beautiful hair looked as if it had converted completely to gray overnight" (101). In this way, the text includes humorous characterizations alongside moments that genuinely mourn the family's suffering.

In addition to the extended consideration of Paulinus's nationalism, ultimately cast as tragedy, the novel also offers another version of nationalism through Kingsley's former classmate, Andrew Onyeije, who is visiting Nigeria from the United States when Kingsley runs into him at the airport. In the way that Paulinus is representative of the optimists of the independence era and Kingsley of the challenges of Nwaubani's generation, Andrew is representative of those of Kingsley's age group who, disappointed with available opportunities in Nigeria, have gone abroad to pursue their educations or

career. As Madhu Krishnan has argued, Andrew is representative of an overly simplistic version of nationalism that the novel wishes to reject (89); I extend Krishnan's argument by going into further detail here.

As many Nigerians would recognize, Andrew's name makes reference to Nigerian short films that aired frequently in the 1980s, aimed at convincing Nigerians to remain in the country and to help improve it (Oberabor).[38] Especially since "Andrew" subsequently became an informal nickname for Nigerians who hoped to "check out," in the language of the films, Nwaubani's Andrew clearly stands in for Kingsley's peers who have left Nigeria for better opportunities overseas. Particularly with this context in mind, Andrew's nationalism seems all the more superficial; he talks nonstop with "nationalistic fervor" until Kingsley "felt like tipping him over a cliff" (286). Shortly thereafter, however, when he realizes his passport has been stolen, Andrew's "patriotism changed color. 'This country is unbelievable!'" he exclaims (288). In contrast, Kingsley pooh-poohs the theft, seeing Andrew as careless with his possessions ("'Someone probably saw you putting it back into your pocket,'" Kingsley shrugs) (288). In this way, the novel portrays the "Andrews" of Kingsley's generation as trapped in an outdated mentality and utterly unable to cope with the realities of present-day Nigeria. Neither leaving the country nor pursuing this type of zealous but superficial nationalism are real options for Kingsley, even though he likely faces comparable financial and professional frustrations to those that drove Andrew abroad—because he prioritizes family and wants to remain close to them. Indeed, unlike many of his fictional contemporaries (Adéèkó 12), Kingsley

[38] Both Sefi Atta's 2010 novel *Swallow* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel *Americanah* also contain references to this real historical campaign, which left a strong impression on those growing up in 1980s Nigeria, as Atta (b. 1967), Nwaubani (b. 1976), and Adichie (b. 1977) all did (Atta *Swallow* 58; Adichie *Americanah* 234-235).

is committed to staying *in* Nigeria. In many other third generation novels, "Emigration to the United States saves protagonists painfully groping for tenable nationalist ways" (Adéèkó 23). Like Zilayefa and Boma, remaining within the contested geopolitical territory is key, though Kingsley does not risk his life in the same way that Agary's and Habila's characters do.[39]

Although Kingsley does not embrace either his father's or Andrew's nationalisms, he does express his own form of patriotic nationalism. While angry about the theft of his passport, Andrew calls Nigeria "seriously fucked up." In response, Kingsley thinks to himself, "No, this country was not fucked up. It was also not a place for idealizing and auld lang syne. Once you faced the harsh facts and learned to adapt, Nigeria became the most beautiful place in the world" (289). Here, Kingsley first critiques Andrew's simplistic, vague criticism of Nigeria: "fucked up" is certainly a negative evaluation, but it is not one that can deal with any type of complexities or nuance. Kingsley further explains that Nigerians cannot expect their country to be as it was in "days long gone"; the historical moment for Paulinus's ideals is over. Rather, understanding of Nigeria's present-day circumstances is essential. As Kingsley argues, one must "adapt" and be willing to respond to contingencies, in this case anticipating crime before it happens by being savvy enough to keep one's passport someplace more secure than a pocket. With a proper grasp of Nigeria's realities, including the pervasiveness of crime, our protagonist concludes that his nation is "the most beautiful place in the world." In this way, a simultaneously cynical and nuanced nationalism, characterized by its thread of criminality, guides Kingsley's reaction toward the "Andrews" of his generation—those

[39] Notably, Nwaubani is also unusual among her contemporaries for writing for a global audience from a home base in Lagos. She is the first contemporary African writer to have obtained an international book deal—with the New York-based Hyperion—while residing primarily in her home country (Dada).

who would leave Nigeria behind and expect it to remain as it was in some idealized vision of the past. The international airport—most likely Lagos's Murtala Muhammed International Airport—thus becomes a "site where very different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other" (Duara 2). I return to a this tension over diasporic Nigerians' nationalism in Chapter 3.

Elsewhere in the novel, Kingsley experiences another moment of patriotic nationalism when a North American scam target tells one of Kingsley's colleagues to "watch out for diseases, especially HIV" in Nigeria, on the basis that "almost all of them [Nigerians] have got it" (191). Incensed by the lazy stereotype, Kingsley says, "All of us standing around the screen stopped giggling. In the ensuing silence, I could almost hear the whisperings of the National Pledge" (191). The 419ers who had been delighted to laugh at the American's ignorance mere moments earlier are suddenly sobered, and the text correspondingly shifts in tone, as they all share a silent moment of patriotism. When someone informs the target, "'It's not like that in Nigeria […] It's in South Africa that they've got it so bad,'" he replies with disinterest, "'All them places are all the same thing to me'" (192). In response, Kingsley departs to send another 419 email with a stronger sense of urgency, as if to penalize Nigeria's critics and particularly those who would deny its specificity (192). Here, 419 becomes a means for the protagonist to feel empowered in the face of the North American's utter lack of concern for his nation. The fact that a whole group of Nigerian 419ers participates in this scene particularly underscores an image of a community working together to take action against this damaging ignorance. *I Do Not Come to You* thus warns against assumptions about

Nigerian (and African) disease even while welcoming assumptions about Nigerians as criminals.

Kingsley's version of nationalism, then, embraces criminality as an integral component. While the fading nationalism of his parents' generation led to financial and medical tragedy, and the simplistic nationalism of his expat peers lacks any grasp of the country's present realities, Kingsley's nationalism becomes for him a guiding principle that helps him cope with his financial hardship and gives him a sense that he can disrupt, at least at an individual level, the global inequalities and ignorance that have put his country at a disadvantage.

KINGSLEY ON RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND FAMILY

Before he reaches the decision to depart from his father's virtuous moral scheme and become a 419 scammer, however, Kingsley spends much of the novel questing for a source of community that can provide emotional support and solutions to his family's financial struggles. His ideological commitment to his family—his sole inheritance from Paulinus—also drives this search. He considers religion, ethnicity, and family as potential networks that might help to support his multilayered national commitment. Early in the novel, frustrated by the limitations of his father's philosophy, and intrigued by his Aunty Dimma's newfound sense of belonging within her church, Kingsley attends a Pentecostal service (58). He grew up attending a Catholic church, but in adulthood he does not return to the church with which he is familiar. Rather, he is interested in investigating this new religious community that has such a pull on many of those around him.

As in many other places around the world, religion has historically been a major source both of group identity and of division within Nigeria. The country has comparably sized Muslim and Christian populations (about ninety million each), with Islam predominant in the North and Christianity in the South (Paden 2). Many Nigerians practice indigenous religions as well, adding to the variety and complexity of these religious communities (Paden 7). While Islam grows in the North in both moderate and extremist camps, Christian Pentecostal churches have sprung up throughout the South.[40] Pentecostalism first took root in Nigeria in the 1970s, but it grew rapidly around the turn of the millennium, when Kingsley decides to investigate what it has to offer (Marshall 2). By 2009, Pentecostalism was arguably "the single most important sociocultural force in southern Nigeria," particularly because it "deliberately" offered a response to the types of perceived political failures that frustrate Kingsley (Marshall 2, 3). Interestingly, Pentecostal churches are also more tied to global networks than are other Christian denominations in Nigeria, thanks to connections with US-based televangelists, for example (Meyer 448). As a result, if Kingsley were to commit to participation in a Pentecostal church, he would also be drawn into a type of global community very different from, for example, the 419 network that enables and is enabled by his communication with fellow 419ers and scam targets globally.

Though the novel pokes fun at religion, it nonetheless depicts it as a real source of community for some people. During the service, Kingsley notes, "All over the hall, men and women, boys and girls, were engrossed in cheerful handshakes and happy hugs and merry verbal exchanges" (61). He thus depicts the church as a place where Nigerians of

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[40] Nwaubani's fellow third generation writers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ayo Sogunro both address this trend in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and "The Apotheosis of Bishop Okikiola" (2013), respectively.

all ages and genders can come together in a joyful setting—"cheerful," "happy," and "merry" all emphasize a positive shared spirit. While the text quite obviously pokes fun of the congregants (the woman next to Kingsley eats a meat pie while making "soft, mushy sounds like footsteps on a soggy carpet"), it conveys a genuineness within their community (61). Clearly, for many people, the Pentecostal church—the only religious group that the novel examines up close—serves as the basis for a meaningful, positive community.

After just one service, however, Kingsley decides that religion will not really help him—and thus the novels ends its brief exploration of religious community. Kingsley promptly rejects religion on the basis of its impracticality for his immediate purposes. When the preacher directs the congregation to focus on Jesus and to forget about such worldly aspirations as money, Kingsley is appalled. He wonders, "Did this holy man really know what he was talking about? My family was almost destitute" (65). Here, Kingsley makes clear that, given his struggle, he is looking for a community for practical, primarily financial reasons, in contrast with Dimma, who joins because of her spiritual anxiety about her multiple narrow evasions of death. Focused on his goals, Kingsley stops pursuing religion as a source of answers or help for his particular problems.

In contrast, ethnicity takes on a role in Kingsley's world that is relevant—Kingsley, his family, and his 419 colleagues all identify as Igbo—but it is largely relegated to the background of the novel. With regard to her own identity, Nwaubani sees ethnic, national, and pan-African affiliations as coexisting. In an interview where she was asked if she felt "more Nigerian than Igbo" or "more African than Nigerian," the author identified herself as equally "Igbo," "Nigerian," "an African," and "God's creation," but

also emphasized her patriotism for Nigeria ("Chance Happenings"). Nwaubani's portrayal of ethnicity as relevant but not primary is evocative of a stance toward which others of her generation have also gestured, as Sefi Atta has on multiple occasions ("Many Nigerian writers I meet feel that they are Yoruba, Igbo, or something else, but I actually feel Nigerian and it comes out in my writing") (Atta "Interview" 123).

Historically, however, and for a variety of reasons, ethnicity has been perhaps most significant of all Nigerian identity categories. Due in no small part to Nigeria's exceptional ethnic diversity, interethnic conflict has, for example, lain at the heart of the catastrophic Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970), the country's notorious series of military coups, and separatist violence that has continued and even escalated in the twenty-first century. To be sure, some of these conflicts have arguably been more about interregional or interreligious tensions—or even about individual power grabs—but they have all at least occurred in the name of ethnicity. In the 1980s, Achebe emphasized the primacy of ethnicity (in his usage, "tribe") in Nigerian life: "Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the chequered fortune of the word *tribe* in her vocabulary" (*The Trouble* 5). This representative formulation emphasizes that ethnic lines formed, at least from the perspective of many older Nigerians, the primary obstacle to cohesive Nigerian nationalism. Interestingly, the Library of Congress subject headings on *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*'s copyright page imply that the novel prioritizes ethnicity, as they begin with, "Igbo (African people)—Fiction." This detail seems to say more about non-African assumptions—and perhaps especially about the stereotype of 419ers as ethnically Igbo (Kperogi and Duhé 276)—than it does about the novel's actual priorities.

In any case, Kingsley's relaxed attitude toward ethnicity becomes clear in one of his conversations with his younger sister, Charity. When Charity tells Kingsley about her plans for marriage, she points out to the unpersuaded Kingsley that her fiancé, Johnny, is also Igbo. She makes sure to include this fact in the relatively small amount of information that she chooses to convey to her brother, so she clearly knows that Johnny's ethnicity is a significant factor in obtaining Kingsley's approval. Later, Kingsley reflects, "Naturally, I would not want my sister to marry someone who was not Igbo, but right now, that was the least of my concerns" (316). His reaction here indicates that ethnicity is an essential factor in his consideration: the word "Naturally" evokes the idea that the desire for a relative to marry a member of the same ethnic group is innate, as if Kingsley were born with this desire, as well as the idea that this preference is part of a usual custom ("naturally, adv."). Also noteworthy is that Kingsley's framing of ethnicity is exclusionary of non-Igbo people, rather than inclusive of Igbo people: he says that he "would *not*" want "someone who was *not* Igbo" in his family (emphasis mine), rather than saying that he *would* affirmatively want Charity to marry someone who *was* Igbo. This phrasing suggests that Kingsley's primary interest lies in keeping away outsiders, rather than maintaining a particular community.

All that said, despite Kingsley's feelings here, the place of ethnicity is not his primary focus; he says, "that was the least of my concerns." Here, the place of ethnicity takes a backseat to Kingsley's concerns about the well-being of his family. At the time of Charity's engagement announcement, Kingsley is coping with ongoing concerns about whether Boniface will be arrested. If he, too, someday goes to prison, Kingsley worries in the same passage that his siblings would wind up "Losing their source of life and

sustenance"—that is, himself as their breadwinner (316). Though the text is making fun of Kingsley's sense of self-importance, he is nonetheless quite serious in this statement, since he really is supporting their entire family, as his father is deceased, his mother's alterations shop is struggling, and his siblings are still in school. In this way, Kingsley prioritizes material support of his family (through 419) over concerns about Charity's fiancé's ethnicity. While ethnicity is still a factor he considers—giving it greater importance in his life than religion, for instance—it nonetheless falls decidedly behind his commitment to his family.

Indeed, responsibilities to family clearly drive Nwaubani's young protagonist. Again, in contrast to what Daniel Jordan Smith has argued, Nwaubani's novel depicts the connections that propel and are in turn propelled by 419 not as individualistic or exclusively selfish, but rather as meaningful and substantive. Kingsley finds in family a sense of belonging and purpose, as well as a means of solving his immediate problems—from Boniface's financial assistance in up-front contributions to Paulinus's medical care, to Boniface's help with getting Kingsley plugged into the world of 419.

Throughout, *I Do Not Come to You* makes clear that Kingsley is operating in a context where familial obligations reign. In the first part of the novel, when Kingsley and Augustina worry about how they will pay for Paulinus's medical treatment, Dimma suggests asking Boniface for financial help. Although she knows that Paulinus despises Boniface's way of life, Dimma says, "'Other rich people build houses for their relatives and train their siblings' children. […] One of my friends, her elder brother is paying for her daughter to do a master's degree in London…almost ten thousand pounds. How can you people have a brother who's so rich and you're struggling like this?'" (103). Here,

Dimma evokes a general, apparently widespread practice (we don't know exactly who these "Other rich people" are, but they seem numerous enough) of familial financial support in at least two arenas: home construction and education. Paulinus's immediate problem is even more basic; while lodging and education are important, he will die if the family cannot gather enough money to keep him in the hospital. Dimma also unknowingly foreshadows Boniface's soon-to-be role in Kingsley's life. While her phrase "train their siblings' children" refers to traditional apprenticeships or tuition for formal education, as the example of the London master's degree suggests, Boniface's "training" of Kingsley as a 419er could also fall under this rubric. In any case, given the context of familial support that Dimma cites, she cannot understand how "you people" (Kingsley and Augustina, and perhaps anyone who upholds Paulinus's outdated ideals) can continue to refuse to participate in a family network that will only help them. Dimma's assertion here thus emphasizes the salience of kinship ties, with Kingsley and Augustina as foolhardy for not relying on this network, especially when the stakes are so high (Dimma adds, "'We're talking about Paulinus's life here'" (104)). Dimma thus portrays kinship support systems as absolutely the norm. The novel makes clear that we should take her points here seriously, as even the deeply ethical Augustina encourages Kingsley to reach out to Boniface after this conversation with Dimma.

Even Boniface, deceptive and manipulative in most parts of his life, takes family obligations quite seriously. Although his ideas about "helping" Kingsley sometimes include obnoxious advice about his shoes and shirt being too ugly (114, 134), elsewhere Boniface's familial commitment is sincere and deep. For example, when Kingsley expresses gratitude to Boniface for helping with Paulinus's medical costs, Boniface reacts

"as if [Kingsley] had just looked him up and down and called him a blob of fat"; he responds, "'Kings, what do you mean by thanking me? What do you mean by that? There's no need for you to thank me for anything. When the eye weeps, the nose also weeps. After all, you're my brother. We're family'" (147). Here, the reader is supposed to laugh—the idea of calling someone "a blob of fat" is certainly entertaining—but also to take Boniface's underlying sentiment seriously. The "blob of fat" simile indicates that Boniface is actually offended by Kingsley's gratitude, as if his nephew's intended thanks were an insult (being called "a blob of fat"). This particular comparison also suggests that Boniface feels that Kingsley sees him as if he had unlimited resources ("fat") that he shared indiscriminately (like a mindless "blob"), rather than thoughtfully with deserving relatives. Later, Boniface's metaphor about the eye and nose weeping also emphasize that he views Kingsley as part of the same, interconnected family system; Kingsley's suffering as the eye necessarily entails Boniface's suffering as the nose, so Boniface will necessarily want to help address the eye's weeping.

