

Writing Marginality:

History, Authorship and Gender in the Fiction of Zoë Wicomb and Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie

by

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any other university for a degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

ABSTRACT

This thesis puts the fiction of Zoë Wicomb and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie into conversation with particular reference to three issues: authorship, history and gender. Apart from anything else, what Wicomb and Adichie have in common is an interest in the representation of marginalised or minority ethnic groups within the nation - the coloured people in the case of Wicomb, and the Igbo in the case of Adichie. Yet what both writers also have in common is that neither seems to advocate the reification of these ethnic groups in reformulations of nationalist discourse. The thesis argues that through their focus on various forms of marginality, both Wicomb and Adichie destabilise traditional notions of nation, authorship, history, gender identity, the boundary between domestic and public life, and the idea of “home”. The thesis focuses on four main topics, each of which is covered in a chapter: the question of authorial voice in relation to history; perspectives offered by women characters in relation to oppressive or traumatic historical moments; oppressive or traumatic histories intruding into the intimate domestic space; and the issue of transnational migration and its (un)homely effects. Employing concepts of metafiction and *mise-en-abyme* self-reflexivity, the study begins by considering the ways in which Wicomb’s *David’s Story* and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* both reflect on the idea of authorship. Focusing on the ways in which each text draws the reader into witnessing authorship, the thesis argues that the two novels can be put into conversation as they both stage dilemmas about authorship in relation to those marginalised by national histories. Following on from this idea of marginalisation by nationalist histories, the thesis then proceeds to examine both writers’ foregrounding of women’s stories that are set in oppressive and/or violent historical times – under apartheid in the case of Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, and during the Biafran war in the case of Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Utilising ideas about gender, history and literary history by Tiyambe Zeleza, Florence Stratton and Elleke Boehmer, the study analyses how,

beginning with father-daughter relationships, Wicomb and Adichie wean their female characters from their fathers' control so that they may begin telling their own stories that complicate and subvert the stories that their fathers represent. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's theory of "the uncanny" and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial reading of that theory, the study then turns to discuss the ways in which oppressive national histories become manifest in domestic spaces (that are usually marginalised in national histories), turning those spaces into unhomely homes, in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In both novels, purity (whether racial or religious) is cultivated in the family home, but this cultivation of purity, which is reflected symbolically in the kinds of gardens each family grows, evidently has "unhomely" effects that signal the return of the repressed, of that which is disavowed in discourses of purity. Since both Wicomb and Adichie are African-born women authors living abroad, and since the "unhomely" aspects of transnational existence are reflected upon in their fiction, the study finally considers the forms of marginality to the national posed by the migrant. Transnational migration is examined in Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* and in Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*, placing stories from these two recently published sets of short stories into dialogue.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis plaas die fiksie van Zoë Wicomb en Chimamandi Ngozi Adichie in gesprek met mekaar, met verwysing na veral drie sake: outeurskap, geskiedenis en geslag (gender). Afgesien van ander kwessies het die fiksie van Wicomb en Adichie 'n belangstelling in die fiktiewe voorstelling van gemarginaliseerde of minderheidsgroepe in die nasie in gemeen – die kleurlinggroep in die geval van Wicomb en die Igbo in die geval van Adichie. Nogtans beveel geeneen van hierdie twee skrywers 'n reïfikasie van nasionalistiese diskoers aan nie. Die tesis voer aan dat, deur hulle fokus op verskeie vorme van marginaliteit, beide Wicomb en Adichie tradisionele konsepte van nasionalisme, skrywer-skap, geskiedenis,

geslagsidentiteit, die grens tussen private en publieke lewe en die idee van 'n eie tuiste destabiliseer. Die vier hoof-onderwerpe van die tesis is word elk in 'n eie hoofstuk behandel: die kwessie van 'n skrywerstem in verhouding tot die geskiedenis; perspektiewe wat belig word deur vrouekarakters in kontekste van onderdrukkende of traumatiese historiese momente; hoedat onderdrukkings- of traumatiese geskiedenis die private sfeer binnedring; asook die kwessie van 'n migrasie oor landsgrense en die ontheimings-effek hiervan. Deur die gebruik van metafisiese en *mise-en-abyme* selfrefleksie begin die studie deur te reflekteer op hoe Wicomb se *David's Story* en Adichie se *Half of a Yellow Sun* [aangaande] die idee van outeurskap reflekteer. Deur te fokus op die wyses waarop beide tekste die leser betrek om skrywerskap waar te neem, voer die tesis aan dat die twee romans met mekaar in gesprek geplaas kan word, terwyl albei dilemmas van outeurskap met betrekking tot diegene wat in nasionale geskiedskrywing gemarginaliseer word, sentraal plaas. Volgende op hierdie kwessie gaan die tesis dan voort om albei skrywers se vooropstelling van vroue se verhale gesitueer in onderdrukkende of gewelddadige tye – onder apartheid in die geval van Wicomb se *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* en gedurende die Biafraanse oorlog in Adichie se *Half of a Yellow Sun* – te ondersoek. Met behulp van idees aangaande gender, geskiedenis en literêre geskiedenis van Tiyambe Zeleza, Florence Stratton en Elleke Boehmer, analiseer die tesis hoedat, beginnende met vader-dogter verhoudings, Wicomb en Adichie hul vroulike karakters loswikkell van hul vaders se kontrole sodat hulle kan begin om hul eie verhale te vertel – stories wat die verhale van hul vaders kompliseer en ondermyn. Met behulp van Sigmund Freud se teorie van die onheimlike en Homi Bhabha se postkolonialistiese interpretasie van daardie idee, gaan die tesis dan voort deur maniere waarop onderdrukkende nasionale geskiedenis in die tuis-ruimtes (wat gewoonlik deur nasionale geskiedskrywing gemarginaliseer word) manifesteer, met die onheimlike effek hiervan op die tuisruimte – beide in Wicomb se *Playing in the Light* en in Adichie se *Purple Hibiscus* – te ondersoek. In

albei romans word reinheid (van ras of geloof) in die familie-tuiste gekultiveer, maar hierdie nadruk op reinheid – simbolies gereflekteer in die tuine wat deur albei gesinne aangelê word – het wel onmiskenbare onheimlike gevolge wat die terugkeer van wat onderdruk is (in die naam van reinheid) aandui. Omdat beide Wicomb en Adichie vroue-skrywers is wat in Afrika gebore is maar oorsee lewe, en omdat die onheimlike aspekte van ‘n transnasionale lewensstyl in hul fiksie oorweeg word, beskryf die tesis die vorms van marginaliteit met betrekking tot die nasionale wat deur die migrant tot stand kom. Transnasionale migrasie word in Wicomb se *The One that Got Away* en Adichie se *The Thing around your Neck* oorweeg, wat die verhale uit hierdie twee versamelings in gesprek met mekaar plaas.

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Introduction

“Strange New Stories”: History, Fiction and Writing Marginality

“Thinking from the margins rather than from the centre gives me a fresh perspective.”

- Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*.

This study is about the portrayal of marginalities in the fiction of Zoë Wicomb and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in relation to three related issues: authorship, history and gender. The perspective adopted is mainly premised on what Jane M. Jacobs in *Edge of Empire* calls “the postmodernist projects of deconstructing master narratives, unsettling binaries and admitting marginalised knowledges” (Jacobs 29). The main aim of this study is to show how fiction by both Wicomb and Adichie carries out these “projects”. As I argue, by “unsettling binaries and admitting marginalised knowledges”, both Wicomb’s and Adichie’s fiction gives “a fresh perspective” (Lee 30) on issues of authorship and history, gender and national narratives, and domestic as well as transnational existence. I further argue that despite “admitting marginalised knowledges” Wicomb and Adichie do not reify the margins. Instead their work reveals how these so-called margins themselves are not as homogenous as they are made to appear, and how reifying marginal groups in terms of ethnicity can be an ethically-dubious effort.