In addition, by calling Kingsley his "brother" when he is actually his half-nephew, Boniface emphasizes the closeness of their relationship and minimizes the importance of measuring the exact degree of a family relationship in order to determine one's generosity. Regardless of how much DNA they share, Boniface implies, Kingsley is part of his family and no less deserving of help than a technically closer relative.[41] That Augustina is Boniface's much older half-sister, with whom he spent almost none of his

[41] In anthropology, Hamilton's rule suggests that altruism in kinship networks largely depends on genetic relationships; the preservation of the maximum percentage of one's genetic material is a guiding principle in decision-making. For example, a soldier would in this paradigm not risk his life to save one brother, who statistically would only carry about half of the first soldier's DNA, but would do so to save three brothers (Cox and Fafchamps 3759-3760). Although Boniface does not risk his life with any of his financial contributions, he nonetheless gives willingly to support Paulinus, with whom he shares no DNA, and repeatedly helps Kingsley, with whom he shares approximately an eighth of his DNA—all indicating a broad, inclusive conception of family.

formative years, is no deterrent. This blurring of distinctions also helps to contribute to the type of family network that the novel depicts—one in which all family members mutually support one another. Finally, Boniface's giving while expecting nothing in return constitutes, in anthropological terms, "pure altruism"—not exactly a phrase that most observers would associate with 419ers, but which is nonetheless the case in Boniface's treatment of family (Cox and Fafchamps 3722-3723). Not only does his commitment to his family—and all of his family—endure alongside his 419 endeavors, but it is also strengthened by them. While almost everything that Boniface does in the novel is motivated by greed, his generosity with family and immediate community consistently lacks any perceptible selfish motive.

With these kinship systems as backdrop, Kingsley also struggles to play his own role as the *opara*, the oldest son in the family and the "symbol of family authority" (Nwokocha 220). As Oluwole Coker notes in his analysis of the novel, the role of the *opara* is specifically grounded in Igbo practices (46), reminding us that these varied affiliations are never quite separable from one another. This role offers both perks and responsibilities, as Kingsley gets the best portion in family meals but also struggles to care for his aging parents and significantly younger siblings. Indeed, as Shalini Nadaswaran has noted, the pressures of fulfilling his prescribed role as *opara* contribute to Kingsley's decision to get involved in 419 schemes. Struggling to shoulder his family's tremendous financial burdens, Kingsley is desperate to earn lots of money quickly (Nadaswaran 387). Moreover, obtaining money through 419 scams helps Kingsley to feel he has fulfilled his role. When he starts to receive money from Mirabelle, his first 419 victim, he says that for the first time, "I felt like a real *opara*"

(182). This quote indicates that committing this type of crime actually does help Kingsley function as *opara*—he finally feels like he has begun to do his part only when he begins to reap the rewards of his scams. In this way, the novel depicts Kingsley as seeking out crime in order to complete his traditional responsibilities, since he can find no feasible ethical or legal option. The fact that his commitment to his family motivates his criminal activity particularly undermines Igwe's and Smith's assertions about 419 being driven by individual greed.

In fact, I would further, continuing to engage in 419 only increases Kingsley's commitment to his role as *opara*. As he proceeds, Kingsley starts to feel some guilt about the impact on his victims. He speaks with Boniface, who reminds him that family is his reason for pursuing 419. While underlying factors are certainly present—larger economic and political issues serve as obstacles to Kingsley's getting a job as a chemical engineer—they are not the immediate factor that pushes Kingsley into 419. More specifically, Boniface creates a binary to convince Kingsley that he must choose between the victims' suffering and his family's suffering—if there is no other means to support his family, as the novel seems to suggest, then robbing scam targets is the only option. Finally persuaded, Kingsley reflects, using his uncle's pompous 419 nickname, "Cash Daddy was right. Not being able to take care of my family was the real sin. Gradually, I had learnt to take my mind off the mugus and focus on the things that really mattered" (185). Here, Kingsley agrees with Boniface that he has been compelled to choose the lesser of two evils. Worrying about the victims, whom he does not even know personally, must take a backseat to "the things that really mattered"—his family. The more involved he gets in 419, the more he feels compelled to remind himself of this philosophy, which

in turn makes him all the more committed he becomes to his role as *opara*. While the novel is not sincerely asking us to believe that Boniface's justification is valid, it is still highlighting the complex web of family loyalties, global imbalances, and criminality that is at play.

Moreover, Kingsley's eventual financial gain from 419 does not make him into an isolated criminal, but rather helps him to maintain and strengthen these networks. His relationship with Augustina most clearly illustrates this point. When Kingsley first gets involved in fraud, Augustina becomes increasingly upset with his fraudulent behavior, and their conflict escalates to the point that she threatens never to visit him again. Distraught over his declining relationship with his mother, Kingsley actually delves further into 419, becomes a kingpin (though one less ostentatious than Boniface), and opens a chain of cybercafés that provide a front for his continuing scams. With this apparently honest profession of café management as his cover story, Kingsley mends his relationship with the delighted Augustina. The text describes her pride for the son she believes to have completely reformed: "That was something Augustina loved about her son: Family always came first" (399). Ironically, Augustina is not exactly wrong here—Kingsley's prioritization of family is what led him into 419 in the first place, and his desire to maintain a strong bond with her led him further into 419, such that he both needed to and could afford to operate a cover business in order to please his mother (and to deceive authorities). Perhaps, too, Augustina's obliviousness here suggests a comparable obliviousness on the part of some older, more idealistic Nigerians, who might, like Augustina, remain unaware of the criminality so pervasive in Kingsley's world. In any case, the novel shows that Kingsley's commitment to family strongly

reinforces his pursuit of 419 (as he needs money to support them and a cover story to appease them).

In sum, then, family ties drive both Boniface and Kingsley in *I Do Not Come to You*; in contrast with what Smith has argued, Kingsley is *not* operating outside traditional networks. To the contrary, the Kingsley's commitment to his role as the family's *opara* largely motivates his decision to pursue 419 schemes, and at the same time, his profits from 419 enable him to support his family and strengthen that network. In this way, criminality proves inextricable from Kingsley's intertwined familial and national affiliations.

419 IN THE WORLD

In addition to the more localized networks it explores, *I Do Not Come to You* also engages with 419's context within a larger system of global inequality and corruption. Evoking this international dynamic, Boniface questions his apprentice Kingsley: "'You, you went to school. Did they not teach you about slave trade? […] Who were the people behind it? And all the things they stole from Africa, have they paid us back?'" (185). Here, the 419 kingpin is responding with rhetorical questions to Kingsley's expression of guilt over a particular victim. Boniface lumps all individual victims in with a larger community, responsible for atrocities against Africans and many others around the world. While the individual woman whom Kingsley frets over is not immediately responsible for slavery or theft from Africa, her community—North Americans—certainly are, and do continue to benefit from their nation's imperialism. In this way, Boniface forces a generalization rather than permitting Kingsley's specific question. Similarly, when he

says "us" ("have they paid us back"), he does not mean himself or Kingsley specifically—as neither of them have been forced into slavery or directly robbed by others—but rather, his "us" refers to Africans more generally. Moreover, "all the things they stole" also utilizes nonspecific terms; an informed reader will know that Boniface is referencing the theft of resources via colonial exploitation. He does so primarily to get Kingsley's mind off the particular victim he is worrying about and convince Kingsley to continue his involvement in 419. As a result, though, this picture is one of overarching historical and geopolitical dynamics, and primarily about Euro-Americans' historical wrongdoing. Moreover, Boniface implies that successful 419 schemes will help achieve some larger historical justice. Euro-Americans ("they") have not yet repaid Africans ("us") for imperialist pillaging of resources and human lives, so in Boniface's paradigm, 419 is facilitating that long-due repayment.

Boniface's rationale here satirizes an oft-cited claim among 419ers that their scam profits serve as fair recompense for Euro-American imperialism.[42] As one online commenter noted, for instance, "I don't realy call it cheating … Some body has to pay what we call retribution From what Africa went through during the Slave trade era … The west took all our resourses, Manpower, and our cultural and traditional wares … Some body will pay some how what your lineage owed [sic]" (qtd. in Rosenbaum). Shortly after Boniface makes his comparable claim, he critiques Kingsley in a humorous way that underscores that the scene should be read as satirical: "'Your attitude is not money-friendly at all. If you continue talking like this, soon, whenever money sees you coming into a room, it will just jump out through the window'" (185). Boniface's

[42] In one famous case in the 1990s, for example, one of a series of self-styled "black Robin Hoods," Fred Ajudua, held that the greater frauds at play were the histories of slavery and colonialism (Glickman 478).

amusing turn of phrase returns the conversation to his real focus—money—instead of the historical justice he claims to be seeking. In this way, the text emphasizes that Boniface is not particularly committed to these larger ethical matters. Rather, he is trying out a standard 419 justification on his nephew, trying to persuade his protégé to stay in what has recently become the family business. Although *I Do Not Come to You* is not actually trying to convince the reader of Boniface's rationale, it is nonetheless serving as a reminder that such justifications are indeed prevalent in the world of 419, as the idea of righting historical wrongs is indeed part of the ideology that propels the scams.

Another play on global dynamics has to do with the idea that people in the global north are foolish, while those in the global south are more clever—a reversal of dominant narratives about the global north's economic prosperity deriving from its citizens' superior intellectual merit. In another tutorial-like session with Kingsley, Boniface identifies the countries of potential victims—places with high "level of mugu," where the people are not "as smart as we are": "'There are mugus in America, Britain, Germany, Russia, Argentina, France, Brazil, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Canada, Japan, Belgium, New Zealand, Italy, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway,'" and "'Even Israel'" (365). Boniface diligently includes countries from every inhabited continent except for Africa: eleven in Europe, two in North America, two in Asia, two in Oceania, and two in South America. Many of these countries have historically been major imperialist powers.[43] In 2009, at the time of the novel's publication, all of the countries on the list

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[43] Some of these countries stole directly from Africa (like France and Belgium), while others did not (like New Zealand and Norway). The extent of imperial activity differs greatly among these countries—the British empire is far more notorious than Brazilian regional imperialism—and the historical periods of their imperialism also varies tremendously, from early Dutch ventures beginning in the sixteenth century to Israel's twentieth- and twenty-first-century endeavors. In some cases, like that of Switzerland, the country's government was never officially a colonial power, but many of its citizens were involved in imperial enterprises like slavery (Hollenstein). Moreover, some of these countries competed with one another in

except New Zealand and Israel boasted one of the thirty-one largest economies in the world, and nine were in the top ten ("2000 and 2009 GDP Estimates"). Boniface's depiction of a geopolitical community of "mugus," waiting to be exploited by 419ers in the way that the one-time imperialists exploited Africans and many others, pits clever Nigerians and others from the global south against ignorant people in the global north. Again, while the texts invites us to be amused by Boniface's picture, it also wants us to take seriously the notion that 419 enables at least an imaginary of some means of addressing global imbalances. In the way that crimes of imperialism created the wealth of the global north, the novel suggests, so might cybercrime do something similar on a smaller scale for Nigerians.

The novel also plays up this idea through the scam targets' names. In addition to Winterbottom, discussed earlier, other targets include Edgar Hooverson, a reference to former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover; Condoleezza, a reference to former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; and Mirabelle Winfrey, a reference to television show host, businessperson, and billionaire Oprah Winfrey. By giving its most foolhardy, unsympathetic characters these names, *I Do Not Come to You* reimagines some of the historically most powerful Americans as dupes of Nigerian advance fee fraudsters operating out of Lagos cybercafés, reiterating a depiction of national criminality as empowering for Nigerians despite uneven global dynamics.

A particularly humorous example that illustrates how 419 letters benefit from non-Africans' ignorance—in the way that real-life 419ers also take advantage of others'

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their colonial efforts; in the sixteenth century, Denmark took Norway's colonial holdings, and in the 1980s, Britain and Argentina fought over possession of the Falkland Islands (*las Islas Malvinas*). Despite the complexity and apparently thoroughness of Boniface's list, however, some countries are conspicuously missing: Portugal's absence is particularly striking, given its role as an early imperial power, the first site of the Atlantic slave trade, and colonizer of Africa, South America, and Asia.

lack of knowledge—occurs somewhat early in the novel, when Kingsley first visits Boniface. Kingsley comes across a 419 letter in his uncle's fax machine. The message, signed by a Professor Ignatius Soyinka, details the plight of Air Vice Marshal Ojukwu, stranded in outer space since 1989. Apparently, when his Soviet co-astronauts returned to earth, poor AVM Ojukwu—as "a black man from a Third World country"—had to sacrifice his spot on the flight to cargo, "which the Soviet Union authorities insisted was too valuable to be left behind" (122-123). This letter, designed both to convince and to mock its targets, contains several absurdities. First, of course, is that the name "Professor Soyinka" should be widely recognizable, as globally renowned Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka was the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature and remains a major voice on the world stage. The name "Ojukwu" would also be a red flag to anyone with any familiarity with Nigerian history, since Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu led secessionist Biafra in the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970), which captured the world's attention with horrific photographs of starving children. Clearly, though, international memory of the tragedy was fleeting, if Boniface can convince his audience with such a letter. Finally, the idea of someone being stranded in space for twenty years (all the while remaining "in good spirits") should be particularly hard to swallow, but apparently the detail that the Soviets chose their cargo over "a black man from a Third World country" provides sufficient rationale for Boniface's target; the idea of whites choosing material goods over the life of a Nigerian is, horrifyingly, reasonable enough to some of Boniface's audience. Boniface, a representative 419er, thus derives both amusement and financial reward from non-Africans' ignorance of Nigeria.

In these ways, the novel casts criminality as a means of empowering Nigerians within an imbalanced global economic and political order. Boniface and his associates take advantage of the global north's ignorance, using it to claim money and greater dignity for themselves, in contrast with Paulinus's dignity being lost to lofty ideals. When Boniface describes the extent of Euro-Americans' ignorance to Kingsley, the latter realizes, "It was my turn to laugh" (228). This line reflects Boniface's, Kingsley's, and even Nwaubani's strategies in telling their various stories. While Boniface and Kingsley are laughing at their victims' foolishness, Nwaubani is engaging in some reversals of her own with names like Winterbottom and Condoleezza, and offering international readers an unprecedented, humorously framed take on a serious matter in contemporary Nigeria.

NWAUBANI'S YAHOOZE GENERATION

By giving the rising 419 kingpin Kingsley a "turn to laugh," *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* distinguishes Nwaubani's take on the advance fee fraud phenomenon. Treating the fraudulent email schemes as humorous lets the novel frame them as empowering for regular Nigerians. Unlike siphoning oil or the other everyday forms of resistance that comprise Zilayefa's and Boma's limited options, 419 becomes extremely lucrative for Kingsley. With the exception of his unfortunate colleague Azuka, who disappears after traveling to Iran to pursue one of his targets, *I Do Not Come to You* focuses on all of the ostensible benefits and few of the consequences of 419 scams (365). This emphasis also separates the novel from most other writing on 419, which tends to explore the impact on victims, from Igwe's and Smith's concern for its limitations on other Nigerians' opportunities, to Beukes's reference to the exploitation of others'

suffering throughout Africa, to countless articles that detail the financial and personal losses of victims around the world. Moreover, the forgeries continue to multiply both within Nigeria and elsewhere throughout the world, continuing to implicate and potentially endanger communities around the globe. Worth keeping in mind, then, is that Nwaubani's novel's empowerment of Kingsley through 419 risks obscuring the consequences for others in Nigeria and beyond—the schemes' impact on global injustices is not as straightforward as Boniface's strident assertions might suggest. His particular strain of narrow nationalism concerns itself with his family and with the image of Nigeria as a whole, but somewhat paradoxically, it leaves some groups of Nigerians pitted against one another. Moreover, embracing the status quo seems possible only with a certain type of privilege: Kingsley has access to essential connections and strategies within the 419 industry only due to his relationship to Boniface.

Among the most significant contributions of *I Do Not Come to You*, though, is the way in which it traces corruption within the Nigerian national fabric, ensuring that Kingsley pursues 419 even after Boniface's gruesome murder. Indeed, state corruption appears in Nwaubani's novel, recast, in everyday Nigerians' criminality in an "infinite regress" of representations and fictions (Comaroff and Comaroff 15). More than a bridge for the gaps in government infrastructure, 419 becomes part of all aspects of Nigerian life—and the Andrews, the text suggest, will have to learn to "adapt" (289). Yet, the novel does not go so far as to suggest that criminality is quite necessary for survival; though Paulinus's ethical commitments contribute to his death, we still see other characters—including the conspicuously named Merit—who survive without resort to criminal pursuits (383 As Oluwole Coker notes in his analysis of the novel, the role of the

opara is specifically grounded in Igbo practices (46), reminding us that these varied affiliations are never quite separable from one another.).

In any case, *I Do Not Come to You* ultimately argues that, with a median age of just 18.2 years old, Nigeria must begin to address the challenges faced by its youngest generations ("Median Age"). The novel makes clear that Kingsley encounters limited options and faces a problematic impasse: the unquestioning commitment of his childhood role model, Paulinus, to his civil service job and the nation-state eventually leads to his death from preventable illness, but the political aspirations of his adulthood role model, Boniface, leads to his murder. Navigating the demands of his role as *opara* is a challenging but non-negotiable endeavor for Kingsley. That he sees 419 as his best bet, even after Boniface's death, suggests both a profound commitment to supporting his family and tremendous frustration with the limited options available to educated members of his generation. While *I Do Not Come to You* deploys humor throughout, it is nonetheless quite serious in its concern for the predicament of young Nigerians.

Chapter 3: "Checkin' In": Diasporic Networks and Return Migration in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* and

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

> "I can't believe you're going back to Nigeria."
> "I'm going home."
> "But you've been here so long."
> "I'm not getting anywhere, Tess."
> "But you never said."
> "Because you wouldn't understand."
>
> —*A Bit of Difference*

> "Everyone she had told she was moving back seemed surprised, expecting an explanation, and when she said she was doing it because she wanted to, puzzled lines would appear on their foreheads."
>
> —*Americanah*

Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2012) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) both culminate with their Nigerian-born protagonists' decisions to leave the countries where they have lived for many years to return "home." Unlike the Andrews of Nigeria's 1980s propaganda campaign or Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, the main characters of these novels choose to return to Nigeria permanently, despite the fact that they have achieved ostensible success overseas: Atta's Deola works as a London-based auditor for an international charity foundation, and Adichie's Ifemelu is a popular blogger posting from the northeastern United States. Knowing that Deola and Ifemelu can afford to stay abroad, the characters' friends and families are shocked by their voluntary returns. Underlying their astonishment is the assumption that life in the United Kingdom or the United States must be inherently preferable, and a return to

Nigeria could only result from failure overseas—a successful life cannot, according to this narrative, conclude in Nigeria.

As the epigraph indicates, when *A Bit of Difference*'s thirty-nine-year-old Deola Bello informs her best friend from British boarding school, Tessa Muir, about her impending move, the latter cannot wrap her mind around her friend's decision. Born to an Italian mother and a Scottish father, reared in the United Kingdom, and engaged to an Australian, Tessa considers herself beyond—and above—national or racial affiliation (45, 40, 42, 43). The excerpt in the epigraph illustrates the disparity between Tessa's and Deola's perspectives on Deola's return to Nigeria, as the six lines of dialogue offer two contrasting interpretations of each of three aspects of Deola's experiences. First, the exchange frames the decision in geographic terms: where Tessa sees her friend as "going back," Deola sees herself as "going home." Tessa's phrasing casts Deola's return as an unnecessary and undesirable shift *backward* in Deola's narrative, whereas Deola's word "home" makes the move seem like the logical conclusion to her story. Then, taking up another line of argument, Tessa argues that remaining "here" (in the UK) for a long period of time is an encouraging consistency, but Deola reads the same fact as a problematic stasis, preventing her from "getting anywhere." That is, Tessa sees life in the UK as the ideal conclusion to anyone's story, but Deola does not see it as a site for her own conclusion. As I discuss later, Deola's frustrated professional path plays a major role in contributing to her feeling of inertia. Finally, the friends reveal their disparate interpretations of Deola's decision not to give Tessa advance warning of her decision. Where Tessa, as a longtime friend, feels she is entitled to know about Deola's move, Deola keeps the secret because she knows her friend will be unable to relate to the

decision. Despite their longtime friendship, Deola feels that she and Tessa cannot truly relate—that her white, cosmopolitan friend cannot grasp her desire for retrieving a sense of nationally specific belonging. Seemingly proving Deola right, throughout the dialogue, rather than trying to ask questions to understand Deola's perspective, Tessa combats her friend's words with almost childlike "buts," attempting to change her mind. Instead of trying to understand an ending to Deola's story beyond the one she had imagined, Tessa tries to make Deola fit into the narrative with which she is familiar. In this way, *A Bit of Difference* confirms Deola's belief that pursuing a genuine exchange of ideas with even the most well-meaning British friend is ultimately futile.

Similarly, in *Americanah*, when Ifemelu informs her friends and family of her decision to move back to Nigeria, they are all—except for one high school friend—"surprised." In context, the novel's reader knows that "Everyone she had told" at least includes Blaine, Ifemelu's longtime African American boyfriend; her Aunty Uju, who lives in Massachusetts; and her New Jersey-based hairdressers, who are from Mali and Senegal (13, 7, 14, 11). Those from Africa and the US alike are baffled by Ifemelu's choice, suggesting that audiences on both continents view the US as inherently preferable. Knowing Ifemelu well, as both Uju and Blaine do, also does not diminish their shock. Like Tessa, Ifemelu's friends and family "expect" specific reasons to justify her return, as if she owes them a list. Ifemelu's stated desire to live in Nigeria does not fit with their assumptions about what an educated young woman like herself *should* want, and so, like Tessa, they remain speechless, only wrinkling their foreheads, rather than pursuing a substantive conversation about Ifemelu's decision.

The basis for Tessa's, Blaine's, and others' confusion lies partly in the scarcity of narratives of return migration, in fiction and in sociological studies alike. Indeed, in defying the societal expectations that accompany their professional successes, Deola and Ifemelu offer alternatives to dominant narratives of educated Nigerians—and other Africans—abandoning their countries amidst the "brain drain," never to return or contribute to the places where they grew up. In reality, however, as anthropologist Ellen Oxfeld and human rights expert Lynellyn D. Long have recently shown, "Contrary to the widespread perception that people want to settle in their new homes, especially in wealthy Western countries, many refugees and migrants want to return eventually, and they lead their lives in the new home always hoping and/or planning for that eventuality" (2). Nonetheless, the phenomenon of return migration has received notably little scholarly attention. Experts have lamented, "Unfortunately, return migration has been largely disregarded in the migration literature" and, as recently as 2012—the year of *A Bit of Difference*'s publication—"Return migration is probably the most understudied aspect of international migration" (Oucho 58; Docquier and Rapoport 707). In an effort to advance the conversation in this arena, I follow up on Oxfeld and Long's assertion that "Diaspora literature is an excellent starting point for analyzing different experiences of return" by offering an analysis of *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* (5). The novels invite such readings by foregrounding their atypical moves in depicting return migration, through dialogues like those excerpted for the epigraph as well as structurally, by raising the question of return early in the novel, though the protagonists do not return permanently until near the end.

As the chapter will detail, the ways in which *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* portray return migration offer a distinct dimension to the oft-cited transnational trend in third generation Nigerian literature[44]—partly because Deola and Ifemelu return to Lagos permanently, but also very much because of the highly localized networks that they favor over broad, diasporic possibilities. As discussed in the dissertation's introduction, most scholarship has framed the transnational shift in one of two ways: either as a move away from the nationalist emphasis of previous generations, or as a complication of previous understandings of nationalism. Like *Yellow-Yellow*, *Oil on Water*, and *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* embrace forms of nationalism that are clearly distinct from earlier Nigerian writing, but they are not wholly disinterested in nationalism. I show in the chapter how, echoing their predecessors in Anglophone African novels from Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) to Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Deola and Ifemelu return at least partly in the hope of contributing to Nigeria, though operating from a more local level.

In addition to participating in this (small) lineage of African return migration narratives, these novels also set themselves up against "Afropolitan" figures. Where self-identified Afropolitan Taiye Selasi characterizes her fellow Afropolitans as "Africans of the world" for whom "home" is "many things," both Deola and Ifemelu repeatedly identify Nigeria, and only Nigeria, as "home" (Selasi "Bye-Bye Babar"). Where the Afropolitan characters of Selasi's novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013) remain "stateless" and in "limbo" (Bhutto), Atta's and Adichie's protagonists have Lagos as the clear endpoint of

[44] The story of Nigerians and other Africans moving overseas has become ubiquitous, to the extent that recently Siyanda Mohutsiwa, a young writer of Motswana and Swazi descent who describes herself as "pan-Africanist by birth," has declared that she is "over" African fiction set in "America. Or France. Or Britain" (Mohutsiwa "I'm Done with African Immigrant Literature"; Mohutsiwa "Is Africa's Future Online?").

their journeys. Significantly, although Selasi has specifically named Adichie as a fellow Afropolitan, Adichie has rejected the label for herself, instead identifying herself as "happily African" (Barber), much like the semi-autobiographical Ifemelu.

Even beyond the work that their most recent novels do, however, Atta's and Adichie's biographies are decidedly transnational. Although the protagonists of their diaspora novels choose to make Nigeria their one and only home, Atta and Adichie each maintain homes in both Nigeria and the US. Born into an educated and politically connected family in 1964, Sefi Atta grew up the third of five children in Lagos's affluent Ikoyi neighborhood (Owomoyela 81; "Sefi Atta (Nigeria)"; Atta "In Conversation"). Her paternal grandfather had been a traditional ruler among the Ebira,[45] a minority ethnic group whose population is concentrated in western and central Nigeria; her father was head of the Nigerian civil service until his death from cancer in 1972; and her mother, of Yoruba descent, worked as a secretary for the United Nations (Owomoyela 81; "Ebira (Igbira)"). After attending preparatory school in Lagos, Atta continued her education in the UK, with boarding school and later, undergraduate studies at Birmingham University (Owomoyela 81). After graduating, Atta worked as an accountant for about fifteen years, first in the UK and then in the US, where she moved in 1994 with her husband and gave birth to their daughter (Owomoyela 81). Three years later, her family moved from New Jersey to Meridian, Mississippi, where Atta completed an online degree in creative writing and began to write full time (Owomoyela 81). The author's official website states that she "divides her time between Nigeria, England and the United States," but other sources make clear that the majority of her time is spent in Meridian, Mississippi, where

[45] The spellings "Ebira," "Igbira," and "Igbirra" are used interchangeably. I use "Ebira" here because it is used most frequently in the scholarship I cite.

her husband works as a doctor and where she has taught at Mississippi State University and Meridian Community College ("About the Author"; "Dr. Olugboyega Ransome-Kuti"; Owomoyela 81).

Prior to *A Bit of Difference*, Atta published two novels, *Everything Good Will Come* (2004) and *Swallow* (2010); a short story collection, *News from Home: Stories* (2010) (published in Nigeria as *Lawless and Other Stories*[46]); and several plays for radio and stage ("About the Author"; "Plays"). Most of her work is set in Nigeria, although global contexts clearly shape her characters' experiences. *Swallow*, for instance, focuses on two young Nigerian women's struggle to decide whether to work as drug mules. The international drug trade thus serves as the backdrop to a story that takes place within Nigerian borders. The stories of *News from Home* are more overtly global in setting, taking place in various locations in West Africa, London, and the United States, and thereby anticipating the transnational scope of *A Bit of Difference*. Atta's writing has earned her numerous accolades; in addition to being shortlisted for the Caine Prize in 2006, her honors include the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa (2006) and the NOMA Award for Publishing in Africa (2009) ("Awards"; Nkem-Eneanya). Atta's work has been translated into several languages, but she continues to envision Nigerians as her "primary audience" (Atta Interview by Elena Rodríguez Murphy).

As Atta has noted, she borrowed from her own biography in shaping *A Bit of Difference* protagonist Deola Bello's experiences. Like her creator, Deola grows up in the

[46] Each of the collection titles' highlights an eponymous story in the collection. Notably, the collection title published in the US and the UK—*News from Home*—comes from a story set in New Jersey, whereas the collection title published in Nigeria—*Lawless*—comes from a story set in Lagos. Despite the book's transnational scope, then, its publishers clearly foregrounded stories with settings more familiar to each audience. Moreover, *News from Home* sounds neutral in comparison to *Lawless*, a title that evokes criminality—perhaps a framing that publishers do not want to promote among Atta's non-African readership.

wealthy Lagos suburb Ikoyi, attends the prep school Queen's College in Lagos, moves to the UK in the 1980s for boarding school and university, and is trained as an accountant ("About the Author"; Atta *A Bit* 54, 31, 67, 88). In a 2013 interview, Atta explained her reasons for these similarities: "I put her in places I'd been on purpose, in Lagos, Abuja, Atlanta and London, to get a strong sense of place. We don't have the same biography though, and I would not make the choices she makes or react as she does" (Atta "In Conversation"). While Deola's and Atta's stories do diverge in certain ways—their family structures, for example, are somewhat different—the numerous parallels in their trajectories nonetheless function to assert Atta's own "Nigerianness" (in contrast to Afropolitanism) by leaving open the possibility that she too will move back someday, just as Deola does after many years overseas.

As a resident of London, where Atta lived until 1994, Deola is constantly negotiating her position as a legal British citizen, a "Nigerian expatriate in London" (in her own words), and an auditor for an international charity organization (5). Set in the mid-2000s, most of the text focuses on Deola's interactions with her co-workers, in both the UK and the US; her Nigerian-born friends Subu and Bandele, both longtime London residents who would never consider a permanent return to Nigeria; Tess, her boarding school best friend; her family members, who live in Lagos; and later, her love interest Wale, a widower and hotel manager she meets while visiting Nigeria. Most of the action takes place while Deola is thirty-nine, but the narrative includes several flashbacks to Deola's childhood and young adult years. Over the course of the novel, Deola's desire to make a permanent move back to Lagos grows. She cannot explain her reasons to her friends and colleagues in London—or, as she puts it, attributing the communication

failure to *them*, they "wouldn't understand"—but at heart, she seeks to be surrounded by people with whom she has a "shared history" and to remove herself from the "racialism rubbish" she constantly encounters in the UK (205, 44, 195). Her return to Nigeria, then, is largely about a reclamation of dignity. At the same time, her unexpected pregnancy also strengthens her relationship with Wale, offering further incentive for her return.

Like Deola's creator Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was one of many children—the fifth of six—and benefited from growing up in an educated and well-connected family (Tunca "Biography"). Where Atta's parents were politically connected, Adichie's parents enjoyed intellectual and literary connections. Adichie was born to Igbo parents in 1977 in Enugu (Tunca "Biography"). When she was very young, her family moved to Nsukka, where the family lived in the former home of literary giant Chinua Achebe. Both Adichie parents worked at the University of Nsukka, her mother as the institution's first female registrar and her father as a statistics professor and administrator (Tunca "Biography").

In Nsukka, Adichie attended secondary school and began her university studies, but partway through, she moved to Philadelphia, and later Connecticut, to finish her bachelor's (Tunca "Biography"). After earning a master's degree from a prestigious creative writing program at Johns Hopkins, Adichie began to publish her fiction, including short stories that have appeared in publications including African short story collections, *The Guardian*, and *The New Yorker* (Tunca "Biography"; Tunca "Bibliography"). Interestingly, Adichie's publication record bears substantial resemblance to Atta's: prior to her diaspora novel (*Americanah*), like the senior author, Adichie wrote two novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), as

well as a collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). Continuing to parallel Atta's literary career, Adichie's first two novels were primarily set in Nigeria, while the short stories take place in Africa and the US. Of the twelve stories, five occur in the US, six in Nigeria, and one in South Africa. *The Thing Around Your Neck* thereby marked a shift from a focus primarily on Nigeria to a transnational scope, much like Atta's *News from Home*. Adichie continues to divide her time between Lagos and Baltimore, although she has stated that she would live full-time in Lagos if her husband, a doctor, did not live and work in Baltimore (Brockes; "Chimamanda Adichie Warns").

Adichie is now known internationally as a literary figure, pop feminist leader, and even a cultural icon. Her writing has earned international and US awards including the Commonwealth Writers' Prizes for Best Book (Africa) and Best Book (Overall), both for *Purple Hibiscus*; the Orange Broadband Prize for *Half of a Yellow Sun*; a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant; and most recently, the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Americanah* (Tunca "Awards & Nominations"). Nigerian writer and filmmaker Biyi Bandele made *Half of a Yellow Sun* into a movie starring Academy Award winner Chiwetel Ejiofor and British Film Academy Award winner Thandie Newton, and rumors circulate that a film adaptation of *Americanah* will feature similarly prestigious actors, Academy Award winner Lupita Nyong'o and Golden Globe nominee David Oyelowo ("Half of a Yellow Sun (2013)"; "Chiwetel Ejiofor: Awards"; "Thandie Newton: Awards"; Stampler). Though the reception of *Half of a Yellow Sun* was mixed, and the filmic *Americanah* has yet to move forward, the celebrity of those involved reflects the global hype surrounding the productions. Reflecting her popularity as a public intellectual, Adichie has even been nominated for a Grammy with Beyoncé, whose song

"***Flawless" (2013) samples part of Adichie's 2013 TED Talk "We Should All Be Feminists" (Ayomide). During March 2015, she was the subject of *Vogue*'s "Today I'm Wearing," a recurring feature in which a particular celebrity shares and discusses their outfits each day for a month ("Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Today I'm Wearing"). Especially since *Americanah*'s publication, Adichie has clearly been prominent in the public eye in several arenas. In contrast with Atta's target audience of fellow Nigerians, Adichie's primary audience, at least for now, seems to be American and other non-African Anglophone readers.