Although these two writers have emerged from, and exist within, different contexts – Wicomb is a South African-born author living in Glasgow, and Adichie is a Nigerian-born-author living in the United States – I believe that their work can be put into conversation in interesting ways. The study deals with four interrelated forms of marginality as portrayed in Wicomb’s and Adichie’s fiction: marginalised voices with regard to authorship and nation; marginalised stories and experiences of women in oppressive and war-torn historical

moments; domestic spaces marginalised in master narratives (and especially history's intrusion into such intimate spaces); and the marginalised lives of those "unhomed" or estranged in foreign nations and cultures. In the course of four chapters, this study attempts to address the following questions: how do Wicomb and Adichie stage and trouble issues of authorship and representation with regard to marginalised narratives and their relation to nationalist histories? How does the interplay between race, gender and class in Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction complicate counter-discourses with regard to oppressive historical moments? How, in the fiction of these two writers, do traumatic events of the past manifest in domestic spaces and in turn impact upon the characters and their relationships in such spaces? How do Wicomb and Adichie, who both currently live in countries other than those in which they were born, portray the complexities of identity and belonging in transnational spaces, and how do their "unhomed" protagonists unsettle the distinction between the homely and unhomely?

Defining Marginality

The word "margin" is usually used in English as a noun to mean border, edge or boundary. The etymology of the word however, reveals that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the word "margin" was commonly used to refer to notes "[entered] in the margin", and that the adjective "marginal" meant "written or printed in the margin" (*Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, 633). Such meanings of "margin" and its adjectival derivative "marginal" become interesting in this study precisely because they speak directly to the idea of the margin as etymologically linked to the act of writing, an act that is foregrounded in much of Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction. Thus, the idea of "writing marginality" in this study refers not only to Wicomb and Adichie writing narratives that are marginal to nationalist histories, but also to the ways in which these writers foreground the act of writing such marginalised histories. Their fiction could thus be read as metafictional "notes" in the margins of master narratives.

However, these metafictional notes have immense subversive potential as they complicate, challenge and often destabilise master narratives, to the extent that what is marginal becomes foregrounded.

My study draws inspiration from Jung Young Lee's words used in the epigraph to my introduction and employs his definition of marginality as well as that of Gino Germani. According to Lee in *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, "marginality is defined only in relation to centrality" and consequently in the absence of "the centre there is no margin" (Lee 30). Lee further isolates what he calls classical and contemporary definitions of marginality. In the classical definition of marginality, the margin is defined mostly in negative terms by the centre which may lead to negative self perception among the marginalised. Marginalities based on race, gender and nationality as imagined in both Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction could be read from this perspective. Lee proposes a self-affirming contemporary definition of marginality which views the margin as "a nexus where two or three worlds are interconnected" or as "an open-ended and unfolding horizon" (47). For Germani marginality is understood as "the lack of participation of individuals and groups in those spheres which, according to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate" (49). The exclusion in question could be economic, political or cultural and it could exist at urban, national or international levels. At urban level, the centre-periphery polarisation would refer to the difference between the affluent suburbs and "the sector of the population segregated into areas of shantytowns, squatter settlements and other illegally occupied land" (3). Such polarisation at the urban level usually translates into economic marginalisation of those living in less affluent parts of the city. The kind of centre-periphery dichotomy that exists at the urban level may also exist at a national level where certain groups of people are excluded from significant participation in the affairs of the nation. This could be based on gender, or on ethnic, economic or cultural discrimination where "the

central areas exercise a dominant and exploitative role while the peripheral areas occupy the position of internal colonies” (5). Wicomb’s and Adichie’s engagement with nationalist discourses in their fiction reveals an interest in patterns and positions of marginalisation. Germani further extends the centre-periphery polarisation to the world scale where there exists a “world urban zone” consisting of “the set of developed countries, dominant and imperialist” which occupy a “hegemonic and exploitative position in relation to a rural zone constituted by underdeveloped countries” (6). As I will show later, transnational experience in Wicomb’s and Adichie’s fiction, especially in their recent collections of short stories, reflects critically on the existence of such a “world urban zone” which attracts migrants from less developed parts of the world in a similar way to which rural populations are attracted into urban centres at the national level. Useful to this study also is Germani’s observation about the impossibility of absolute marginality. Germani notes that “within marginality in its generic sense, a series of types of marginality can be distinguished” (8). Thus he accepts the “pluridimensional conception of marginality” which is basically “admitting different dimensions of marginality, and even different degrees within the same dimension, and distinctions of degree, inside of each form (8). Lee also makes a similar point when he notes that in the process of marginalisation “Centres are created within margins; margins are also created within centres” (Lee 310). These observations become important precisely because the forms of marginality that Wicomb and Adichie deal with in their fiction cannot be said to be at all simple or homogenous.

Wicomb, Adichie and Writing Marginalities

Wicomb's and Adichie's concern with marginalities in their fiction may be linked to their interest in women's narratives, and to the ways in which these authors themselves have been "raced", that is, relegated to certain ethnic groups in racial discourse. Firstly, however, the middle-class status of these writers, owing to their education and professional training, means that they experience gendered marginality quite differently from other women who are not as educated. The interrogation of such disparities among women appears in each writer's fiction. Secondly, the two writers' exploration of women's stories and experiences is profoundly shaped by their awareness of other forms of marginality. Adichie acknowledges the inextricable interplay of various forms of marginality in her fiction when, with reference to *Half of a Yellow Sun* she says "I was particularly interested in class and race and gender, which I think affect everything about life in every part of the world – in some ways, the amount of humanity and dignity the world allows depends on what race and class and gender you are" (Adichie "African 'Authenticity'" 51).

In the countries of their birth, both Wicomb and Adichie belong to groups of people who, historically, are or were considered marginal groups in the nation: coloureds in South Africa and the Igbo in Nigeria. The marginalisation of coloured people under apartheid placed coloureds in the middle of two races, namely white and black, forcing coloured people to exist on the boundary between two racial categories. Colouredness was thus "unhomed" within both white and black groups, which represented two extremes on the spectrum of racial purity as propagated by the apartheid system. Being coloured meant falling short of both whiteness and blackness, or in the words of Zimitri Erasmus in her introduction to *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place* (which echo Lee's thoughts above about a negative definition of marginality), colouredness meant having a "residual, in-between or 'lesser' identity – characterised as 'lacking' [and] inferior" (Erasmus 15-16). The association of

colouredness with miscegenation also tied colouredness to issues of “immorality, sexual promiscuity, illegitimacy, impurity and untrustworthiness” (17). As a result, being coloured meant being burdened by both shame and discomfort which “resulted on the one hand, in attempts to reconstruct a sense of purity based on claims of ethnicity and indigenous roots, or on the other, a complete denial of this identity” (16). As we shall see later, the discomfort and shame that leads to these two extremes is a prominent subject in Wicomb’s fiction. However, Wicomb’s portrayal of colouredness neither accepts the inevitability of coloured shame, nor does it reify colouredness as a racial group. In fact, in her widely cited essay “Shame and Identity: The case of the Coloured in South Africa” Wicomb speaks out against discourses of “shame” and “purity” by critiquing what she calls the “self-fashioning of a totalising colouredness” (Wicomb “Shame” 95), calling this “a shameful excess, an exorbitance of identity currently expressed in the construction of coloured nationhood” (105). Wicomb suggests an alternative view of colouredness:

Instead of denying history and fabricating a totalizing colouredness, ‘multiple belongings’ could be seen as an alternative way of viewing culture where participation in a number of coloured micro-communities whose interests conflict and overlap could become a rehearsal of cultural life in the larger South African community where we learn to perform the same kind of negotiations in terms of identity within a lived culture characterised by difference. (105)

Wicomb’s sentiments expressed in this citation extend to her fiction. To borrow Erasmus’s words from a different context, Wicomb’s fiction is geared towards “an affirmation of coloured identities without resorting to ethno-nationalism” (Erasmus 15). I also find that the following assertion by Erasmus speaks to certain ways in which coloured marginality is portrayed in Wicomb’s fiction:

Although marginal, coloured identities are not caught athwart official and hegemonic frames that attempt to define or erase ‘coloured’. Instead, people historically classified coloured appropriated and contested these frames. [...] Coloured identities are productive subjective realities shaped and reshaped by people under the condition given them by history. (23)

Wicomb is clearly one writer who has “appropriated and contested” the “frames” of colouredness, even as her fiction “attempts to create a space for voices until recently lost in debates centred around a black-white reductionism” (15).