Like *A Bit of Difference*, *Americanah* is the most autobiographical of its author's major works to date. In *Americanah*, protagonist Ifemelu moves from Nsukka to the US to complete her university education, which had been slowed by ongoing faculty strikes under the Abacha regime. Echoing the trajectory of her creator, Ifemelu first moves to Philadelphia to pursue her bachelor's; while Adichie moved to Connecticut to join an older sister, Ifemelu often visits Massachusetts to see her Aunty Uju, who is like an older sister figure, and later moves to Connecticut to live with her boyfriend Blaine; both author and character live in Baltimore for a time; and both hold fellowships at Princeton (Adichie *Americanah* 100; Schoettler; Adichie *Americanah* 143, 311; Tunca "Biography"; Adichie *Americanah* 208, 16). In addition, several of the novel's anecdotes derive from Adichie's experiences upon first moving to the US. One of Ifemelu's blog posts, for instance, discusses the specificity of American racist tropes using the example of watermelon. Ifemelu writes, "In undergrad a white classmate asks if I like watermelon, I say yes, and another classmate says, Oh my God that is so racist, and I'm confused" (*Americanah* 222). Revealing the inspiration for this example, Adichie once told an NPR

interviewer about her confusion upon overhearing a white student make a comment about watermelon to an African American student ("'Americanah' Author"). Her reveal of this personal experience just one month after *Americanah*'s release draws a clear connection between her public persona and her protagonist, perhaps further laying claim to the author's emphatically Nigerian, rather than Afropolitan, identity—much like the implications of the biographical similarities between Atta and Deola.

Americanah's main timeline traces its protagonist's decision to move to Nigeria around the year 2009, but the text also includes many flashbacks to Ifemelu's childhood, university years, and earlier years in the US, as well as to her longtime boyfriend Obinze's attempt to immigrate to the UK. Fragments of Ifemelu's blogs also appear interspersed throughout. Due to this structure, the reader only gradually learns that Ifemelu's life in the US is bleak at first—desperate for money, she suffers a traumatic sexual encounter that leads her to distance herself from family and friends, most notably Obinze—but eventually, her romantic and professional lives improve, culminating in a relationship with a handsome Yale professor and a successful blog, *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. Where Nwaubani's Kingsley uses email to obfuscate and to spread stereotypes, Ifemelu attempts through her digital publications to improve cross-cultural communications and correct misunderstandings. Despite Ifemelu's apparent successes, she decides to return to Nigeria, where she starts a new blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, and reconnects with Obinze—who has, in the meantime, moved to and been deported from the UK, gotten a job in Lagos, gotten married, and had a daughter. By the end of the novel, Ifemelu has lived the full Bildungsroman, returning from a stint

overseas, moving into her dream neighborhood in Lagos, maintaining a thriving blog, and reentering a relationship with the newly single Obinze.

By focusing on Deola's and Ifemelu's decreasing interest in diasporic affiliations, their professional trajectories, and their decisions to move back to Lagos, the chapter explores how these seemingly transnationalist texts—both set on three continents, with leaps back and forth in time and space—are in fact about increasingly narrow nationalisms. I trace how both characters' personal and professional networks overseas shrink over the course of each novel, culminating in their decisions to focus on highly localized commitments. Throughout this process, they express nostalgia for the days of pan-African solidarity, which they place squarely in the past, and critique Afropolitanism as an unrealistic glorification of the present era of globalization. My argument therefore stands in contrast to the idea that third generation Nigerian literature turns *away* from nationalism, as these particular texts instead call attention to a reconfigured nationalism. In some ways, this move indicates a deep pessimism about Africans' agency in the US and the UK, and a resignation in the face of apparently insurmountable global inequalities. At the same time, however, a pragmatism underlies these shifts; given the apparent impossibility of effecting top-down change at either federal Nigerian or globalized levels, Deola and Ifemelu elect to work from the bottom up. In this way, I argue, *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* suggest that our era of intensifying interconnectedness may, in contrast to prevalent assumptions about the digital age as a force for democratization, induce a sense of resignation to inequality in a transnational context and simultaneously strengthen highly localized nationalisms. This approach does

not deny other third Nigerian texts' embrace of broad global networks, but rather aims to parse yet another dimension of the transnational shift.

My argument invites various questions about literary studies, geography, technology, and political systems. First, thinking about the literary market, what does it mean that these authors who are part US-based are writing these semi-autobiographical characters who choose to return permanently to Nigeria full-time? How can critics reconcile the reality that books like *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* circulate more and more widely, with their protagonists' focus on the highly local? And what role does the authors'—and their protagonists'—privilege play in telling these stories? Does geographical distance interfere with national participation and commitment? That is, given their distrust in the possibilities of international charity and the digital sharing of ideas, do *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* make the case that Nigerians must be physically present in order to make meaningful contributions? In what ways might an emphasis on highly localized nationalisms preclude or overlook possibilities for broader alliances, especially those enabled by the digital age? And conversely, to what extent are the types of small-scale contributions embraced by Deola and Ifemelu even effective? In what ways do these texts' pessimism about opportunities for genuine global exchange and equality reiterate or rewrite earlier narratives of pessimism about the future of the African continent? Finally, given that Nigeria is already fragmentary in terms of its ethnic, religious, political, and geographical tensions, might the emphasis on the local risk that an inward turn will foster internal divisions, thereby strengthening threats from exploitative multinational corporations, the reign of Boko Haram, and other challenges to

the stability of the state? Before exploring these inquiries, however, the chapter first offers some historical context for Deola's and Ifemelu's journeys abroad.

AFRICAN DIASPORA AND "BRAIN DRAIN" ANXIETIES

Today, more writers who identify as Nigerian live overseas than ever before, a factor that Habila has highlighted for its role in shaping the transnational shift (Habila "Introduction" viii). This relatively new statistic is only the most recent development in the complex history of the modern African diaspora (Tanner 85). The slave trade between Africa, Europe, and some Atlantic islands was well underway by the middle of the fifteenth century, but it was not until 1519 that the first Black Africans arrived as slaves in the Americas—specifically, in Puerto Rico, which remains a *de facto* colony of the US (Rawley with Behrendt 2; Capps, McCabe, and Fix 2; Malavet 3). From then until the last slave ship crossed the Atlantic in 1867, approximately ten million Africans were forcibly removed from Africa; of this horrifying number, only 360,000 survived the journey to become slaves in the present-day United States (Eltis 371; Capps, McCabe, and Fix 2). Aside from occasional voluntary emigration to pursue employment, little emigration from Africa to Europe and the United States occurred between 1867 and the 1960s, approximately the era of formal European colonialism in Africa (Capps, McCabe, and Fix 2). Nonetheless, the diaspora has never been static and has never moved only in one direction: from resettlement schemes in Sierra Leone and Liberia, to educational exchanges, to the spread of cultural ideas in fields like religion and music, diasporic circulation has remained in motion throughout the centuries (Zeleza "Diaspora Dialogues" 47, 50-52).

Then, for several reasons, the 1960s saw an rise in African emigration overseas. First, amidst the process of formal decolonization, the continent's leaders prioritized formal education, the imagined pinnacle of which entailed universities overseas like Oxford and Cambridge. As *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*'s Paulinus exemplifies, Nigeria—independent as of October 1960—was no exception to this pattern (Arthur 49). At the same time, political turmoil throughout the continent provided further incentive for young Africans to pursue their studies elsewhere (Tanner 87). Most notably, the instability and violence preceding and throughout the Nigeria-Biafra War of the late 1960s led to the departure of many educated Nigerians (Hagher 68). Finally, in the case of the US, changes in immigration policies in 1965 enabled more Africans to enter the country: policymakers eliminated national origin quotas that disadvantaged non-Europeans and created more immigration opportunities benefiting families (Capps, McCabe, and Fix 2). In part as a result of greater emigration from Africa, the term "diaspora"—previously utilized primarily in the post-World War II European context—began to be widely used to apply to African peoples (Rapoport 90; Zeleza "Diaspora Dialogues" 31). Especially because many experts anticipated that African-born students would return to their countries of origin after completing their degrees, economists in the 1960s largely agreed that the "brain drain" would benefit all parties (Docquier and Rapoport 682). Residents of all countries involved, these economists argued, would share ideas and skills.

The oil boom of the 1970s made Nigeria an appealing destination for migrants from elsewhere in Africa, but starting in 1981, the decrease in oil prices caused a dramatic turnaround in this trend (de Haas 162). Educated Africans increasingly

remained in "recipient" countries, and living standards throughout the continent declined (Sako 25). As a result, with regard to Nigeria and Africa as a whole, analyses of the brain drain took a pessimistic turn (Rieff 10). The second wave of studies on the brain drain determined that "source countries" necessarily lose financial, educational, and medical resources when their most educated go overseas. It was a vicious cycle, the prevalent narrative held, amplifying the effects of a "zero-sum game, with the rich countries getting richer and the poor countries getting poorer" (Rapoport 90). This era of heightened concern over the brain drain promoted campaigns like Nigeria's short film series about Andrew, later satirized by Nwaubani's nationalistically fickle Andrew Onyeije and unironically embraced by *Americanah*'s Obinze, Ifemelu's US-infatuated boyfriend.

Despite Nigeria's efforts to prevent its educated youth from "checking out," unprecedented growth in voluntary emigration from Africa began in the 1990s and continues into the present.[47] Reasons for emigration today have remained largely consistent. "Push" factors (those encouraging emigration *from* Africa) include low wages, poor working conditions, concerns about physical safety, and poor infrastructure and social services, and "pull" factors (those encouraging immigration *to* specific countries) include better professional opportunities and working conditions (Sako 26; Kaba 117; Sako 27; Kaba 118; Levinson). The US Immigration Act of 1990 further facilitated migration, permitting more immigration from "underrepresented" countries, including Nigeria; 19% of sub-Saharan African immigrants between 2000 and 2013 entered the country through the program (M. Anderson 7, 8).

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[47] Reliable statics are difficult to come by, as not all countries keep precise track, and many migrants travel outside legal channels (Oxfeld and Long 2). Nigeria, for one, does not record or estimate emigration rates (de Haas 165). Nonetheless, I include here the most reliable figures available.

Today, more Nigerians—writers and otherwise—live overseas than ever before. More Nigerian emigrants move to the US than to any other country; approximately 213,000 people born in Nigeria are now residents of the US ("The Nigerian Diaspora" 2).[48] This development is quite recent, as 49% of all Nigerian immigrants currently residing in the US arrived between 2000 and 2015 ("The Nigerian Diaspora" 2). Reliable numbers for Nigerian migrants to the UK are particularly hard to come by, but studies show that overall, African migration to the UK is undoubtedly on the rise. In 2001, 809,000 people born in Africa were residing in England and Wales; just ten years later, in 2011, that number had risen by 62% to reach 1.3 million (Chothia). Though the US and the UK are the most popular destinations for Nigerian emigrants, other countries with growing Nigerian-born populations include Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Italy, and Ireland (de Haas 162-163).

Moreover, African—and especially Nigerian—immigrants to the US and the UK are among the most educated immigrants (de Haas 163). Out of the West African countries that send the most migrants to the US, according to sociologist Baffour Takyi, Nigeria "sends the highest percentage of people with bachelor's or higher degrees"; an impressive 47.9 percent hold such qualifications (247). Further, highly educated women from Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa are increasingly moving overseas to pursue their own professional opportunities, rather than migrating to join their husbands, as used to be the predominant trend (Adepoju 2). (Indeed, both Deola and Ifemelu move *back* to Nigeria to commit to their primary love interests, in a reversal of the historical trend.) As

[48] A somewhat sensational and oft-cited *New York Times* article in 2005 declared: "Since 1990, according to immigration figures, more [Africans] have arrived voluntarily than the total who disembarked in chains before the United States outlawed international slave trafficking in 1807" (Roberts). As the author acknowledges later in the article, this statistic refers only to the slaves who survived the journey.

a result, at least in the US and the UK, "highly skilled women are overrepresented among international migrants" (Docquier and Rapoport 688). With regard to emigrants of all genders, widely considered the most serious problem is the flight of medical doctors, although that of trained teachers has also become a subject of serious concern (Sako 26; Tanner 50).

While Nigerian and other African immigrants' level of education is likely of net benefit to recipient countries, debates over the impact on source countries rage on. Many experts express deep concern about the damage to source countries, including the shrinking of the middle class and the loss of capital (Tanner 96; de Haas 171). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has determined that Africa is the continent most afflicted by brain drain (Levinson). Evoking a growing panic about these statistics, in 2005 political scientist Arno Tanner asserted, "the Nigerian diaspora in the US has enough doctors, nurses, lawyers, professors, scientists, administrators, and business manages to run a first class 21st century African country" (91). This sweeping claim seems difficult to back up, but it still emblematizes the grave concern with which many stakeholders view African emigration.

Yet, other methodological approaches to the study of African migration suggest that other aspects of emigration can be of substantial benefit to source countries. Economist Hillel Rapoport, for instance, has argued that what seems like a "drain" often results in a "social gain" (90). The pervasiveness of the desire to emigrate, he argues, can motivate significant numbers of would-be emigrants to pursue higher education to boost their qualifications overseas. Not all of these students will ultimately emigrate, endowing the country with more "brains," and a higher value will generally be placed on domestic

education (90). In addition, those who do emigrate often help their countries of origin "through the creation of business and trade networks" (94). In the case of Nigeria, following its return to democracy in 1999, the federal government has redoubled its show of enthusiasm for international migration, framing it as beneficial to national development and engaging diaspora organizations (de Haas 174). Further, some experts assert that, with such a huge population—coming in at over 180 million as of July 2015—Nigeria hardly has to worry about a relatively small fraction of its people living elsewhere ("Nigeria"; de Haas 177).

Though return migration might seem to be a solution to some of the concerns expressed by UNCTAD, it is not always a quick fix to the problems created by mass emigration. Skilled labor and financial investment are doubtless boons, but return migration can, for example, disrupt social and professional hierarchies of existing communities (Oxfeld and Long 3). Some have also expressed concern about growing conspicuous consumption accompanying return migration, which, besides being socially undesirable, also means that returners' investments are unlikely to be going toward macroeconomic ends (Oxfeld and Long 3). Finally, and tragically, losses sustained by emigration may be "permanent," especially in smaller countries; setbacks in access to good healthcare and education—exacerbated by the flight of qualified doctors and teachers—can be difficult or even impossible to bounce back from (Tanner 46).

"TOO HUGE AND FRACTURED"

With these anxieties about brain drain as a backdrop, both *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* use their protagonists' (failed) quests for community overseas to convey a

nostalgia for the heyday of pan-Africanism—a movement whose achievements they locate only in the past. In so doing, they call for some sort of group identity to take its place. Where Kingsley rejects his father's nationalism as impractical, these novels recall those attitudes more fondly, perhaps because their characters' relative socioeconomic privilege enables them to do so.

Prior to the novel's main timeline, though, Deola feels at least loosely connected to African diasporic communities. She recalls:

> As a student, she had an approximate sense of belonging while walking through Brixton Market or dancing to calypso music at the Notting Hill Carnival, or hanging around Speakers' Corner on a Sunday. She went to Hyde Park for Nelson Mandela's seventieth birthday and for the Pavarotti concert when she worked in the city. Afterward she walked to the tube station with other Londoners singing 'Free Nelson Mandela' the first time around and '*O Sole Mio*' the next. Now, she is not even part of the Nigerian community in London. It is too huge and fractured. (164)

Qualifying Deola's "sense of belonging" with the word "approximate" lets the reader know right away that Deola never felt like she was fully part of any community in London, either at as a student as the London School of Economics (LSE) or as a young professional. The narration of these memories, however, is as close as the novel gets to linking Deola to any diasporic community.

The specific sites the passage mentions clearly associate Deola not with a Nigeria-specific immigrant network, but rather with deeply historically rooted communities of immigrants from throughout the African diaspora. Located in a neighborhood

predominantly populated by immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, Brixton Market is famous for its African and Caribbean produce shops ("Brixton Market").[49] The annual Notting Hill Carnival is also led by Afro-Caribbean immigrants (Burr 84). Its festivities are largely inspired by Trinidad's Carnival, in which participants buck city rules and recall the days when the festival meant that slaves were, just briefly, free to roam the streets (Burr 88, 89). The history of calypso music, overlapping with that of Carnival, also evokes layers of African diasporic history. It was inspired by West African musical tradition, was developed by slaves in the Caribbean (particularly Trinidad), has been utilized as a mode of contesting political power from the era of slavery to the present, and appears in *A Bit of Difference* in London (Guilbault 41, 44, 45). Bringing together these various diasporic elements calls to mind a powerful transnational celebration of resistance. Yet, Deola's connection to these histories is vague—she "walks through" and "dances" in these celebrations, but the depth of her "approximate" connection is questionable, as is how the less economically privileged residents of Brixton, for example, might feel about a highly educated administrator "belonging" to their community.

The passage's mention of Speakers' Corner also calls to mind histories of pan-African and other resistance. At the edge of London's Hyde Park, Speakers' Corner has been a site for activists to exercise free speech since the nineteenth century. Famous Speakers' Corner orators have included, in the 1930s, Trinidadian writer C.L.R. James,

[49] Since the time of *A Bit of Difference*'s publication four years ago, Brixton has become a site for controversy about gentrification (Hancox). With its longtime Caribbean and African immigrant residents at greater and greater risk for losing their housing, the neighborhood that was so recently the epitome of immigrant community for Atta may be unrecognizable in a few years—suggesting that such networks, often considered essential for immigrants without Deola's educational and financial advantages, may be at risk.

Kenyan activist (and later, the first president of Kenya) Jomo Kenyatta, and Jamaican political leader Marcus Garvey; and in the 1960s, the Trinidadian American civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael and Guyanese activist and writer Walter Rodney (Worcester 32; Hill 394; Walters 180; Mwari). Like "walking through Brixton Market," the phrase "hanging around Speakers' Corner" does not exactly suggest active participation, but Deola may well be listening in on contemporary public debates; this connection, though, is even weaker than her connections to Brixton and Carnival. Despite Speakers' Corner's storied history of pan-African solidarity, in the last twenty years the numbers of speakers and listeners has shrunk and the space has increasingly become a site for anti-immigrant and theologically conservative Christian and Muslim speakers (Coomes; Jordon; R.B.). As a result of this reality, even Deola's effort to "hang around" the area suggests nostalgia for a bygone era in which Speakers' Corner debates were more likely to be about the forging of revolutionary alliances than about "promising a fast track to heaven" (R.B). Through the examples set Brixton Market, the Notting Hill Carnival, and Hyde Park, *A Bit of Difference* raises the possibility of Deola's connection to others within the global African diaspora in London but remains ambiguous about the substance of that connection.

The structure of the sentences describing Deola's trips to "Hyde Park for Nelson Mandela's seventieth birthday and for the Pavarotti concert," in the years immediately following her university graduation, blurs the distinction between the "African" and the "European" events. The events occurred three years apart (in 1988 and 1991, respectively), and the information is not conveyed in chronological order. The first of the two sentences mentions the events, and the second describes the activities she

remembers: “singing ‘Free Nelson Mandela’ the first time around and ‘*O Sole Mio*’ the next.” By blurring the lines between these memories, the text perhaps indicates that Deola’s pan-African and European affiliations are inextricably linked, in a move that resonates with Krishnan’s argument that contemporary African nationalisms have become a “site of plural belonging” (75). In June 1988, Mandela’s seventieth birthday event in Hyde Park was aimed at getting the famed activist out of prison and spurring the end of apartheid (Hawksley), so Deola’s participation is legible as an act of political solidarity. The performance by iconic Italian opera singer Luciano Pavarotti to which the passage refers took place in 1991 and was famously attended by Prince Charles and Princess Diana, symbols of the monarchy that once controlled so much of Africa and their world (and whose marriage was then crumbling as infamously as had the empire for which they stood) (de Jongh). The most recent “sense of belonging” Deola has experienced, then, was approximately fifteen years prior to the main storyline and took on a quintessentially European character. The shift from Deola’s visits to Brixton Market during her university years to the occasional mass event in her early working years conveys a broadening but perhaps increasingly detached attachment to these communities, as these events seem to decrease in intimacy and frequency over the years.

Further supporting that line of reasoning, the text clearly emphasizes these events as having taken place a significant amount of time into her past, as the main part of the novel’s action takes place during in the mid-2000s, and the narrator distances them by concluding that narrative about her past sense of “belonging” and transitioning with the word “Now.” She no longer feels even an “approximate sense of belonging” to any community, “not *even* the Nigerian community in London.” The word “even” here is

striking, since it hints that "the Nigerian community" would be Deola's last resort, but the narrator offers no sign that Deola had ever belonged to such a network. Moreover, the fact that Deola no longer attends these events, from the Notting Hill Carnival to shows in Hyde Park, seems like a voluntary drifting away—surely she could still attend such events if she so desired, since she still lives in London. Instead, she focuses on how the Nigerian community is "too huge and fractured," without clarifying whether it has always seemed that way to her, or whether it is a more recent development. Either way, the phrase foreshadows her eventual engagement with narrow nationalisms, fostered by her perception of the practical improbability of broad solidarities. The implication, too, is that if it were either less populous or more unified, then Deola thinks she might be more likely to get involved.

The text reveals, however that socioeconomic differences also play a role in Deola's relationship to diasporic communities in London, even if she is not conscious of this factor. The narrator explains, "There is a Nigerian crowd in London that Deola is not part of. People who came in the nineties when the naira-to-pound exchange rate plunged. They came to work, not to study or to get professional training. They settled in Lewisham, Peckham, Balham and any other '-ham' they could transform into a mini-Lagos" (23-24). While this group does not comprise the only Nigerian community in London—it is "*a* Nigerian crowd," not "*the*"—it nonetheless seems to dominate, at least in Deola's perception. In contrast with Deola, who arrived in the UK as a high school student, the members of this group moved to London more recently, as adults, and brought with them a strong sense of community, "transform[ing]" each of these London neighborhoods "into a mini-Lagos." The fact that the excerpt mentions "a mini-Lagos,"

instead of "a mini-Nigeria," means that these immigrants are likely from Nigeria's urban center, rather than from all over the country—so they, too, are a specific subgroup. Though Deola is also from Lagos, she feels she would have little in common with them, given their socioeconomic differences. In addition to the fact that this "crowd" came to London due to financial hardship in Nigeria, the "-hams" that the narrator lists also call attention to a class difference: while all three have recently undergone gentrification, they were historically working class (Misra; Ball; Merry). While immigration is diversifying almost all neighborhoods in London, Peckham has become particularly diverse—yet, the Nigerian "crowd," at least in Deola's vision, remains insular (Jeffries). The way that this passage distances Deola from the "mini-Lagoses" of the "-hams" emphasizes that, when she elsewhere tells Tessa she wants to marry "a Nigerian" because they will have a "shared history," she means a particular type of Nigerian—someone who likely shares her educational and economic background and who fits within a particular social stratum in Lagos. Given that immigrant associations overseas play a key role in supporting new immigrants in their new home *and* in maintaining connections to their country of origin, Deola's gradual rejection of these diasporic networks indicates a distance between her and not only other Nigerians and members of the African diaspora in London, but also perhaps a distance between her and Nigerians "at home" (Arthur 19). In this way, *A Bit of Difference* implies that not only the size and fracturing of diasporic communities complicates potential for pan-African solidarity—class, too, is an obstacle to pan-African solidarity. Decades ago, inclusive pan-Africanist movements were coopted by relatively privileged nationalist leaders who glossed over class differences in their emphasis on the shared struggle against colonizers (Rodney). Perhaps, then, Deola's apparent lack of

awareness that she does not see Nigerians of all socioeconomic backgrounds as sharing a history, makes the case that ongoing constructions of Nigerian nationalism continue to suffer from class-related blind spots.

At first, to a greater extent than Deola, Ifemelu connects with local diasporic networks while a student. At Wellson, her fictional university in Philadelphia, Ifemelu attends African Students Association (ASA) meetings, directed by her Kenyan friend Wambui. At the first meeting, the narrator conveys the scene by identifying the different African nationalities represented: "Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans, one Congolese, and one Guinean sit around eating, talking, fueling spirits, and their different accents formed meshes of solacing sounds" that instill in Ifemelu a "sense of renewal" (140). At home in Lagos, Ifemelu was never surrounded by such a diverse group of people. In fact, most of her friends were not only Nigerian, but also specifically Igbo. Although hearing so many "different accents" at once must be new to her, the phrase "solacing sounds" demonstrates that Ifemelu derives a sense of comfort from the pan-African solidarity that the ASA seems to provide. The thorough listing of all the (sub-Saharan) nationalities represented at the meeting offers a lot of the specificity unprecedented in Ifemelu's US experiences (as most Americans she encounters cannot distinguish among African countries, let alone different accents), yet their range of accents combine to a soothing effect. While acknowledging the specificity of each country, the passage suggests a continental pan-African solidarity that seems easy for Ifemelu to access, at least in a diasporic context. The idea of Ifemelu experiencing "a sense of renewal" not only signifies that her mood has improved, but it also implies that there is something new about her identity as an immigrant as a result of this meeting—as

if she newly identifies with a pan-African dynamic that builds on their shared experiences to form community without erasing national differences.

Soon, though, Ifemelu's—and *Americanah*'s—attitude toward the ASA grows less favorable. While the novel's reviewers have rightfully noted the novel's examination of the peculiarities of race in the US,[50] so far no one has drawn attention to the novel's substantial critique of Africans' representation of African Americans and themselves within the US. At an ASA meeting, for example, Wambui pontificates, deploying some irony:

> 'Try and make friends with our African-American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. Always attend African Students Association meetings, but if you must, you can also try the Black Student Union. Please note that in general, African Americans go to the Black Student Union and Africans go to the African Students Association. Sometimes it overlaps but not a lot. The Africans who go to BSU are those with no confidence who are quick to tell you "I am *originally* from Kenya" even though Kenya just pops out the minute they open their mouths. The African Americans who come to our meetings are the ones who write poems about Mother Africa and think every African is a Nubian queen.' (141)

At first, when Wambui begins speaking, she seems to encourage a dynamic, two-way relationship between the ASA and the BSA, but her increasing irony makes clear that she is actually quite critical of exchange between the African and the African American

[50] See especially Subashini Navaratnam's review "Race-in-America is a Central Character in 'Americanah'" (2013) and Bret McCabe's review "In 'Americanah,' Adichie Explores How We Talk (And Don't Talk) About Race" (2013).

student groups. Her opening with "Try"—and "true pan-Africanism"—proves to be disingenuous. Indeed, she immediately says that friendships with fellow ASA members will be more important; without them, she cautions, African students can lose "perspective." She is not specific about what she means by this word—is she prioritizing maintaining a specifically African "perspective"? Given the national specificity that the organization seems to recognize, what would a continental perspective look like? Wambui's words continue to be cagey: her command to "always" go to ASA, but only go to BSA "if you must," sounds like it would be delivered in a humorous tone but with its message in earnest. Her reference to "true pan-Africanism" reads as ironic—while she celebrates experiences shared by African immigrants to the US, as evidenced by her role as president of the ASA, Wambui quickly belittles attempts at exchange between the predominantly African and the predominantly African American student groups. Apparently without exception, Africans who go to BSA are, in her analysis, ashamed of being insecure immigrants trying to mask who they "really" are—as if they cannot ever become "really" American—and African Americans who go to ASA are ignorant, more interested in mythologizing the continent than learning about its realities. In both cases, in Wambui's scheme, anyone who visits the "wrong" meeting exhibits a poor grasp of their "true" identities. Wambui believes that pan-Africanism in the broadest sense is humorously obsolete, as she sees the gap between African and African Americans is too wide ever to bridge, yet she still upholds the idea of solidarity among those who grew up on the African continent.

Most of the members of ASA laugh uproariously in response, indicating a widespread acceptance of the rigid distinction between the two groups. Ifemelu, however,

walks away with concern about the line that Wambui has drawn in the sand, even though she has done so with humor, and even though the novel otherwise portrays Wambui favorably. As an educated person who grew up in Nigeria, Ifemelu herself fits in, but she remains alarmed about what these divisions will mean for Dike, her Aunty Uju's son who was born in Lagos but can only remember his life in Massachusetts, brought up by his Nigerian mother. Her concern turns out to have been very much warranted, as many years later Dike attempts suicide due to depression that has, according to the novel, been exacerbated by anxieties about his racial and national affiliations. Wambui's assertion of the separation between the ASA and the BSA thus raises concern both about the apparent impossibility of "true pan-Africanism" (solidarity between Africans and African Americans) *and* the dangers of this type of thinking to individuals who do not fit neatly into either category, like Dike. By raising concern about this seemingly innocent and humorously executed distinction between two student groups, *Americanah* also portrays a less glamorous side of "Afropolitanism"—the danger of potentially being excluded from all groups, as happens to Dike, who grew up knowing "what he wasn't" but never "what he was" (380). Though *Americanah* sets itself up in opposition to narratives of Afropolitanism, both through Ifemelu's repeated assertion of Nigeria as her only "home" and later through her criticism of the "Nigerpolitan Club" in Lagos, Dike's predicament suggests that Afropolitanism might yet be a very useful concept for those whose experiences do not readily fall into Wambui's tidy categories. In any event, where Deola only gradually drifts away from loose diasporic affiliations, Ifemelu quits attending ASA meetings, at least partly because she is so troubled by the problematic divisions created and fostered by organizations ostensibly aimed at building solidarity. The revelation that

Wambui's mention of "true pan-Africanism" was merely ironic suggests once again nostalgia for a past era of constructive pan-African solidarity, now transformed into a means of boundary-drawing and exclusion.

"THE TARZAN COMPLEX"

As in their professional lives, both Deola and Ifemelu also attempt to engage transnational networks through their professions, the main focal points of each novel. An auditor for an international aid organization, Deola travels from London to the US to standardize the auditing system and to places like India and Nigeria to evaluate the legitimacy and efficiency of potential aid recipients. Her employer is a fictional organization named LINK, an acronym whose meaning the novel never reveals, though it vaguely hints at an equal partnership between the organization and its aid recipients, and also evokes the opaqueness in purpose and strategy of many such NGOs. Indeed, while Deola's job initially might suggest a commitment to improving the lives of those "back home" and around the world—especially as her main assignment in the text is to visit two NGOs in Nigeria—*A Bit of Difference* reveals both the profound inequalities inherent to LINK *and* Deola's disinterest in working at the macro level to help others. Tokenism, enforced dependency, and racism are endemic to LINK's interpersonal office dynamics and overarching policies alike. Like Nigeria's position within the system of international aid, Deola is meant to stay in a subservient role within the office, despite her qualifications. Significantly, while numerous critiques of international aid have been launched from stakeholders on all sides of the issue, pervasive racism is rarely explicitly listed among them. Oft-cited flaws of charitable giving systems include excessive

attention to “symptoms,” rather than underlying causes; benefit to the recipient state, rather than those most in need; favoritism in selecting recipients; and inefficient use of funds (“Ethics Guide”). As I show here, *A Bit of Difference* makes the case that the issue at the root of all of these problems is systemic racism—which, in turn, suggests that meaningful improvement to international aid cannot take place without addressing race.

At first, though, Deola defends LINK against some of the standard critiques of international charity organizations. Three months into the job, she reflects on the advantages and the disadvantages of “Africa Beat,” a similarly nondescript title that describes a project partnered with LINK with the vague goal of combating HIV/AIDS throughout Africa: “Africa does suffer, unduly, unnecessarily, and if all she has to cope with is the occasional embarrassment about how Africans are portrayed, then she is fortunate” (3, 27). The mention of “Africa” and “Africans” emphasizes the general nature of charities’ marketing schemes. Rather than taking the opportunity to inform audiences about specific histories and problems, the narrator implies, Africa Beat—and programs like it—continue to depict the continent in broad terms. Deola is also aware that such terms are often damaging stereotypes, but she dismisses them as “the occasional embarrassment.” The use of passive voice in the phrase “are portrayed” deemphasizes LINK’s (and therefore, LINK employee Deola’s) role in disseminating these representations of Africans. Assuming that “she” refers to Deola, then the line reflects a rather self-absorbed sentiment on her part, unconcerned with the larger impact of problematic depictions of millions of Africans. That is, Deola would be considering the benefits of Africa Beat in terms of the entire continent, but the drawbacks only in terms of herself. This moment of self absorption drives home that for Deola, LINK is just

another job, not necessarily an opportunity to help those at "home." The ambiguity of "fortunate" also underscores this point—in what way is Deola fortunate? Is it just that she only has to deal with the indignity of these representations in order to keep her job? Does her fortunate lie in the fact that she is not dependent on charitable aid? Finally, worth noting is that the sentence never outright says that LINK *helps* "Africa," only that "Africa suffers" and Deola withstands "occasional embarrassments." This evasion of the purpose of LINK—ostensibly to minimize suffering—serves as a reminder that such "occasional embarrassments" do not necessarily translate into tangible benefits for those being represented.

Despite her claim that "embarrassing" portrayals of Africans are only "occasional" among these organizations, Deola eventually discovers that these problematic representations are inextricable from the existing system of international aid. Deola is throughout the novel frustrated by LINK's choice of spokesperson for Africa Beat, a Nigerian hip hop artist named Dára who comes to embody LINK's inaccurate and often racist marketing schemes (5). At first, the choice of someone actually from the continent as a representative might seem preferable to, for example, Bono,[51] but the problems with Dára as a representative of Africa are myriad: he claims to have grown up on the streets, but his parents were university lecturers, and he is cast as an authority on a global health crisis, but "In Nigeria, no one would have paid him any mind" (26, 147). The consequences are substantial, as LINK has endowed this man with the ability to speak on behalf of an entire continent to potential donors. Eventually, LINK discards

[51] In a quintessential remark, Bono once stated, "I represent a lot of [African] people who have no voice at all… They haven't asked me to represent them. It's clearly cheeky but I hope they're glad I do" (qtd. in Richey and Ponte 721). This awfully bold assertion, of course, fails to consider *why* all these Africans seem to "have no voice"—they might be hard to hear with Bono talking over them.

Dára as quickly as they signed him on, due to his poorly informed assertion that polygamy helps combat HIV/AIDS, which happens to be unsavory to UK and US audiences (147). The organization immediately moves on to find another token representative who will appeal more readily to its target audience (131). His prompt replacement emphasizes the superficiality of LINK's commitment both to Dára and to working with Nigerian organizations—for LINK, Dára is a mouthpiece, not a true spokesperson, and as the rest of the section shows, Nigeria is a country to be "helped" by LINK, not a true stakeholder.

Deola knows from the beginning that Dára is being used as a token, but she does not realize until later in her LINK tenure that she, too, is just as much of a token to the organization, despite her competence and qualifications. She is ideal for the job because of her professional and educational background and because of her familiarity with Nigeria, where LINK is looking to expand its aid programs. Yet, when she tries to make a recommendation—a much more informed one than what Dára might offer—she faces condescension and silence. Deola visits Nigeria to audit two small NGOs, and as happens in any country, one turns to be legitimate, and other seems to divert funds to the CEO and her family. She warns her LINK colleague Kate that the suspicious organization—Widows in Need (WIN)—will not be reliable, but Kate ignores her and proceeds to negotiate with WIN's CEO (158). Despite being in title the director of internal audit, having grown up in Nigeria, *and* being the only LINK employee to have visited WIN's headquarters, Deola is not taken as an authority. She realizes, finally, that she was only hired at LINK "because she is Nigerian—a Nigerian to match Dára" (159). Deola realizes her qualifications and experience are meaningless to LINK, whose staff has hired her

only in a blatant instance of tokenism. This realization becomes a major part of her decision to leave London.