The case of the Igbo in Nigeria is also complicated in its own way. Like that of the coloured people in South Africa, the marginalisation of the Igbo people, who are a minority group in relation to other language/ethnic groups such as the Hausa and Yoruba, also has some roots in colonialism. The British system of indirect rule in colonial Nigeria, with its emphasis on semi-autonomous territories governed indirectly through local chiefs, promoted ethnic allegiance among the different ethnic groups in the area that later formed Nigeria. Such ethnic allegiance and the resultant distrust of one ethnic group by another remain major problems that Nigeria has faced since its independence in 1960. These problems led to the 1966 military coups that later culminated in the Biafran war, a moment when the Igbo felt not only marginalised but also rejected by Nigeria. The January 1966 Igbo-led coup which overthrew the Nnamdi Azikiwe-led civilian government was seen, especially by northerners, as the desire of the Igbo military officers to assume power, regardless of the fact that the overthrown Azikiwe was Igbo. According to Toyin Falola, Igbo military officers who led the coup claimed to have done so to stop the rot instigated by Azikiwe’s corrupt and ineffective civilian government. However, the fact that “none of the twenty-seven key politicians and military personnel that were killed was Igbo” (Falola 117) made northerners suspicious of the reason for the coup. This suspicion, coupled with General Ironsi’s leadership after the coup (which was seen as displaying favouritism towards Igbos in government and military appointments), led to protests in the north which led to attacks on Igbos resident in the north. In July 1966 a counter-coup was staged by military officers from the north and Igbo officers were targeted. According to Falola, what followed was random execution of Igbo soldiers

which extended to people other than those connected to the Ironsi administration (118). A rumour that some northerners had been killed in Igboland triggered widespread killing of Igbos that forced many Igbo people to flee from the north to their homeland. In May 1967, under the leadership of Ojukwu, south-eastern Nigeria seceded from the federal republic of Nigeria to become an independent state of Biafra. The three years of civil war that followed Biafra's secession entrenched in the Igbo a feeling of marginalisation by the federal state of Nigeria (see Achebe, "On Biafra"). Such feelings persist into the present day and have taken new forms of expression like the formation of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Like Wicomb, Adichie's portrayal of the Igbo's history of marginalisation, especially as shown in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, is not geared towards ends like those of MASSOB, but rather towards showing the complexity not just of history but also of Igbo identity politics and claims for an ethnically-homogenous Igbo nation-state. She expresses her scepticism about the ethnic-based Biafran nation when she observes that "[t]he survivors' sense of defeat and injustice can result in their making a utopia of Biafra when it may very well have become yet another tyranny" (Adichie "African 'Authenticity'" 50).

Through foregrounding acts of writing history or collective narratives, Wicomb and Adichie unsettle collective identities reified by nationalist narratives and dramatise the dilemmas of writing about the past, particularly when this concerns a history of war, trauma and violence. As stated above, the main focus of this study is on how Wicomb and Adichie engage with forms of marginality in relation to authorship and nationalist discourses. Part of the project involves showing how both Wicomb and Adichie focus on women's stories in relation to national narratives, or in other words, on how they foreground and critique the idea of "daughters of the nation" by focusing on women's experiences during oppressive political situations. As I shall argue, both writers also explore issues of class as revealing

complex levels of marginalisation. Taking cognizance of the remembered and intergenerational impacts of racism, war and violence, both Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction portrays the ways in which the violence of colonialism, racism and war turns the domestic sphere into "an unhomely space" and impacts upon the ways in which later generations negotiate positionality against traumatic pasts handed down to them by older generations. Finally I intend to examine how perspectives offered by transnational migrants in Wicomb's and Adichie's short stories play with and challenge issues of identity and belonging, and how the "unhomed" protagonists of these stories offer "unhomely" readings of both their home and host countries.

Literature review

The study of marginality in Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction is by no means a novel area, though no previous studies have brought the work of these two writers into extensive conversation. In the South African context, critics have pointed out that literature often engages silence and absence in order to render the effects of the oppressive discourse of apartheid (see, among others, Moslund and Knapp) as well as in discourses of healing and reconciliation in the post-apartheid era. With regard to discourses of healing and reconciliation, according to Attwell and Harlow the post-apartheid South African writer must negotiate "the tension between memory and amnesia" (Attwell & Harlow 3) with responsibility to both the past and future. Evidently Zoë Wicomb is one of these South African writers who negotiate this dilemma, as a review of critical perspectives on her fiction may reveal. Available literature on Wicomb's fiction is, quite expectedly, concerned largely with issues of apartheid and its aftermath, even though apartheid itself is only "glimpsed" (Sicherman "Afterword" 188) in her fiction. Annie Gagiano places Wicomb amongst South

African novelists whose fiction has shifted focus from “the national imaginary” to “the local” when she argues that:

As the starkly Manichean divides of pre-1994 South Africa begin to blur a bit around the edges, a number of novelists appear to have started a process of extending our sense of the local rather than the national imaginary. They do so by engaging with communities and sub-strata of our society whose variety and vitality were to a large extent hidden by the predominantly racial-political colouring that apartheid writing inevitably reflected. (Gagiano, “Shades” 71)

In one way or another, critical attention to Wicomb’s fiction reflects this awareness about Wicomb’s concern with what Njabulo Ndebele has famously called “the rediscovery of the ordinary”. In Gagiano’s words, Wicomb’s fiction tells “strange new stories” marked by “shifting boundaries ... dissolution of old rigidities and ... refusal of the almost proverbial victim-or-resistor roles for black characters” (Gagiano, “Adapting” 815).

Critics have also analysed how Wicomb handles the theme of apartheid and how her characters survive oppression (see for example Driver, Sicherman, Handlarski and Marais). According to Dorothy Driver, Wicomb’s fiction “bears witness to a history of deprivation” which can be subverted by “psychological change whose major route is in rewriting representation” (Driver 45). Here Driver refers to how Frieda in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* uses narrative to question her racially-defined identity (see also Sicherman, Marais). Thus, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, as Denise Handlarski notes in a different study, is “fundamentally concerned with the act of writing as resistance” (Handlarski 56) since Frieda deconstructs both the racist and sexist constructions of her being as she grows as a woman and a writer. The “roughly autobiographical” (Raiskin 214) nature of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* has seen critics compare the protagonist with the author herself especially since the two share not only similar backgrounds but also similar opinions and attitudes about life. For instance, Sicherman notes that “[a]lthough the book is not biographical in any but a superficial sense, the background of the protagonist, Frieda Shenton is that of her creator Zoë

Wicomb, whose brave imagination has set before us a discomfiting heroine – frank, sometimes amused, often uncertain” (Sicherman, “Afterword” 187).

Other critics discuss Wicomb’s fiction in line with dominant themes in post-apartheid literature, such as “the imperative of breaking silences” and “the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change” (Attwell & Harlow 3). Wicomb’s fiction, especially *David’s Story*, is usually read as breaking the silence through its bringing into the open unspoken and unspeakable issues within the anti-apartheid movement. Reading violation of the female body in *David’s Story*, Christa Baiada concludes that “Wicomb lifts the shroud of silence obscuring women’s history as participants in and victims of nation building” (Baiada 33). Thus, *David’s Story* is “a literary intervention into the silencing of women and their stories in the future of South Africa” (34). While noting like Baiada the violation of the female subject during the anti-apartheid struggle, Meg Samuelson questions the assertion that texts like *David’s Story* break the silence on female violation. Samuelson instead asserts that such texts draw attention to silence itself and “the meanings produced in the spaces between voice and silence” (Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* 120).