In the same way that LINK shoos Dára out as soon as he makes a statement unfavorable to their organization, Kate sends Deola a cruel email as soon as she learns of Deola's report questioning LINK's vetting strategies. Kate calls Deola's honest assessment "a gross betrayal," as if Deola should have served her loyally and without questioning the best interests of the organization and the people it claims to serve (207). LINK's treatments of Dára and Deola thus suggest that even twenty-first-century philanthropic organizations can still proceed as their colonial predecessors did, claiming to be helping Africa without meaningfully engaging any African people. Racism continues to preclude Deola from making a substantive contribution even to an organization aimed at impacting her own country of origin. In the way that Kate wants Deola only to serve her interests, so LINK seems only to want Africa to serve its institutional interests.

As Deola's friend Subu, another Nigerian living in London, sees LINK's attitude: "'It's the Tarzan Complex. You have to make them feel useful to get ahead. If you ask for respect, they don't want to know. Forget about getting through to these people'" (153). Subu's term "Tarzan Complex" refers to the conclusion of American writer Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), when Tarzan forfeits his rightful property inheritance *and* allows his love interest Jane to marry the same man who has taken that inheritance. In this reading, the African-born Deola, like the African-born (though white) Tarzan, would be expected to sacrifice her financial and emotional well-being to the financial and emotional well-being of her white colleagues. Subu's assertion also

includes another catch-22, "You have to make them feel useful to get ahead." In practice, however, Deola can never "get ahead" if she spends all of her time being subservient and telling others what they want to hear. This impossibility, and the sense of resignation that Subu expresses, are especially disturbing coming from a character who repeatedly insists that she will never return to Nigeria. While Deola's "not getting anywhere" in the UK spurs her return to Nigeria, Subu will live the rest of her life in London, apparently acquiescing to "making them feel useful" indefinitely. Although Deola frequently argues with Subu, including earlier in this same conversation, the text here gives Subu the last word—for once, Deola (and therefore the novel as a whole) apparently cannot disagree with her. In this way, the novel ties LINK's employees' personal disrespect for Deola, to the organization's lack of respect for all Africans, to contemporary global dynamics that deprivilege African voices in general.

Finally, *A Bit of Difference* ties LINK's racism to its dependence on Africans' dependency. Kate ignores Deola's idea to look into microfinance schemes in Africa—an idea that came from a Nigerian NGO worker, the very type of person with which LINK is ostensibly partnering—and when Deola presses, Kate dismisses it immediately. "[W]ithin Africa we focus on charity," she says, as if outside of Africa LINK might consider pursuing microcredit or other programs more clearly aimed at enabling self-sufficiency (147). Deola realizes, "LINK is not in the business of making their beneficiaries look self-sufficient. They must evoke sympathy to raise money" (147). That is, in order to survive, LINK must ignore the voices of Africans, even those it superficially involves—like Dára and Deola—*and* maintain systems of dependency. As Kate's assertion about microcredit makes clear, Africa stands at the bottom of the hierarchy of dependency that

perpetuates these forms of charity. While these arguments about international aid are neither new nor obscure, they call attention to LINK's pervasive racism, both in terms of disregarding Deola's opinions *and* in terms of not wanting those it "helps" to become self-sufficient. If, as Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation Alex de Waal has argued, international aid can be made more effective by "giving control of the aid to its recipients," making the process more transparent, and getting more people involved on the ground, then *A Bit of Difference* adds that systemic racism must be addressed first, or else these goals will be impossible (de Waal 638). Indeed, Deola and Subu seem resigned to the catch-22 that no one within the system wants to combat racism, while racism bars from entry those most able to combat it. "All she has to cope with," then, turns out to be much more than an "occasional embarrassment." Even for a wealthy, educated Nigerian, *A Bit of Difference* indicates, global system inequalities prove insurmountable.

In contrast with the racist depictions that propagate and are propagated by LINK's activity, Ifemelu's blog *Raceteenth* initially seems to offer a platform for representing her experiences to a global audience, but as I demonstrate, Ifemelu's authorial control over the US-based blog is always limited. As with Deola's position as LINK's "Tarzan," Ifemelu also finds herself subservient in her overseas endeavors, even when she is ostensibly in a leadership role. Literary scholar Serena Guarracino has argued that the blog first conveys Ifemelu's voice "raw and true," in Wambui's words, and ceases to do so when she begins to earn income from the blog, but I argue here that the novel *never* assigns Ifemelu full control over her intellectual process or product while she writes about race and from within US borders (Guarracino 16). The blog's title, the novel's figurative language describing the blog, and the role of Ifemelu's boyfriend Blaine

together portray global racial and geopolitical hierarchies as precluding Ifemelu's voice from being fully authoritative even on her own experiences. My argument therefore counters the prevalent belief that the internet, especially due to anonymity and relative affordability (for those who have access), can enable otherwise disenfranchised voices to set agendas, lead conversations, or otherwise challenge Eurocentrism (M.O. Okome 296; Nzegwu 379). Ifemelu's lack of agency with regard to *Raceteenth*, then, foregrounds limitations of the internet; if it is, indeed, "an essential space for the intellectual construction of the diaspora," then at least in *Americanah*, it is a space that continues to deprivilege African voices in global contexts (M.O. Okome 294). Where Kingsley feels that his digital endeavors are in some small way correcting global imbalances of power and wealth, Ifemelu experiences the opposite—her blog only reinforces her less privileged position in global intellectual conversations. In this sense, my reading of *Americanah* supports political scientist Jodi Dean's idea that "blogipelago" is a more apt term than "blogosphere," due to inequalities that pervade even the blog, seemingly one of the most democratic forms of digital communication (Dean 38). Dean explains that while blogging can undoubtedly offer new platforms for exchanging ideas, the form enables new types of hierarchies among and within blogs, creating distances between disparate conversations and imbalances in visibility and authority—more akin a series of different islands than a limitless "blogo*sphere*."

Ifemelu is first inspired to start *Raceteenth* thanks to a series of conversations with Wambui. Midway through *Americanah*, Ifemelu starts relaxing her hair to look more "professional" at work. (Getting the treatment in the first place constitutes a concession to American expectations. Earlier, upon first moving to the US, Ifemelu is appalled that this

sort of treatment is expected of Black women in the US (205).) Soon, Ifemelu's hair and scalp suffer serious damage from the treatments, so she cuts her hair very short (210). Distraught about her new appearance, Ifemelu follows Wambui's advice and visits an online community dedicated to natural hair issues, HappilyKinkyNappy.com (211). While this particular site is fictional, many real sites much like it exist. Exchanging ideas on these forums completely changes Ifemelu's attitude toward her hair. The narrator explains, "Posting on the website was like giving testimony in church; the echoing roar of approval revived her" (215). The word "revived" here echoes the idea of "renewal," the word describing Ifemelu's initial feelings at the ASA meetings. Sharing her ideas with a community of people who have shared her experiences—with whom she has, as Deola says, a "shared history," though here based on racial experiences—energizes her and instills in her a sense of belonging. Participation in a digital community, comprised of Black women who have faced similar threats to their physical health in efforts to meet beauty standards enforced by white-dominated culture, provides meaningful support to Ifemelu that she cannot replicate elsewhere and gives her a platform to convey her experiences. Moreover, the fact that this first online community that inspires Ifemelu is specifically about hair signals connections to Black women's histories of discrimination and resistance in the US as well as in Africa.[52]

[52] For a detailed historiography of Black women's hair from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first, see Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps's *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (2002).
Adichie has more explicitly called attention to Black women's hair as a site for resistance elsewhere in her fiction. Published in *The Guardian* in 2007, her heavily allegorical story "Hair" narrates the story of a Nigerian girl who quits relaxing her hair due to her family's financial crisis. Once natural, the girl's hair speaks to her, laying out a plan to undo the scam that bankrupted the family—a scam that deprives the family of its rightful properties and is executed by an alleged family friend named Lugardson, a clear reference to Lord Frederick Lugard, the first Governor-General of colonial Nigeria (Nwankwo and Ifejika 21-22). The hair's plan succeeds, conveying the message that the embrace of natural hair can offer possibilities for combating oppression and discrimination.

Inspired by her engagement with HappilyKinkyNappy.com and by Wambui's praise ("You should start a blog"), Ifemelu opens her blog, first called *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America* (298). The first word of the title, Raceteenth, refers to Juneteenth, the holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the US on June 19, 1865—a major celebration specific to African American history and culture, which Ifemelu is attempting to understand and describe through her blog. As many readers of Adichie's work would know, the holiday's name also provides the title for African American author Ralph Ellison's posthumous novel, *Juneteenth* (1999), comprised of decades' worth of notes compiled by Ellison's friend and literary executor, John F. Callahan. Though the novel was highly anticipated, many readers were disappointed; as a *New York Times* reviewer summarized, "The resulting book provides the reader with intimations of the grand vision animating Ellison's 40-year project, but it also feels disappointingly provisional and incomplete. Given all the cutting and tidying up Callahan has done, the book's opaqueness and attenuation come as little surprise: after all, he has effectively changed the book's entire structure and modus operandi" (Kakutani E1). Though Adichie is surely not comparing Ifemelu's blogging to the work of literary great Ralph Ellison, the idea that someone else—even an apparent ally like Callahan—could, in an editorial role, change a work so dramatically, perhaps evokes Ifemelu's boyfriend Blaine's well-intentioned but problematic role in reshaping *Raceteenth*, which I examine below.

Though "Raceteenth" remains in the blog's title throughout its existence, Ifemelu changes the title from the original, *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*, to *Raceteenth or Various*

Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black (298, 316). Several changes appear, and only one receives an explanation: she adds the parenthetical "Those Formerly Known as Negroes" because of a conversation with her father in Nigeria, who has no idea that the word "Negro" is no longer a preferred term to describe African Americans. This extra information thus demonstrates that Ifemelu is tailoring her blog to a non-American audience, who are likely less familiar with appropriate contemporary identity terms—an issue that reiterates the specificity of American Black history.

Taken together, the other three revisions to the blog's title work together to rhetorically minimize Ifemelu's role in the intellectual labor behind *Raceteenth*. On the one hand, the change from "Curious" to "Various" might seem to indicate a greater objectivity on Ifemelu's part. "Curious" might be describing what she encounters, emphasizing the singularity of Blackness in the US, whereas "various" seems more neutral in its evaluation ("curious, adj."). On the other hand, "curious" might also describe Ifemelu, a "curious observer" of American racial dynamics—a reading that suggests that, with the elimination of "curious," Ifemelu's perspective fades from the title. Then, the revised placement of "by a Non-American Black" diminishes the prominence of her role in writing the blog by pushing the phrase that identifies her from a prominent position in the title to the end. Finally, the shift from "on the Subject of Blackness in America" to "About American Blacks" changes the focus from a concept (race) to a particular group of people (American Blacks). Ifemelu's identity again shifts toward invisibility, as she herself experiences "Blackness in America" daily for many years, but a blog "About American Blacks" must necessarily be about people other than

herself. Though Ifemelu's revisions to the title seem innocuous upon first read, they ultimately push her authorial role to the background.

Like the changes to the blog's title, the novel's figurative language describing *Raceteenth* subtly attributes greater agency to the site than they do to Ifemelu, its creator. That is, from the time Ifemelu begins the blog—*not* from the time that it begins to provide her income, as Guarracino argues—the novel consistently characterizes *Raceteenth* as a living being, operating increasingly independently of its creator. When she first creates it, the text says, "she signed on to WordPress, and her blog was born" (298). A close reading of this phrase in context reveals that it sets up, from the beginning, the depiction of *Raceteenth* taking on a life of its own, sometimes to Ifemelu's benefit, but often to her detriment. The use of the possessive "her" ("her blog" rather than "the blog") portrays the project as under her control, but already the use of the passive voice ("was born," rather than, for example, "she gave birth to" or "she created") removes Ifemelu from the active role of author. Finally, the verb choice—"born"—introduces *Raceteenth* right away as something living, and something that will grow. It may be Ifemelu's idea, and it may still be shaped by her efforts, but the idea of "birth" emphasizes that it will always be its own independent entity.

Shortly after the "birth" of *Raceteenth*, the text advances the characterization of the blog as a living being:

> The blog had unveiled itself and shed its milk teeth; by turns, it surprised her, pleased her, left her behind. Its readers increased, by the thousands from all over the world, so quickly that she resisted checking the stats, reluctant to know how

> many new people had clicked to read her that day, because it frightened her. And it exhilarated her. (305)

In this passage, Ifemelu is completely absent from all the subjects of each independent clause—in contrast with "*her* blog," earlier—and at the same time, *Raceteenth* becomes part of the subject of every independent clause. The only time that Ifemelu is the subject occurs when "she resisted" learning more about the responses to her work. Everywhere else that Ifemelu appears in the passage, she is the object of the blog's actions: "it surprised her, pleased her, left her"; "it frightened her"; "it exhilarated her." This structure implies that the blog does not only take action independently of her, but is also independently responsible for the impact on her, as if she were not the creator behind all of the blog's activity. Most of the verbs in the passage have to do with Ifemelu's emotional state, from the negative ("frightened") to the positive ("exhilarated"), except for the action of having "left her behind," which suggests that *Raceteenth* is becoming capable of excluding or abandoning its own creator. Responses to the blog, then, seem to have greater influence than Ifemelu's posts, which initiate and provoke each conversation. The word "unveiled" insinuates that something is hidden from Ifemelu at first, as if she does not quite understand the nature of her own intellectual product. The image of *Raceteenth* getting its adult teeth characterizes it as a growing animal, maturing and gradually able to operate on its own. The text's language here also conflates Ifemelu with her blog: the phrase "clicked to read her" makes the author, rather than the blog, the object. Finally, the last two uses of "it" are somewhat ambiguous—they might refer to the blog's stats or the idea of a large readership, but "it" could also arguably be the blog, instilling these seemingly unpredictable emotional reactions in her. Even in the blog's

early stages, then, she never seems to exercise full control over her work, which is growing as if of its own accord and exercising intensifying control over *her* instead.

One might imagine that Ifemelu earning an income from the blog would make her feel more empowered, but she reads the development in exactly the opposite way. When she receives offers for financial support, the text conveys her reaction: "Support. That would make the blog even more apart from her, a separate thing that could thrive or not, sometimes without her and sometimes with her" (305). Once again, *Raceteenth* occupies a more dominant syntactical position: though "the blog" is an object of the "support," the pronoun that describes Ifemelu only appears as the object of prepositional phrases that convey the blog's apparently ambivalent relationship to its creator—"sometimes with," "sometimes without." In addition, the uses of the words "apart" and "separate" for the first time explicitly delink Ifemelu from her work. These words choices are striking, since one would think that earning an income from a blog would make it more integral to a writer's life, but in contrast with the conflation of Ifemelu and *Raceteenth* earlier (the audience "clicked to read *her*"), the blog's financial viability further alienates creator from product.

As *Raceteenth*'s popularity grows, and more and more users contribute their own responses to Ifemelu's site, she feels not only increasingly distanced by the blog, but worse, also victimized by it and its readership. That is, once "grown," her blog seems as if it starts to feed off her:

> Now that she was asked to speak at roundtables and panels, on public radio and community radio, always identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog. She had become her blog. There were times, lying awake at night, when

> her growing discomforts crawled out from the crevices, and the blog's many readers became, in her mind, a judgmental angry mob waiting for her, biding their time until they could attack her, unmask her. (308)

The nature of her blog binds her to anonymity, as she must remain "careful not to let on whether she was African or Caribbean," so that her writing will seem equally applicable to all of her "Non-American Black" readers (208). Without her own public identity apart from that of "The Blogger," however, Ifemelu loses any semblance of identity even in her personal life ("she had become her blog"). Indeed, her title as "The Blogger" ties her even more tightly to her work—she could have, for example, gone instead by a title like "a Non-American Black." This passage makes her necessarily anonymous work identity simultaneously both a threat and a source of protection. The violent-sounding verbs "Attack" and "unmask" imply that removing her anonymity—which is part of what enables the monstrous, unveiled, toothy blog to consume her—is also a dangerous threat that seems almost to put her at physical risk. Expanding on the image, the word "subsumed" suggests not only that Ifemelu had no sense of self beyond the blog, but also that the blog has grown both vast and parasitic, if it can "absorb" or "incorporate" her into itself ("subsume, v."). This language portrays Ifemelu as both inseparable from and being destroyed by her blog, leaving her no escape. At the same time, however, she is afraid to lose her anonymity, as it provides her with protection from one of her greatest fears, that "the blog's many readers" will "unmask her," which appears alongside the idea of them "attack[ing] her." Some of these fears are rooted in negative reader and listener responses, but some of them seem to arise from the blog's inherent unpredictability—even if it does not go in an undesirable direction, the many participants seem to have

more control over Ifemelu's work, and by extension her personal life, than she does. In any event, her growing readership, instead of rewarding her with respect and financial resources, becomes a waking nightmare in this passage.