Hugh Macmillan and Lucy Graham in their essay entitled “The ‘Great Coloured Question’ and the Cosmopolitan: Fiction, History and Politics in *David’s Story*” turn to political issues and question certain readings of *David’s Story* “as confirming liberal paranoia about the ANC in exile as a terrorizing (if not terrorist) organisation, and as a reflection of liberal pessimism about transition” (Macmillan and Graham 332). In fact, Macmillan and Graham “are surprised by the literal and unimaginative ways in which this work of fiction is often read”, further arguing that “one can only arrive at such conclusions by closing down the meaning within the text” (332, 346). For them, “[t]he novel’s narrative complexity and multilayered portrayal of ethical dilemmas should compel readers to confront the impossibility of discerning a single, simple truth about the history and future of South Africa”

(346). The alternative readings called for here would possibly reveal how Wicomb's fiction foregrounds ambiguities and contradictions emergent from the attempt to build the present by narrating the past (see Gagiano, Attwell and Harlow, and Bartley). Transnational aspects of Wicomb's fiction have also attracted considerable critical attention recently. Notably, in April 2010, Stellenbosch University and University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) co-hosted a Zoë Wicomb conference called "The Cape and the Cosmopolitan: Reading Zoë Wicomb" whose specific concern was cosmopolitan and transnational connections between the Cape and other places as portrayed in Wicomb's fiction. Some of the papers presented at the conference were published in a special issue of *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 12.3-4 (2011). In his keynote address during the conference (published as "The Urge to Nowhere: Wicomb and Cosmopolitanism"), Abdulrazak Gurnah underlined the transnational nature of Wicomb's fiction when he observed that her fiction manifests tension "between the value of travel and the value of rootedness" (Gurnah 261). For Pamela Scully in "Zoë Wicomb, Cosmopolitanism, and the Making and Unmaking of History", Wicomb's fiction "centres on the Cape as a location founded in mobility and patterns of transhumance between rural and urban" (Scully 299). Scully further observes that Wicomb's fiction "inscribes the history of the Cape as a transnational site of sailors and settlers, indigenous and enslaved" (300). In that regard, "[t]he Cape travels, too, in the movement of individuals through spaces of the British commonwealth from Cape Town to Glasgow and back again" (300) a point echoed by Julika Griem in her reading of Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* which, according to her, "sends its much more diverse set of characters into a restless circuit of transnational relations connecting Africa and Europe, Cape Town and Glasgow" (Griem 389). Virginia Richter sums up thus Wicomb's cosmopolitan and transnational concerns:

I consider Wicomb as a cosmopolitan author in a more precise sense: as an author who embeds locally specific stories in a complex intertextual, historical, and

transnational web of cross-references, thus creating a resonating cavity that encloses, and reverberates with, South African and European cultural memory. (Richter 373)

A follow-up conference on Wicomb's work, entitled "Zoë Wicomb and the Translocal: South Africa and Scotland", which furthers this sense of Wicomb as a cosmopolitan writer, has just been held at the University of York (September 2012).

Wicomb's telling of what Gagliano has called "strange new stories" links her to the third-generation of Nigerian writers to which Adichie belongs. Among other themes, third generation Nigerian writers reflect critically on present day manifestations of Nigeria's colonial history such as political strife and religious dogma. Comparable to Wicomb's relationship to the post-apartheid transition and the desire for nationalist identity expressed by some of her coloured characters (for instance in *David's Story*) is Adichie's relationship to the post-independence ethnic strife which culminated in the Nigerian civil war and which is reflected upon in Adichie's work. The Biafran war, as the civil war came to be known, has been one of the major subjects of Nigerian literature after independence (see Emenyonu, Wiseberg, Feuser, Amuta and Bryce, among other critics). The war still remains a major topic even for third-generation Nigerian writers, particularly Adichie. In her article entitled "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafra Experience" (which is based on a paper she presented at the Christopher Okigbo International Conference at Harvard University, 22nd September, 2007), Adichie emphasises the influence of Biafra in her life as well as literary imagination:

I have often been asked why I chose to write about Biafra, and I like to say that I did not choose Biafra, it chose me. I cannot honestly intellectualize my interest in the war. It is a subject I have known for very long that I would write about. I was born seven years after the Nigeria-Biafra war ended, and yet the war is not mere history for me, it is also memory, for I grew up in the shadow of Biafra. (Adichie "African 'Authenticity'" 49)

In a postscript to the 2009 Fourth Estate edition of *Half of a Yellow Sun* entitled "The Stories of Africa: A Q & A with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" Adichie further reiterates the

centrality of Biafra in her literary imagination with particular regard to her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*:

I wrote this novel because I wanted to write about love and war, because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra, because I lost both grandfathers in the Nigeria-Biafra war, because I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present, because many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today, because my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, because my mother cannot speak at length about losing her father in a refugee camp, because the brutal bequests of colonialism make me angry, because the thought of egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men, women and children enrages me, because I don't ever want to forget. (Adichie, "The Stories of Africa" 2)

While Adichie made this statement in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, some of the things she says here apply to her first novel and her collection of short stories as well. For instance, "the brutal bequests of colonialism" and male violence underlie the plot of *Purple Hibiscus* as well as such stories as "A Private Experience" and "The Headstrong Historian" in *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Her wish to write a novel about "love and war" gestures towards concern with the everyday details of life and speaks to Wicomb's concern with the ordinary as noted above. In fact, Adichie claims in "African 'Authenticity'" that she was determined to make *Half of a Yellow Sun* about "the grittiness of being human - a book about relationships, about people who have sex and eat food and laugh, about people who are fierce consumers of life" (Adichie, "African 'Authenticity'" 50), features which apply to her first novel and her collection of short stories as well. Also shown in Adichie's statement about the centrality of Biafra in her fiction is how she inherited the Biafra trauma from her parents such that even without experiencing the events of the Biafran war firsthand, she still remains profoundly affected emotionally by those events (see De Mey).

Along with other third generation of Nigerian writers like Chris Abani, Helen Oyeyemi and Sefi Atta, Adichie has received substantial international critical acclaim. This began with the publication of her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* in 2004 which was followed by *Half of a Yellow Sun* two years later. The literature available on Adichie's fiction focuses

mainly on her portrayal of the trauma of the Biafran war (see Hawley and Hodges among others), the predicament of vulnerable groups in a culture of violence (see Ouma, Hron, Tunca), the problem of religious bigotry (Channels) and recently, echoes of Chinua Achebe in her fiction (Ouma, Whittaker, Boehmer and Osunibi). In their reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, both John Hawley and Hugh Hodges note how the Biafran war still remains a viable theme for third generation writers like Adichie. However, they point out that unlike previous war novels, the focus in Adichie's novel is on "the book's principal players rather than on the politics and strategies that shaped the war" (Hawley 20). This, according to Hodges, allows Adichie's novel to "negotiate dilemmas implicit in fictionalising war more successfully" than her predecessors' "thinly disguised and pedestrian reflections of history" (Amuta cited in Hodges 2, 3). The issue of "ordinary", vulnerable people in a culture of violence in Adichie's fiction is addressed, among other critics, by Hron and Tunca. While Hron analyses the child as a medium through which the story of violence and abuse is told (e.g. Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* and Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*), Tunca focuses on the child as victim in her reading of *Purple Hibiscus* noting that, despite critical consensus so far on *Purple Hibiscus*'s narrative voice as being "detached and unemotional", Kambili still speaks against her father's violence but in a way that does not directly confront the father. Of interest is how both Hron and Tunca suggest that the violence suffered by the child stems not simply from the perpetrator but from something beyond. This echoes Adetunji Osinubi's essay "Literacies of Violence after *Things Fall Apart*" where, while making links between Achebe and third generation of Nigerian writers, it is suggested that the culture of violence in post-independence Nigeria has links with times past.

The influence of Chinua Achebe's fiction, especially of *Things Fall Apart*, on Adichie (as noted by Osinubi) cannot be overemphasised. Adichie herself talks of how reading Achebe's fiction gave her the permission to write her own stories ("African 'Authenticity'")

42). Critics (for instance Boehmer, Whittaker, Arana, Uwakweh and Ogwude) have examined how Adichie's confessed indebtedness to Achebe in terms of creative imagination is reflected in her fiction. For example, it has been pointed out that Adichie pays tribute to Achebe in the very opening sentence of her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus*: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (*PH* 1). In the words of Boehmer in her essay "Achebe and His Influence in Some Contemporary African Writing" this could be called one of Adichie's "numerous filiative gestures towards Achebe" (Boehmer, "Achebe" 148). Echoing other critics, Uwakweh calls Adichie "Achebe's 21st century daughter" (Uwakweh 53). While noting Achebe's influence on younger Nigerian writers, however, David Whittaker notes how younger writers including Adichie "have problematised Achebe's vision of the role of the African writer in a number of important ways [...] often displaying very different literary sensibilities and perspectives" (Whittaker 108). As I shall demonstrate later in chapter four, "The Headstrong Historian" is one such story in which Adichie has overtly "problematised Achebe's vision of the role of the African Writer."

Like Wicomb, Adichie's fiction engages with the past to explore the significance of "strange new stories" (Gagiano, "Adapting" 815) and "unspoken secrets" (Hewett 81). In this study, I am interested in these "strange new stories" and how Wicomb and Adichie use such stories to reveal multiple marginalities that complicate national histories as well as simple ideas about race, gendered or ethnic-based marginalities. The experiences of Wicomb's and Adichie's protagonists trouble the idea of the "many as one" in national imaginaries as well as claims of homogenous identities in post-apartheid South Africa and post-independence/post-Biafra Nigeria respectively.

While there are literary critical studies of Wicomb and Adichie each within their particular contexts, I would like to draw these two writers into conversation because I believe that their work speaks to each other in interesting ways. Both Wicomb and Adichie focus on groups of people whose place in the history of their respective nations reveals the complexity of identity politics both at individual and collective levels. As outlined above, Wicomb's fiction explores the life of coloured people during and after apartheid, troubling negotiations of ethnicity. For her part, Adichie focuses on the Igbo people whose struggle during the Biafran war as well as in post-war Nigeria has been riddled with political and economic hardships. Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction thus deals with questions around ethnic marginalities, and both writers offer critiques of colonial history and racial identity politics, often foregrounding women's stories. While Wicomb was born and grew up under apartheid before migrating to Scotland, Adichie was born seven years after the Biafran war and thus did not experience firsthand the events of the war. I believe it would thus be interesting to see what such different backgrounds afford the two writers in terms of discourses for writing marginalities, and how these discourses can be put into conversation. I would also like to see how Wicomb's migrants, some of whom claim blood relations with Scotland, where Wicomb now lives, compare to Adichie's migrants who are mainly economic migrants in the United States of America, where Adichie is now based.

Theoretical Points of Departure and Chapter Focus

Apart from Germani's and Lee's theoretical definitions of marginality, this study draws on a number of theoretical positions all of which relate to the issue of marginality and its various manifestations in Wicomb's and Adichie's fiction. The main theoretical underpinnings of the study are theories of marginality, theories of historical metafiction and authorship, theories of nationalism, and theories of the "unhomely". In his widely cited book *Imagined*

Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Benedict Anderson observes that “nationness as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind” and that the writing of history plays a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of these “artefacts”, providing a sense of a shared past among members of the nation which Anderson defines as “an imagined political community” (Anderson 4). As Sten Moslund notes, “the cardinal role of historical narratives [is] constructing or confirming collective identities” (Moslund 9). However, it has been observed that the so-called “shared” story of the past is either not shared at all, or where it is claimed to be shared, it is experienced differently by different people. Owing to the fact that events that become history are experienced differently by different people, the question of who writes such narratives and from whose perspective they are written becomes an interesting one, especially when such narratives have to do with times of war and oppression.

One of the issues to be addressed in the study is the relationship between literary fiction and history. While not creating a rival narrative to history, fiction engages silence and absence to rethink nationalist histories, through examining the notion of collective identities and the authorship of collective stories. As Moslund notes

Literature may expand the collective memory and responsibility by casting light on repressed events giving voice to the marginalised, the silenced, the forgotten; it may complicate any given national narrative by creating discontinuity and fragmentation, acknowledging a heritage of difference and defending the right to non-conformity; or it may counter imagined national ideals by voicing national acts of shame. (Moslund 25-26)

According to André Brink in a statement that evokes the work of Wicomb and Adichie, fiction may offer a “crucial new dimension” that aims not at presenting “new historical evidence” but rather a “leap of the imagination towards grasping the larger implications of our silences” (Brink 24). In an attempt to think through the function of literature, my reading of authorship and history in this study draws on the concept of metafiction. Metafiction,

according to Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*:

is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and truth. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh 2)

Specifically, I draw on Linda Hutcheon's postmodernist reading of historical novels, and in particular on her concept of "historiographic metafiction". By "historiographic metafiction", Hutcheon refers to fiction "which works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction" (Hutcheon 4). As Andrzej Gasiorek puts it elsewhere, such fiction troubles "boundaries between the 'real' and 'invented' in order to expose the constructed nature of historical discourse" (Gasiorek 149) and, in the words of Brink, such fiction "is never read 'in its own right' but as a myriad of intertextual relationships" (Brink 22). One of the features of such fiction is self-reflexivity, which is the manifestation of "a certain introversion, a self-conscious turning toward the form of the act of writing itself" (Hutcheon 128). In metafiction, the act of writing constitutes one of the major objects of attention as the novel aims simultaneously to "create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction" (Waugh 22). Both Wicomb and Adichie portray acts of writing in their fiction, which tend to reflect on the narrative's own textuality.

In my attempt to theorise the blurring of the boundary between the domestic and the public that takes place despite the marginalisation of the domestic space within nationalist histories, I draw on Freud's idea of "the uncanny" ("*das Unheimlich*") and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial reading of Freud's theory. For Freud, the "uncanny" or "unhomely" means "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once familiar" (Freud, "Uncanny" 1-2). The "uncanny" says Freud, in his analysis of E.T.A. Hoffman's

short story, “The Sandman”, is something strange and unsettling but secretly recognised, and therefore “belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (Freud, “Uncanny” 1). As Freud’s analysis of this short story reveals, fiction can afford us a way of thinking about uncanny and “unhomely” aspects of human experience. Adapting Freud’s theory to examine postcolonial fiction, Bhabha refers to the “unhomely” as “the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world” (Bhabha *Location* 1), as a place where “the borders between home and world become confused” and the fusion of the private and the public leads to “a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). The disruption of “the symmetry of private and public” (13) or home and the world, leads to “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” and subsequently to “the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home in the world” (Bhabha, “The World” 141). In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha is interested in places where the “borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other” (Bhabha *Location* 13). In these blurred boundaries between “private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social” there develops, according to Bhabha, “an interstitial intimacy” that “questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed” (19).

These main theoretical strands – theories of nation, of metafiction, of the unhomely - are applied to the reading of different texts across four chapters. In chapter one, Patricia Waugh’s definition of “metafiction” and Linda Hutcheon’s concept of “historiographic metafiction” are used to read the question of authorship and history in Wicomb’s *David’s Story* and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Both texts not only “situate” themselves in relation to historical discourse by engaging nationalist discourses but also thrive on self-reflexivity as a narrative mode. *David’s Story* reflects upon its own making through the amanuensis’s attempt to piece together a narrative about David’s personal life. We witness her typing on

her computer and she takes the reader through the process of trying to make sense of information from varied sources, including David's own unreliable memory. She occasionally also tells David and/or the reader about her dilemmas or choices as she scripts the story. Basically, this makes *David's Story* a novel about the act of turning events into narrative and makes the reader witness the act of writing. Likewise, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* also reflects on the idea of turning events into written history through the reader's witnessing of the writing of a book entitled "The World Was Silent When We Died", written by an author who is not immediately known to the reader. While focusing on how *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflect on moments of writing, chapter one also examines how Wicomb and Adichie contest the issue of authorial voice by investing the authority to write in a character usually marginalised in the writing of history. Both the coloured woman who writes "David's story" and Ugwu, an initially semi-literate house boy in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, belong to groups of people who are usually excluded from the conventional exercise of writing history.