Exacerbating these problems is the role of Blaine, Ifemelu's African American boyfriend and a Yale professor in comparative politics. The two meet on a train ride, but they do not reconnect until a "Blogging While Brown convention" (309). Once again, attributing agency to the blog, the texts frames this event by saying: "Her blog brought Blaine back into her life" (309). The coincidence initially seems like a positive development in Ifemelu's personal life, as their romantic relationship quickly blossoms, and she moves into Blaine's home in New Haven. Blaine is impressed by *Raceteenth* and comes to serve almost as a patron for her work; yet, his growing, ostensible support role turns out to be yet another source of oppression for Ifemelu. She

> wrote her blogs from his apartment, at a desk he had placed for her near the bedroom window. At first, thrilled by his interest, graced by his intelligence, she let him read her blog posts before she put them up. She did not ask for his edits, but slowly she began to make changes, to add and remove, because of what he said. Then she began to resent it. Her posts sounded too academic, too much like him. (313)

Perhaps even genuinely perceiving himself in a supporting role, Blaine gradually seizes control over various aspects of Ifemelu's blogging. The couple is living together, so technically the apartment is "theirs," yet the passage describes it as "his," indicating his dominance over the space. Blaine's placement of her desk might initially seem like an act of support—perhaps he is helping Ifemelu focus on her intellectual work by shouldering

the responsibility of setting up her creative space—but in context, this move reads as yet another aspect of his effort to shape her intellectual and creative output. The text pokes fun at Ifemelu's admiration of Blaine: the phrases "thrilled by his interest" and "graced by his intelligence"—particularly the latter—read as ironic, meant to key the reader in to the fact that Blaine's intelligence, while real, is not the godlike force he believes it to be. Significantly, the text specifics that Ifemelu "did not ask" for his input, yet he offers it anyway, presumably knowing that she will revise her work accordingly. While some read this portrayal of Blaine as anti-intellectual, I hold that it is instead critical of American arrogance; while Blaine allows his voice to overpower Ifemelu's, his colleague Boubacar—a Senegalese professor at the same institution—is able to support Ifemelu without dominating her. Where Blaine inserts his words and opinions into individual posts, Boubacar invites Ifemelu to his lectures for ideas for the blog and encourages her to apply for a fellowship at Princeton, where she would have the opportunity to expand *Raceteenth* outside Blaine's unsolicited tutelage (341). Although Ifemelu is the one doing all the writing, she feels that she has lost control over her authorial voice, which in turn causes conflict for the couple, rendering Ifemelu's personal and professional lives unhappy. To remain in the relationship, she has to make Blaine "feel useful" as Deola would have to do for Kate at LINK, even though Ifemelu and Blaine share many similar experiences as with blackness in the US.

Ifemelu's deteriorating relationship with Blaine, as emblematized by his control over her intellectual production, is also legible as an allegory for her relationship to the US. In the novel's first chapter, narrating her thought process during their breakup, the text says that "her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always

sitting by the window and looking out" (7). The comparison emphasizes that Ifemelu observes her relationship—and her life in the US—from a distanced, observational (rather than evaluative) perspective, as if she is less fully a participant. It also depicts Ifemelu as trapped in some way, unable to escape the walls of the pleasant but nonetheless confining house. What is unclear is whether the simile places Blaine in the house with her, outside the house being watched by her, or as the house itself. If Blaine is in the house, then the implication is that his ideological perspective has confined them both in some way, and she is gazing out to see other possibilities; if he is outside, then she feels trapped and (emotionally and intellectually) distant from Blaine, isolating her; and if he is the house itself, then that most of all portrays him as controlling and confining her with his well-intentioned and specifically American efforts to shape her thinking. The fact that the simile is about looking out of a window, too, evokes Blaine's placement of Ifemelu's writing desk by the window, which happens chronologically years earlier but which we only learn about later in the novel. In drawing this connection, the simile links Ifemelu's feelings about her relationship with Blaine, her identity in the US, and her blog *Raceteenth*. Already in the first chapter, then, the novel underscores Ifemelu's feeling of being an outsider in the US. Although this moment is near the end of the story chronologically, its placement so early in the text heightens the reader's awareness of Ifemelu's outsider status, inviting the careful reader to watch out for the issue throughout Ifemelu's time in the States.

In these ways, *Raceteenth*'s gradual "subsuming" of Ifemelu is a result of its situation in an American context, where Ifemelu realizes she can never speak truly authoritatively. Rather than empowering her, the blog serves to make Ifemelu

increasingly aware of her position within the conversation on race in America, in which *Americanah* emphasizes that she will remain an outsider, no matter how many Nigerians make their homes in the US. That she feels "an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness" suggests that something inherent in her transnational personal and professional paths can be damaging; the inclusion of "borderlessness" here is striking, since it is often used in a positive and even glamorous sense, talking about Afropolitans, the possibilities of the internet, and so on. True Afropolitanism, *Americanah* contends, can be a potentially dangerous myth.

COMING HOME

Similarly resigned to racism's control over her individual career and her country's position within global humanitarian aid structures, Deola leaves London in part to evade what her brother Lanre calls "that racialism rubbish" (195). Exhausted from having her possibilities limited by her race, Deola realizes during a visit to Nigeria, "Here, she is virtually color free and she hopes to remain that way" (57). While racism made legible by LINK is clearly a factor in her decision, at the same time Deola also chooses to return because of her realization that she would rather try to help others on a more localized scale. She transitions from the breadth of "Africa Beat" to focusing on HIV/AIDS awareness among those she knows personally.

Explicitly emphasizing her commitment to a more and more narrowly defined community, Deola declares outright that working at a global level is the wrong choice for her: "She is in the wrong business anyway. She has never wanted to save anyone but the people she loves. Isn't this enough? Don't organizations like LINK do the same when

they decide who to give what and for how long?" (160). By spending so much time on personal interactions between the characters, *A Bit of Difference* makes clear that this network (that of "the people she loves") is quite small: she has exactly three friends in London—Tessa, Subu, and her writer friend Bandele—and in Lagos, outside of work obligations, she only interacts with her mother, her two siblings' families, and Wale. Her question about whether helping only those she knows personally is "enough" may or may not be rhetorical. If it is, then it is confirming that Deola's engagement with her personal network is sufficient, possibly even more effective than her work with LINK, but if the question is not rhetorical, then it is opening up space for debate. Her comparison of her narrow selection of whom to help to LINK's process of selecting aid recipients calls attention to the pitfalls of favoritism in systems of international aid, highlighting ways in which the system is biased and therefore less widely effective than it portrays itself. Even seemingly equitable, international networks, then, with standardized systems for decision-making—as evidenced by the fact that part of Deola's job is to standardize LINK's manuals for the auditing process—can be as subjective as any individual, in Deola's reading.

Further, the strategy that Deola employs to help "the people she loves" also operates as a direct criticism of international aid. That is, the specific project on which she embarks at the end of *A Bit of Difference* is to encourage her friends to get tested for HIV. She is inspired to do so because of her own fear of HIV after her one-night stand with Wale—a fact that suggests that motivation to take action against the epidemic, or any other crisis, comes first and foremost from personal experience, rather than awareness of "numbers." The fact that she feels she can make a real difference just by

telling her friends to get tested for HIV is a dig at large charitable organizations as well as governmental aid, as the vast majority of humanitarian aid sent to the continent is HIV/AIDS-related (Richey and Ponte 715). Her success in getting Bandele to agree to get tested confirms that her individual-level efforts have had some impact. In the final scene of the novel, Deola visits Subu and is uncertain as to whether her friend has been tested. Subu's mother is also present, which both prevents Deola from asking Subu directly and leads Deola to believe that Subu may have tested positive for HIV, since her mother was not planning to visit from Nigeria until "Christmastime" (219). The text does not confirm either way—whether Subu has been tested, and if so, what her results were—but the fact that the tension affects Deola so deeply—her "legs give way," she is "panicking," and her hands are "trembling"—underscores how critical the issue is, and how much impact an individual act can have (219, 220). The placement of this critical scene at the book's finale highlights its importance, too, even just the importance just of the act of getting tested, which we know Deola has already convinced Bandele to do. In addition the fact that the people to whom she reaches out are both Nigerian helps articulate what she is doing as a form of nationalism, rather than an effort to help an arbitrary personal network. Presumably because Deola assumes Tessa, her other friend in London, is unthreatened by HIV because of the latter's monogamous relationship (a flawed assumption, to be sure), Deola does not try to "save" Tessa by encouraging her to get tested. The novel could have included a non-monogamous non-Nigerian character among Deola's friends, or it could have had Deola ask Tessa to get tested even despite her assumptions about monogamy—but it does not do either, maintaining Deola's commitment specifically to *Nigerians*.

At the same time, however, *A Bit of Difference* also invites the reader to question the limitations or drawbacks of Deola's narrowing of community. While HIV/AIDS is a global epidemic that she can help combat on a small scale, by encouraging her friends to get tested regularly, her narrow focus means that she necessarily withdraws from macro problems that she does not feel she can affect. Watching Wale keep up with international news, for example, Deola observes: "On the front cover of the newspaper he is reading is a headline about soldiers who were killed in Iraq by friendly fire. Deola has not thought about the war in a while and all she wants is to see Wale's face again" (217). Here, Deola is completely uninterested in the then-ongoing, US-led Iraq War. Her only desire is for Wale to *stop* reading about it so that he will put down the newspaper and then the two of them can engage as individuals—or, perhaps she does not even desire that much interaction, since she only "wants to see Wale's face." Without condoning or condemning Deola's complaint about the newspaper, this moment raises questions as to whether Deola's disengagement from international concerns is ethical or not.

Elsewhere, however, a more disturbing image seems more overtly critical of Deola's focus on more immediate networks, as she reflects on the complexities underlying humanitarian crises throughout the continent, especially the fact that many of LINK's resources go to programs in countries with poor human rights records, including "Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Congo, Angola and Rwanda" (159). One of the most prominent critiques of international aid is that funds often wind up supporting corrupt governments, rather than those who need it most—a difficult situation to resolve, since distribution to those most in need can be difficult without government involvement. The narrator describes the conclusion of her thought process: "Whose fault is that? she thinks,

shrugging off the amputated sleeves of her summer jacket while imagining it as a one-armed child" (159). Her "shrugging" motion suggests a dismissal of responsibility, but more notable here is the deeply disturbing accompanying image of the "one-armed child." The phrase clearly references the atrocities committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) during its eleven-year war in Sierra Leone. The conflict, centered on the diamond mining industry, was notorious for its use of child soldiers and for the RUF's practice of chopping off opponents' arms (Packer). RUF soldiers notoriously used the term "sleeve" to characterize their crude amputations—"long sleeve" or "short sleeve" would describe the length of the amputation—which ties Deola's gesture even more closely to the atrocities (Vargas). The image of Deola "shrugging off" her jacket as if it were one of the war's victims, then, seems highly critical of her seemingly easy detachment from international matters. The image may also recall similarly horrific atrocities in the Belgian Congo around the turn of the last century, when colonial officials would cut off the hands of Africans who would not gather "enough" rubber for the regime, often murdering their "subjects" and keeping the hands as records or trophies (Hochschild 165). The connection of Deola's jacket to the British Congo may be a bit more tenuous, but it nonetheless calls to mind the entangled histories behind crises throughout Africa that have led to the types of complexities that Deola "shrugs off." It is partly a feeling of resignation—Deola cannot parse the complex situation by herself anyway—not unlike the resignation she feels about endemic racism at LINK. While the Iraq War may be too distant for *A Bit of Difference* to condemn Deola's detachment, events on the continent of Africa are perhaps not too far for her be obligated to take some

interest, from the novel's perspective. In this way, *A Bit of Difference* takes an ambivalent stance toward Deola's shift toward a narrower national commitment.

Deola's embrace of this narrower network is legible as a nationalism not only because the people she decides to help are Nigerians, as noted, but also because of her insistence that Nigerian national identity matters much more than ethnic identity. The novel imbues strong ethnic identifications with a negative connotation by making characters who frequently discuss ethnic differences decidedly unlikeable in all respects, from Deola's snobby in-laws to the corrupt CEO of WIN (106-107, 90). Conversely, likeable characters, like Deola and her love interest Wale, are unconcerned about ethnic differences. Well into their relationship, for instance, Deola learns that Wale's grandfather was Hausa (216). The couple already know they are both of partially Yoruba descent, but they have not asked further questions because it is not of interest to them, even though they have gotten to know one another quite well. When Wale mentions his partly Hausa heritage, Deola's only response is to joke that Wale must be a "Muslim terrorist," a reaction that mocks concern about ethnic differences, and then the scene ends, never to raise the topic again (216). By making Wale the Nigerian with the "shared history" to whom Deola commits, the novel emphasizes that, for Deola, ethnic differences do not preclude a "shared history" among Nigerians, even where socioeconomic disparities do.

As Deola resigns herself to the inequalities dramatized by LINK and instead pursues a much narrower community, so Ifemelu decides that she has done what she can with *Raceteenth* and moves to Lagos, creating a new blog to contribute to the production of ideas there. Though Ifemelu had some level of success with *Raceteenth*, as evidenced

by her readers who implore her to return to blogging "soon," she decides to make the move back to Nigeria, "because she want[s] to" (5, 13). The almost immediate success of her new blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, show the novel's approval for Ifemelu's decision in returning—and in embracing, in some ways like Deola, a narrow nationalism (16).

Her discontent in the US, however, is not the only reason for Ifemelu's return. To the contrary, her visits to "Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs" from her home in New Jersey contribute greatly to her decision (6). Witnessing her old friends' and acquaintances' digital representations of their lives in Nigeria makes Ifemelu feel envious, as if others "were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be" (6). While she is far from needing to risk "dying for the nation" as earlier Nigerian characters might have, her geopolitical location still matters a great deal in this formulation. Though Ifemelu is most likely following and picturing her friends specifically in Lagos, where she grew up, she consistently says "Nigeria" when describing her home, revealing that she at least imagines herself to be missing the nation as a whole. Further, where anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen notes how online connections can build communities across and despite geographic distance, in this fictional case Ifemelu's engagement with social media drives her to travel the physical distance to participate in person and locally in Nigeria (11). As such, the novel makes the case that not only can digital connections build digital communities based on shared experiences, like *Raceteenth*, but can also catalyze a turn shift to the geographically specific, in turn indicating limitations of digital networks—because seeing these friends

represent Nigeria on Facebook is, for Ifemelu, no substitute for being physically present in Nigeria.

Upon her return to Lagos, Ifemelu works briefly as a features editor for the fictional *Zoe Magazine* (401), but frustrated with the magazine's superficiality, she soon leaves to start a new blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* (418). The words "Small" and "Lagos" in the title highlight the blog's local focus: both its individual topics and its geographical scope are narrow. "Redemptions" brings to mind connotations of "saving, delivering, or restoring" ("redemption, n."). Both Ifemelu and Lagos seem to be undergoing "restoration" here: Ifemelu is recovering from the discontent from her years in the US, and her blog aimed at engaging, challenging, and informing her fellow Lagosians is an effort at shaping twenty-first-century Lagos, in contrast with *Raceteenth*'s emphasis on more removed "observations." *The Small Redemptions* covers a greater breadth of topics than did *Raceteenth*, but it does so at a localized level—that is, rather than discussing the experiences of a vast and geographically diverse group like *Raceteenth*'s target audience of "Non-American Blacks," *The Small Redemptions* examines a range of experiences shared by Ifemelu and those in her immediate social network. With posts by Ifemelu and some her friends, the blog covers topics from the personal to the social to the overtly political: discussions of the view from Ifemelu's bedroom window in Ikoyi, the logistics of wedding planning, and the government's demolitions of hawkers' shacks all feature on the blog (475, 421, 474). With these types of posts, Ifemelu addresses national questions at a very local level, writing based on her own in-person observations (even the shack demolition post was based on a scene

Ifemelu witnessed near her friend Ranyinudo's office) and soliciting guest posts that convey other first-hand experiences (474-475).

Also in contrast with *Raceteenth*, *The Small Redemptions* appears consistently under Ifemelu's control. Although commenters can participate just as fully as they do on *Raceteenth*, Ifemelu does not feel under siege by them. The narrator describes her process working on the new blog: "Ifemelu moderated the comments, deleting anything obscene, reveling in the liveliness of it all, in the sense of herself at the surging forefront of something vibrant" (422). Unlike with *Raceteenth*, Ifemelu is the subject of the sentence and the clear director of the blog's activity. The verbs "moderated" and "deleting" indicate her authority, and "reveling" indicates a positive and consistent emotional response that stands in contrast to the emotional roller coaster that accompanies her experience producing *Raceteenth*, which had variously "surprised her, pleased her, left her," "frightened her," and "exhilarated her" (305). What was emotionally volatile about *Raceteenth* becomes merely "lively" in *The Small Redemptions*. In addition, the idea that Ifemelu's new blog brings her to "the surging forefront of something vibrant" suggests that her new project, which embraces and advances this narrow nationalism, is "something vibrant" and on the rise. In other words, the novel implies that such narrow nationalisms, perhaps especially those bolstered by digital networks, may be a growing trend.