In chapter two the focus shifts to examine how Wicomb and Adichie foreground women's stories that are often marginalised in narratives set in oppressive and war-torn contexts. Because of their settings under apartheid and in the traumatic historical upheaval of the Biafran war, Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town (YCGL)* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* are the novels that will be analysed here. I begin discussion in this chapter by drawing on Tiyaambe Zeleza's observation about how women are generally excluded from predominantly "malestream" African history (Zeleza 207). From a literary perspective, Zeleza's ideas are echoed by Florence Stratton whose book *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* aims at restoring women to African literary history which, even though no longer an exclusive club for men today, still remains dominated by male presence. Stratton's position is similarly advanced by other literary scholars such as Susan Andrade and

Elleke Boehmer. Together, these literary scholars' ideas on women, literature and the nation are used to read how various female characters enmeshed in oppressive or war-torn contexts negotiate their positionality. In *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* Boehmer underlines the gendered nature of nationalism when she argues that

As in the cross-section of a tree trunk that is nowhere unmarked by its grain – by that pattern expressing its history – so too is the nation informed throughout by gendered history, by the normative masculinities and femininities that shaped its growth over time. (Boehmer, *Stories* 3)

For Boehmer, nationalism is “cast in a gendered mould” (23, 33). Chapter two interrogates Boehmer's idea of “daughters of the nation” and analyses how Wicomb and Adichie critique nationalist histories through the stories of women who are often excluded from otherwise “malestream” (Zezeza 207) national histories. By revealing how experience varies even among classes of women themselves, however, Wicomb and Adichie question what Homi Bhabha terms the “progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion – the many as one – shared by organic theories of holism of culture and community and by theorists who treat gender, class or race as social totalities that are expressive of unitary collective experiences” (Bhabha, *Location* 142). Both Wicomb and Adichie are thus critical of “the very concepts of homogenous national cultures [...] or organic ethnic communities” (5).

Freud's concept of the uncanny and Bhabha's interpretation of the theory become useful in chapter three which focuses on the effects of memory and the intergenerational passing down of stories with special reference to the domestic space. As Heather Hewett notes in her reading of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, an observation that is true of much of Adichie's and Wicomb's fiction:

Adichie reveals a recurring concern with the postcolonial mayhem that underlies the domestic world of her characters and her observations about one family's private struggle extend into the realm of political metaphor. (Hewett 89)

In both *Playing in the Light* (PL) and *Purple Hibiscus* (PH) the private-public division is thrown into question as the boundary between them becomes so porous that the private becomes just another version of the public and vice versa. In both novels, the intergenerational effects of historical violence and racial oppression become manifest in uncanny or unhomely aspects of domestic spaces. Such unhomely moments relate, in Bhabha's terms, "the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha, *Location* 11). I also show in chapter three how in both *Playing in the Light* and *Purple Hibiscus* the gardens that families plant and tend become symbolic of the cultivation of certain forms of purity that the families strive to achieve: racial purity in the case of the Campbells in *Playing in the Light* and religious purity for the Achike family in *Purple Hibiscus*. Chapter three ends by focusing on how travel becomes a metaphor for healing as both Marion and Kambili in *Playing in the Light* and *Purple Hibiscus* respectively travel or plan to travel as a way of beginning anew after confronting their silenced stories.

The form of marginality which forms the main focus of the final chapter is one based on transnational existence. As Uwakweh has observed "[i]t is important in postcolonial discourses to examine the impact of migration or "exile" on creative consciousness, as it provides insight into the writer's ideological base" (Uwakweh 58). As I demonstrate, Wicomb's and Achidie's opinions about transnational existence and its impact on their creative imagination differs somewhat, though these opinions may be put into dialogue. Asked in an interview with Hein Willemsse about whether distance from South Africa affords her freedom to write about South Africa, Wicomb says she doubts "whether that distance affords her freedom" (Wicomb, "Conversation" 150-151). Responding to a similar question in a different interview with Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver, Wicomb acknowledges that "writing about South Africa is arguably a way of coping with absence and longing and a need

to belong” but that the idea of “absence feeding the imagination, or distance providing a better perspective”, to her, “sounds like a cliché” (Wicomb, “Writing and Nation” 183). What “sounds like a cliché” to Wicomb is however, pertinent and well acknowledged in Adichie’s case. In a radio interview with Guy Raz on America’s National Public Radio, Adichie concedes that America “gave me space and possibility that I could re-invent myself” and also that being in America gives her a better perspective to write about her home country. She tells Raz: “One has to let go of easy sentimentalist things and just be very clear-eyed when looking at home. Sometimes when I am [home], particularly in Lagos, I find Lagos to be a sensory overload and I can’t write about [it] when I am there and then I leave and it’s just better and clearer and in some ways easier to write about it” (Adichie, “Irritation”). She makes a similar point in another interview with Carl Wilkinson when she says that “Nigeria is the one place where I question myself the least” (Adichie “I Left Home”), emphasising rather indirectly how leaving Nigeria allows her the opportunity to question herself. Both authors, however, admit having been spurred into creativity at some point by a feeling of homesickness. In the two separate interviews cited above, one with Hunter and another with Meyer and Olver, Wicomb acknowledges being moved into writing by a feeling of nostalgia. She tells Hunter in an interview that she wrote *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* “out of intense homesickness” (Wicomb, Interview with Eva Hunter 87). She also tells Meyer and Olver while referring to *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* that “a cocktail of nostalgia and outrage dictated the subject matter of the book” (Wicomb, “Writing and Nation” 184). Earlier in the same interview with Meyer and Olver she hints at the idea that she might have been moved to write by “the desire to prove herself in a hostile environment” in which, as she tells Hunter in the above cited interview, her experience “was about being silent” (Wicomb, Interview with Eva Hunter 87). In that sense, writing for Wicomb becomes a way of overcoming fear, of “speaking, of unscripted speech” in a Scottish environment where she

feels unhomed (Wicomb, "Writing and Nation" 183). Adichie too admits being moved into creativity by a longing for home. In a conversation with Michael Ondaatje she admits to have been "very homesick, very nostalgic" when she wrote *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie cited in Ana 270). Reiterating her point about the possibility of self-reinvention that living in America affords her, Adichie states that she achieved her aim of reinventing Nigeria in *Purple Hibiscus* which she feels could not have been the case if she wrote the book in Nigeria (270). Through the reading of Wicomb's *The One That Got Away (TOTGA)* and Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck (TAYN)*, I analyse in chapter four how the two authors imagine transnational migration and existence from female characters' perspectives. In so doing, both Wicomb and Adichie insert women's stories in discourses of migration which, as Patricia Passer and Nkiru Nzegwu observe in separate instances, have for a long time focused exclusively on male migrants. In this chapter I draw on what Bhabha calls "the moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering" (Bhabha, *Location* 139). The scattering and gathering that Bhabha refers to here could be linked to Germani's earlier noted observation about the existence of a "world urban zone" and its periphery, often plagued by political and economic problems which force certain people to migrate to the "world urban zone". Yet, as I intend to show, this centre-periphery polarisation is also unsettled in the writings of Wicomb and Adichie. Taking the idea of the "unhomely" further, I explore how Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* and Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* portray the problem of living in what Bhabha refers to as "a boundary that is at once inside and outside, the insider's outsideness" (Bhabha, *Location* 14). In both texts the "unhomely" results from entering spaces that are at once alien but also familiar. When characters in Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* experience features of Glasgow that gesture towards Africa and South Africa, their homeland, they are drawn into uncanny experiences that offer unhomely readings of Scotland. Many of

Adichie's characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck* experience American society as unhomely, and her work examines how Nigerian migrants negotiate their positionality in relation to America but also in relation to each other. In the light of Bhabha's assertion that "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*" (Bhabha *Location 5*, italics original), which echoes Lee's idea of marginality as "a condition that offers opportunity for creativity" (Lee 47), I examine how liminal existence shapes characters' relationships to their past and to their new homes. I conclude chapter four by circling back to the issue of authorship discussed in chapter one.