Further, where *Raceteenth* takes away from Ifemelu's sense of identity, *The Small Redemptions* helps Ifemelu to build her sense of self and belonging, completing the Bildungsroman where *Raceteenth* could not, despite its appearance of success. As if she were incomplete before authoring *The Small Redemptions*, the text says of Ifemelu that,

upon developing her new blog, "She had, finally, spun herself fully into being" (475). Once again, Ifemelu is the subject of the sentence, clearly in charge of these processes. The verb "spun" evokes simultaneously a very physical idea, like that of working carefully to draw out threads from a larger material (creating a narrative about herself and a smaller one about Lagos), as well as an image of circular movement (perhaps calling to mind her circular journey that culminates with her return to Nigeria) ("spin, v."). In these ways, Ifemelu's journey from the overwhelming, broad *Raceteenth* to the uplifting specificity of *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* reads as a trajectory from the broadly transnational to the highly local.

Showing how Ifemelu's local focus is part of a nationalist commitment, Adichie has more recently elaborated on the blog's scope through a less-publicized sequel in the form of a website, also called *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*. Blurring boundaries of text and genre, the site features twenty-seven posts, authored by Ifemelu and other characters from *Americanah*, and dated from August 27, 2014 to November 2, 2014. Based on the dates of links to the posts on Adichie's Facebook page, the website's posts appear to have been posted in real time (rather than all at once and backdated). The additional posts are similar in tone to those in *Americanah*, but they reflect an expansion in focus; instead of centering around life in Lagos, they expand to include reflections on Ifemelu and Obinze's time in Enugu, concerns about the Nigerian government's handling of the then-ongoing Ebola crisis, and critiques of the *New York Times*'s representations of African languages and the work of the late Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui. As a result, the digital *Small Redemptions* demonstrates engagement with other Nigerian places, with the country's federal government, and in a style reminiscent of the blog *Africa is a Country*,

non-African media representations of the continent. Ifemelu imagines Lagos as a microcosm of the Nigerian nation and its place in the world. The widening of the scope of *The Small Redemptions* through this sequel makes the case that a focus on the local may only be a starting point for building broader alliances and engagements.

Caveats and Consequences

Americanah's and *A Bit of Difference*'s optimism about local or narrow nationalisms has its limitations. Their protagonists' socioeconomic privilege, for one, offers them opportunities not available to most people. As African literary scholar Katherine Hallemeier has noted, the fact that the US economic downturn in 2008 does not seem to affect Ifemelu's earnings off her critical race blog seems unusual and arguably—though Hallemeier does not go this far—implausible, much like the ease with which Ifemelu begins to earn income from *The Small Redemptions* (235). Deola's profession in the UK is more believable, but her return to Lagos is facilitated by the fact that the family business is a major bank; she will have no difficulty getting a job upon her return. While their analyses of global racial inequalities are convincing, they seem to suffer from blind spots with regard to class and socioeconomic issues.

Even beyond basic financial constraints, numerous other factors might preclude an easy transition back to Nigeria, such as political stability, access to family and other support networks, and concerns about homophobia. The texts stop short of being prescriptive about return migration or national identification, though, as each includes sympathetic Nigerian-born characters who remain overseas. *A Bit of Difference* note that Bandele would face substantial discrimination in Nigeria because of his sexuality, and the

novel is also sympathetic to Subu, who is unwilling to deal with infrastructural inconveniences in Nigeria. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's beloved Aunty Uju who first left Nigeria when her life was endangered under the Abacha regime, remains in the US with her son Dike, whom she has brought up there. The inclusion of such characters seems to leave some room for Afropolitanism as an alternative or complementary identity—perhaps especially for the isolated young Dike—but the semi-autobiographical protagonists are clearly distanced from the label, perhaps indicating that the authors do not want to dismiss the concept outright, but they also do not want to viewed as Afropolitans themselves, given the obvious connections between the protagonists and the authors. Even though Atta and Adichie remain in the US at least part-time, they tie their public personas to these characters who are "checkin' in" and thereby assert their positions as Nigerian, not Afropolitan, writers.

Afropolitans, "Nigerian expatriates," or otherwise, *A Bit of Difference*'s and *Americanah*'s resignation to racism overseas and systematic global inequality is, clearly, deeply pessimistic. From constant microaggressions, to Deola's resignation to the deep flaws of international aid, to Ifemelu's apparent inability to direct a conversation about life for Non-American Blacks living in the US, the novels convey little to no hope for change on a large scale. Part of this attitude may be rooted in pragmatism; they at least provide a counter to problematically "utopian" narratives about life for Africans overseas, for instance (Ojaruega 22). At the same time, however, the texts seem to suggest abandonment of broader alliances, especially in their gradual dismissal of immigrant networks overseas. Do these texts leave room for, to take just one example, the digital pan-Africanism that young African writer Siyanda Mohutsiwa has recently described in

her TED Talk “Is Africa’s Future Online?”? In what ways might Deola’s and Ifemelu’s narrative conclusions constitute a form of Afropessimism revised for the twenty-first century?

In any case, and despite their characters’ pessimism about Nigeria’s—and Africa’s—positions in global dynamics, both *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* are hopeful about improving the lives in others in Nigeria, at least from their narrow, local perspectives. In contrast with the panic of their friends who first learn about their plans to return to Nigeria, the success of Ifemelu’s Lagos-specific blog, and Deola’s decision to bring up her soon-to-be-born child in Nigeria, are both forward-looking and optimistic, as the characters shift their gaze from the general (Africa Beat, race in America) to the specific (“the people she loves,” Lagos). While the novels offer a glimpse into the limitations of the often embraced transnational literary shift among members of their generation, they instead articulate a hope for the possibilities of narrow nationalisms as their protagonists “check in” to Nigeria for good.

Conclusion

> I think it's an aggregation of all of the small acts that are really transformative. I think a group of small acts transform the individual. And maybe when the individual transforms, *we* transform. The big acts will only sustain us for a little while.
>
> —Chris Abani

Whether due to a governmental failure to defend the rights of Niger Delta peoples, institutional corruption that rewards political connections over merit, international aid programs intent on maintaining economic dependencies, or social media platforms that are less democratic than they proclaim, some system has failed the characters of the five novels on which the dissertation has focused. That so many young Nigerian writers are preoccupied with systemic failures reveals a serious pessimism about the ability of states and other large organizations to effect change, in contrast with many nationalists' hopes in decades past. With first- and second-generation nationalisms deemed obsolete, the five novels' characters retreat into smaller communities that they can make sense of amidst crisis and from which they at least attempt to catalyze bottom-up, grassroots change. In a 2010 interview, Chris Abani summed up this attitude: with little faith in the impact of "big acts," he believes that "an aggregation of all the small acts" holds greater potential for "transformation." To be sure, he does not guarantee that they will *necessarily* lead to transformation—he leaves the possibility as a "maybe"—but they are nonetheless the best source of hope, just as Habila's character Rufus identifies the only possibility for hope in the worshippers' community on Irikefe Island; they might remain in "uncertain water," but they still leave him with a sense of "optimism" (*Oil on*

Water 239). Whether they are more about sovereignty, ideology, or belonging, the narrow nationalisms of the dissertation's primary texts all operate in contrast to longstanding wisdom that nationalism is about imposing ideology from the top-down. Revising, for example, Eric Hobsbawm's claims, this cluster of third generation Nigerian texts show that nationalism in the twenty-first century is neither "constructed essentially from above" nor on its way out (10). In contrast with Habila's "post-nationalist" aspirations for his generation, then, nationalism—in its revised and varied forms—remains relevant to Nigerian and other African literary and cultural production.

These writers' pessimism about the "big acts" is a recent development, arising within the last decade's international disillusionment about the possibilities of globalization, as well as domestic disappointment with the lack of change that the post-Abacha era brought for most Nigerians. That is, much as first-generation African nationalisms of the 1950s and 1960s gave way to postcolonial pessimism, 1990s-era optimism about globalization gave way to this most recent moment of post-globalization pessimism. A product of this pessimism, narrow nationalisms therefore counter optimistic narratives of Afropolitanism because of the latter's function as a literature of globalization. Indeed, Afropolitanism reflects excitement about how globalization might break down barriers; the shared sovereignties within the African Union and the European Union are two examples of how globalization and the corresponding deprivileging of national boundaries initially seemed to foster international mobility and thus educationally and culturally diverse experiences (InterAfrica Group and Justice Africa; Wells and Wells 30). In conjunction with the freedoms that Nigerians imagined would accompany their country's burgeoning political democracy, these possibilities seemed

imminent in the early years of third-generation Nigerian writing, around the turn of the millennium.

Yet, as the 1999-2007 tenure of Abacha's first elected successor, Olusegun Obasanjo, wore on, observers realized that his administration had more in common with those of his predecessors than they had envisioned. In fact, Obasanjo's government essentially continued the process that the military leadership initiated in decreasing the state's role in social welfare programming, itself an effect of the Reagan-Thatcher neoliberal push of the 1980s (Ekanade 23). In the name of combating corruption and improving efficiency, the newly democratic Nigerian leadership declared that the private sector could handle much-needed social welfare services and embarked on a significant privatization effort within the first year (Ekanade 14, 15). Major industries including electricity, gas, and petroleum were all subject to privatization schemes, culminating in 2007 with the federal government's sale of two major oil refineries at low prices to companies with whose leadership Obasanjo enjoyed personal connections (Ekanade 18). In such ways, the state continued to partner with corporations and thereby furthered Nigerians' distrust in its motives and effectiveness. Indeed, at the helm of state economic policies throughout Obasanjo's presidency were prominent and powerful neoliberals—most notably Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who worked for the World Bank for twenty-one years before becoming Nigeria's Minister of Finance in 2003, and who has since moved back and forth between roles at the World Bank and prominent financial decision-making positions in Nigeria (MIT News Office). For such reasons, democracy in Nigeria—as in many other countries—turned out to mean not a greater engagement with social issues like poverty and inequality, but rather purely "market efficiency," as economic power

continued and continues to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few private interests (Ekanade 2, Watts "Imperial Oil" 33).

Consequently, the "distrust" that Paul Tiyambe Zeleza observes in third generation writing is not just of first- and second-generation nationalism but also of the promises of globalization. In response to the failures of globalization and democracy, and beginning with 2006's *Yellow-Yellow*, Nigerian narrow nationalist literature has begun to turn away from the optimism of the earliest third generation writers and toward a new and more pessimistic, post-globalization phase. Where Afropolitanism moved the conversation's focus away from the nation-state, narrow nationalism steps in to recenter it on the local and the national—a move that Deola and Ifemelu physically enact with their return migrations in *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah*. The narrow nationalist texts of the last decade, then, come to form a critical subgenre; where the term "narrow nationalisms" reflects strategies they come to embrace, another way to frame them might be as "literature of neoliberal austerity"—a framing that would define the texts by what they aim to contest.

The ways that neoliberal economic policies affect communities are not the same across the board; as global capital enters and operates differently within different contexts, so each affected community responds differently. The diversity of narrow nationalist responses, then, reflects the myriad ways in which these economic policies function. Big Oil's destruction in the Niger Delta, for example, relies on gender- and environmental-based exploitation, so it results in gender- and environmentally-based responses in *Yellow-Yellow* and *Oil on Water*. Similarly, lack of access to white-collar jobs engenders a criminal response in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, and inequalities

in intellectual discourse and global charity receive still distinct responses in *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah*, as the protagonists attempt to distance themselves from the international structures in which they once participated. Even within a single region or crisis, narrow nationalist responses can take disparate forms: Agary's protagonist Zilayefa remains responsible for her mother's well-being, so she must continue to earn a living—which leaves her at least temporarily dependent on the financial and emotional support of Sisi, whose wealth comes from cooperation with Big Oil, as she engages in projects like leasing trucks and selling toiletries to oil workers. Habila's character Boma, on the other hand, has weaker family ties and can therefore detach more fully from the oil industry, subsisting and resisting on Irikefe Island without reliance on oil-related income. In these ways, third generation novels depict a range of narrow nationalisms that embrace local specificities while all engaging in the same effort to critique globalization and neoliberal economics.

In addition, the historical settings of some of these novels serve as a critique of the Obasanjo administration's failure to effect change. *Yellow-Yellow* and *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, for instance, each begin about a decade prior to the novels' publications. *Yellow-Yellow*, published in 2006, follows Zilayefa's experience in the mid-1990s, concluding with her feeling of hope at the moment of Abacha's death—an ambivalent ending that suggests that, in the way that government policies changed little in the subsequent years, so Zilayefa's educational and financial opportunities will correspondingly remain limited. *I Do Not Come to You*, published three years after *Yellow-Yellow*, begins immediately after Abacha's death, but Kingsley only witnesses his possibilities for employment and his family's financial situation deteriorating; tellingly,

the advent of democracy thus does not benefit the middle-class family at all. Further, when Kingsley's 419 mentor Boniface dies a death reminiscent of Abacha's rumored fate—poisoned in the company of sex workers—Kingsley faces a potential turning point, in which he acknowledges that could continue to pursue 419 or could use his 419 earnings to pursue a lawful career. If we read Boniface as standing in for Abacha, and Kingsley as middle-class Nigerians who have turned to criminality out of desperation, then Kingsley's decision to continue with 419 suggests that the new democracy's claims of combating corruption and improving legitimate employment opportunities were, at best, exaggerated. In these ways, *Yellow-Yellow* and *I Do Not Come to You* signal that democracy did not alter economic and political realities for most Nigerians due to the continuation of neoliberal policies.

At the same time as they critique macroeconomic strategies, though, narrow nationalist texts also flag the dangers inherent in their localized responses to globalization. In *Oil on Water*, for example, the fact that Boma's resistance takes on a religious form has implications for religiously based resistance throughout Nigeria. That is, although the eco-spiritual group on Irikefe seems like a force for productive nonviolent resistance, what about the mushrooming of other types of religious groups, from Pentecostalism and Christian evangelism in the South to radical Islam in the North? That Boma's group is only given the generic name of "the worshippers" suggests that they should indeed be read as a type, rather than a specific fictional case. Through its portrayal of this group, *Oil on Water* suggests that even extremist religious groups—such as the notoriously violent Boko Haram—may emerge as much in response to neoliberalism as they do as a result of radical theologies. This move, in turn, redirects

responsibility for religious conflict to economic ills as much as religious extremism; radical religion, in this formulation, constitutes a response to the failures of a particular system, rather than an aberration within an otherwise functional system.

Further, although different narrow nationalist groups participate in the same anti-neoliberalism project in a general sense, my reading of these novels indicates they are nonetheless at risk of clashing with one another, given their disparate sets of grievances and priorities. Even if the fictional Kingsley and Boma both face economic hardships caused by corruption and privatization, for instance, Kingsley's response—reinforcing existing systems by participating in them—in turn exacerbates the financial and political conditions that surround Boma's group on Irikefe. As neoliberal policies continue to impact communities in different ways, so the potential for increasingly varied narrow nationalisms to be at odds with one another will rise, advancing continuously toward potential chaos.

Perhaps no less detrimentally, the increasingly fragmented communities of narrow nationalisms may, rather than or in addition to clashing directly with one another, instead becoming increasingly isolated, as Boma's eco-spiritual group is in a physical sense on the rural Niger Delta island. The potential for isolation especially raises the question as to whether narrow nationalisms suggest that large-scale resistance movements will become increasingly an event of the past, if disparate groups cannot connect to each other or find sufficient common ground. If available modes of protest change in this way, then perhaps more widely the possibilities for critiquing power will change as well—in the Niger Delta, throughout Nigeria and Africa, and globally. With disparate narrow nationalist resistance projects growing in number, the potential for collective protest of the current

economic regime seems only to shrink, in turn suggesting a dangerous spiral. In any case, the fragmentary nature of narrow nationalisms remains a far cry from independence-era African nationalisms, which worked to united nationalists from throughout the continent in a shared project of combating imperialism. The effort to resist neoliberalism may thus take forms too divergent to allow for broad alliances, at least in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, the proliferation of local resistances seems likely only to escalate, given the current economic climate. Experts hold that World Bank policies only exacerbate already uneven development, for example as the institution supports microfinance programs without acknowledging the exploitative interest rates that often accompany such initiatives and consequently leave many borrowers substantially deeper in debt (Bond). Institutional enthusiasm for neoliberal economics shows no sign of slowing down, as Euro-American—and increasingly, Chinese and Japanese—economic interests continue to compete amongst each other in Nigeria and throughout Africa. Despite globalization's and neoliberalism's claims of "leveling the playing field," narrow nationalist literature suggests that it does just the opposite by coming to heighten disparities and creating increasingly localized responses and communities. Put differently, while the number of multinational corporations shrinks (with mergers and buyouts), conversely the number of narrow nationalisms appears to be multiplying. Rather than connecting everyone worldwide, the internet age has instead resulted in multitudes of often disconnected subgroups.

In this light, Abani's notion that "an aggregation of all the small acts" can be "transformative," then, suggests that such potential transformations can be either constructive or destructive—or perhaps both. The expansion and diversification of

Nigerian and African literature, to cover an even wider range of topics and experiences than ever before, is certainly a positive development. The increasing fragmentation of communities and nations indicated in these third generation novels, however, offers a pessimistic prognosis for the future of resistance and solidarity in Nigeria and Africa. The continuing role that literature will play amidst these tensions remains to be seen. Where Achebe asserted Nigerians' histories to contest colonial ideologies, perhaps the literature of narrow nationalisms will similarly combat the neoliberal ideologies undergirding economic austerity in the twenty-first century.

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