Chapter One

Witnessing Authorship:

Writing History in Wicomb's *David's Story* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) have a major similarity: they both reflect on the act of writing history – the act of scripting the past. In each case, the reader becomes a witness, not only in relation to glimpsing unspeakable trauma, but also in relation to the act of writing. In *David's Story*, David enlists the services of a woman to help him write his personal story, which is linked with the history of the struggle against apartheid and the story of Andrew le Fleur, the Griqua chief, and his idea of Griqua nationalism. These stories, which form different strands of what is supposed to be “David’s story”, unravel as the amanuensis drafts the manuscript of what she describes as an “impossible story” (DS 212). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we witness an unnamed narrator struggling to write the story of Biafra. By the end of the novel, we realise that the writer of this story turns out to be Ugwu, the illiterate houseboy we meet in the first pages of the novel. Like Frederick Douglass, whose *Narrative* he reads while serving in the Biafran army, Ugwu rises from being a mere houseboy to becoming the author of an important book on Biafra that offers an insider’s eye on events during the war. In their respective texts, both Wicomb and Adichie focus on the flipside of Benedict Anderson’s idea of “reading and the nation”. Anderson argues that the growth of book publishing gave rise to “reading publics” (Anderson 40) that for him formed “the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (44). Drawing attention to the significance of *mise en abyme* scenes of reading in the formation of national communities, Anderson refers to a tale in which a young man finds a newspaper account of a destitute man dying in a street: “the imagined community” here is “confirmed by the doubleness of our reading about the young man reading” (37). Yet we cannot think about

readers and *mise en abyme* scenes of reading, without writers. In this chapter I argue that focusing on those who write may disrupt our imagined communities as we know them. Both *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* focus on the idea of writing history by staging acts of writing that offer new perspectives on notions of the rainbow nation and Nigeria as well as Biafra as imagined communities.

David's Story opens in a way that raises questions about the authorship and ownership of the story: "This is and is not David's Story" (*DS* 1). This is reiterated at the close of the novel when the amanuensis distances herself from the story she has been writing by disavowing any responsibility for the story. While this raises questions of whose story it is, it also draws the reader into witnessing the dilemmas of storytelling. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* similar questions are raised in the conversation between Ugwu and Richard, two characters associated with writing the story of Biafra. When Ugwu asks Richard whether he is still writing his book on Biafra Richard replies: "The war isn't my story really" (*HYS* 425). Ugwu agrees: "He had never thought it was really" (425). In this chapter I build on these dilemmas to explore how marginality is represented in relation to questions of authorship and the ownership of history. In both *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, authorial agency is ascribed to individuals who are excluded from the league of white middle class men usually vested with authority to author history. While *David's Story* foregrounds women in the authorship of history, *Half of a Yellow Sun* gives authorial agency an underling who is marginalised in terms of class.

As noted earlier, both *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* fall within the concept of "historiographic metafiction"¹ and both texts also exhibit self-reflexivity by employing

¹ I should point out here that both *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (and indeed Wicomb's and Adichie's other works of fiction analysed in this thesis) may be read as postcolonial gothic fiction particularly in the light of Diana Adesola Mafe's definition of postcolonial gothic fiction as fiction that "engages with colonial histories through gothic tropes – the horrific, the supernatural, the sublime, and so on", as fiction that is "literally haunted

mise-en-abyme scenes of writing. According to Peter Lunenfeld *mise-en-abyme* “is a mirroring of the text by the subtext” (Lunenfeld 54). It is, according to Gregory Ulmer, “a reflexive structuration, by means of which a text shows what it is telling, does what it says, displays its own making, reflects its own action” (Ulmer cited in Lunenfeld 54). In *David’s Story* “reflexive structuration” is achieved through the amanuensis’s constant comments and questions about the story she is writing, her decisions about what to include or exclude from the story as well as her invention of stories where she feels compelled to do so. *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflects upon its own making through a book entitled “The World Was Silent When We Died” (hereafter called “the book”), parts of which appear apparently at random in the novel. *Half of a Yellow Sun* deploys uncertainty about the author of “the book” as an important structural element of the novel: while “the book” seems to be linked with Richard for the larger part of the novel, it is ultimately attributed to Ugwu who writes his final dedication on the very last page of the novel.

The Amanuensis, Ugwu and Moments of Writing

Both the amanuensis in *David’s Story* and Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* represent marginalised authorial voices in the histories of colouredness and Biafra respectively. Through the amanuensis in *David’s Story*, Wicomb attempts to recover women’s voices, and in particular the voices of coloured women, silenced by patriarchy over centuries. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie’s aim is to recover voices marginalised in terms of both race and class,

by the colonial experience and its aftermaths” (22-23). Elsewhere, Judie Newman also asserts that gothic genre’s “ability to retrace the unseen and the unsaid of culture renders it peculiarly well-adapted to articulating the untold stories of the colonial experience” (85). Wicomb’s focus on apartheid’s racial politics and its impact on the coloured population in *David’s Story* and Adichie’s engagement with Nigeria’s colonial experience and its horrific aftermath in *Half of a Yellow Sun* invite a postcolonial gothic reading of the two texts. In this chapter, however, the two novels are read from the metafictional point of view precisely because I am interested in the texts’ focus on the moments of writing which also reflect on the textuality of the texts themselves as well as the respective histories they fictionalise. That said, scholarship on the postcolonial gothic elements especially in Adichie’s fiction has already started to appear, an example being Lilly Mabura’s article (which I cite in Chapter 3) entitled “Breaking Gods: An African Postcolonial Gothic Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*”.

as represented by Ugwu. By placing authorship in the hands of Ugwu, Adichie evidently intends to wrest authorial power from the West and the African middle class. One of the unique features of both *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* is how the two texts draw the reader into witnessing moments of writing as both the amanuensis and Ugwu write their respective stories. Apart from glimpsing unspeakable events within the anti-apartheid struggle and the Biafran war, the reader also witnesses the dilemmas both the amanuensis and Ugwu face as they write their respective stories. While in *David's Story* the amanuensis takes the reader through her writing process by describing and commenting on her writing, in *Half of a Yellow Sun* the reader is given a “fly-on-wall” position as Ugwu’s process of writing is described through present tense, third person narration. Both novels give the reader the impression of being in the moment of writing.

Critics have acknowledged how the complex structure of *David's Story* may be observed as early as the first sentence in the preface: “This is and is not David’s story” (*DS* 1). Notably, the use of the present tense in this first line draws us into the moment of “making” the story. Stéphane Robolin reads the opening sentence as setting “the tone for the rich ambiguity and remarkable tensions that follow” (Robolin 303). For Meg Samuelson, “the opening pages – the narrator’s preface – complicate notions of narrative beginnings and authenticity, alerting us to the unreliability of both the storyteller and his scribe” (Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* 102). In Wicomb’s own words, such an opening also foregrounds “the difficulty of telling that story” and that “the act of telling [such a story] produces more story” (Wicomb, “Washing” 22). The amanuensis continues in the preface that the story is one that David would have liked to have written himself, and that David “has indeed written some fragments – a few introductory paragraphs to sections, some of surprising irony, all of which I have managed to include in one way or another – but he was unwilling or unable to flesh out the narrative” (*DS* 1). The phrase “in one way or another” is significant here as it

alludes to the idea that the amanuensis could have edited or otherwise changed the fragments that she has included. At the end of the preface the acts of writing, redrafting and editing are again foregrounded as the reader becomes witness to the production of the text they are about to read:

It is a matter of some concern to me that David has not read all of the manuscript, although he was happy with what he saw and made only minor amendments in the interest of accuracy. It was much later, during the final draft and with an anxious publisher breathing down my neck, fearing that historical events would overtake us, that I took liberties with the text and revised considerably some sections that he had already approved. (3)

By witnessing this confession about drafting, the reader becomes aware of the ways in which attempts to “record” may inevitably involve taking “liberties” in the form of an imaginative “fleshing out” of the narrative, even if, as the amanuensis herself later claims, that story may amount to a “scrambled thing” (213).

In the text of *David's Story* too, the reader bears witness to the amanuensis's attempts to write the story, witnessing her frustrations, her impatience and sometimes excitement that evolve during and after her meetings and discussions with David. In the stories that David tells the amanuensis, or that she chooses to tell after her conversations with David, the stories of “the maverick Griqua chief” (DS 76) Andrew Le Fleur and that of David's MK comrade Dulcie are dominant. Both Le Fleur and Dulcie seem linked to David in ways that make them inseparable from David's personal story: Le Fleur is David's probable forebear and Dulcie is his comrade in the MK with whom he shares a kind of intimacy which he initially denies but reluctantly acknowledges at a later stage. The moments of writing that I dwell upon here have largely to do with these two important characters in *David's Story*.

To better appreciate the reader's role as witness to moments of writing in *David's Story*, the amanuensis's position in relation to David and the reader needs to be fleshed out. In the first place, an interesting similarity should be noted in the relationship between David

and the amanuensis, and between Le Fleur and his wife Rachel. In both cases, male subjects turn to women to help them articulate and record their ideas and, in both cases also, the women subvert men's authority. The amanuensis's task of "recording" things David tells her resembles Rachel's task of taking Le Fleur's dictation of letters and speeches. While Rachel subverts her husband's authority by, among other acts, withholding her authorial services through her body's resistance to writing, the amanuensis escapes any attempt to tame and domesticate her by moving beyond the terms of reference of her task, as the story she sets out to "record" outgrows the initial intention and becomes larger than David's personal story. As seen in the passage discussed above from the preface, she is contradictory about her role in the creation of the narrative – she says she was simply "recording" (like Rachel the secretary of Le Fleur), but at the same time she confesses to agency in having redrafted the manuscript before publication, and that David has not seen the final version of the story.

In *David's Story*, Rachel Susanna le Fleur represents how, over centuries, women's authority has often systematically "ceded to wifely submission" (Baiada 40). Confirmed through Rachel's character is Anne McClintock's assertion that "[i]n the chronicles of male nationalism, women ... are all too often figured as mere scenic backdrops to the big-brass business of masculine armies and uprisings" (McClintock 105) and hence they "are not seen as independent members of the national community, but as wives responsible to the nation through their service to individual men" (117). Rachel is thus an ineligible author in patriarchal terms, though (like Milton's daughters who transcribed *Paradise Lost* and read to their father in his blindness) she is employed as a secretary to her husband. Yet there are some ways in which Rachel subverts patriarchal authority as well as her husband's idea of Griqua nationalism.

In the shadow of the "divinely ordained" Griqua chief, Rachel becomes a vessel through which the prophesised rebuilding of the Griqua nation is to be fulfilled. Le Fleur saw

in her heart “a well of kindness, docility and above all obedience which would ensure that history unfolded without a hitch and according to [his] vision” (DS 45). Confirmed here is what Stéphane Robolin in his theory of “loose memory” calls “a significant parallel between the collective control of women and the management of memory such that societies predicated on racial and ideological purity require the control of both” (Robolin 308). Thus Le Fleur, with his nationalist project for a “pure” Griqua nation, must control the memory of colouredness (by claiming pure Griquaness) and women who are complicit in the story of coloured shame.

The “politicisation of women’s domestic role” (Wicomb, “Variety of Discourse” 37) ultimately dis-empowers women as human beings within nationalist discourses, as happens with Rachel. As Meg Samuelson notes, remembering the nation through female bodies leaves these bodies “disremembered and even dismembered, as their wombs are fetishised and detached from their speaking selves” (Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* 18). Ironically, the coloured womb, as represented by Rachel the *volksmoeder*, from which pure Griquaness is supposedly to be born, is the very womb that gave birth to “coloured shame” that Le Fleur wants to purge. It also belongs to the very body that cannot be trusted with public authority or authorship in patriarchal ideology. With Le Fleur’s ascendancy to power, Rachel must play the supportive wife to her visionary husband, becoming his secretary and archivist. As Anne McClintock would put it, Rachel’s “*political* relation to the nation is thus submerged in a *social* relation to a man through marriage” (McClintock 112, italics original). She becomes the “patient ear” on which he practices his “long sermons on the role of duty, industry, thrift, sobriety, and chastity in the upliftment of the people” (DS 46). She is not allowed any comment or opinion on her husband’s ideas for, according to Le Fleur, “making a fine pumpkin fritter did not mean she could comment on weighty matters” (90). As wife to the saviour of the Griquas Rachel has to be dignified: “she had to keep her head covered at all

times, was not to throw it back and roar with laughter even in private, and above all, was not to venture outdoors after sunset without an escort” (49). To borrow Meg Samuelson’s words in her reading of Zakes Mda’s *Heart of Redness*, dignity is here “framed in terms of domesticity” (Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* 97). Rachel becomes for her husband “a sweet innocent, trusting little thing” who knows “nothing of the world” (*DS* 84) and whose words (to borrow from Samuelson again) “are displaced in favour of the reproductive potential of her womb” (Samuelson 25). She becomes “thingified” like the Rain Sisters who are “shaped by God into perfect vessels for collecting and carrying back radical moisture from the rain-soaked Cape Peninsula with which to temper the radical heat of Namaqualand” (*DS* 153). Despite being central to Le Fleur’s vision of the Griqua nation, these important women are significantly excluded from the nation. While their bodies are used as “signs” by Le Fleur in his nationalist project, he refuses to hear what they have to say. Their words to him are nothing more than “frivolous women’s talk and gossip” (155).

Yet, despite her apparent meekness, Rachel subverts Le Fleur’s patriarchal control. Acting like an amanuensis of sorts, Rachel is positioned in such a way that she is able to form her own opinions about the idea of Griqua nationalism and especially about the so-called stain of colouredness that her husband strives to erase. She initially declines the role of secretary, saying “she was not good at reading and writing, that it was not her kind of thing” (47). Yet Le Fleur “looked at her sternly”, reminding her with finality that: “You have a duty to me, to God and to your people; your kind of thing is that duty and nothing else” (47). Situated between her husband and the racially-prejudiced white settlers, both of whose ideas she is sceptical about, Rachel has her own opinions about her husband’s idea of Griqua nation as well as about white settlers’ racism. Rachel’s response to her husband’s angry outbursts about greedy white capitalists “squealing like piglets in their filthy ponds” (52), for instance, may be read as a critique of Le Fleur’s idea of racial purity on which he bases his claim for a

separate Griqua nation. She tells him: “you shouldn’t speak like that of missionaries, remember your own grandpapa from across the waters” (52). Rachel’s evoking of Le Fleur’s European ancestry undercuts his claim for pure Griqua identity and thus renders his whole Griqua nationalism project suspect. Rachel’s opposition to Le Fleur’s racial politics becomes clearer as her husband dictates a congratulatory letter to the newly-elected prime minister of South Africa, General Louis Botha in which, besides asking for a separate Griqua homeland, he also castigates “kaffirs” whom he feels betrayed him. Rachel’s initial reaction to Le Fleur’s letter to General Botha is withholding her secretarial services. Her body refuses to perform the task she once performed diligently: “her wrist first twitched with pain, refusing to move across the page” (160) as she found his words to be unpalatable lies:

Even if she then chose to think of Andrew’s strange ideas, to try and carry on as before, her body resisted. She could no longer be his secretary, her wrists seized up in the very presence of a pen, and the smell of ink made her sneeze uncontrollably, scattering the great man’s reformed thoughts hither and thither, so that he would rather do without her services. (162)

When her husband announces his “solution to the great coloured question” as being “absolute separation” of “God’s stepchildren” from both white and black races, Rachel’s reaction is, once again, a critique of Le Fleur’s obsession with racial purity as noted above. We are told that Le Fleur found “God’s Stepchildren” to be “a fine phrase” and was elated when Millin published a novel of that title which he did not bother to read because he assumed that the book “would be an endorsement of his ideas [...] and so he gave it his fulsome praise” (161). Rachel is critical of Le Fleur’s acceptance of colouredness as shame (and his determination to purge this shame). As a woman she thinks “bitterly of woman’s labour, of the joy of birth that could never be shameful – never a problem yet there was Andrew, spreading the infection of shame” (162). Rachel’s sentiments are shared by David’s wife, Sally, who sees her husband’s search for his roots (which resembles Le Fleur’s agitation for pure Griquaness) as “all

fashionable rubbish” because their roots as coloured people “are all mixed up and tangled” (27). Like Rachel, who sees in colouredness a woman’s “joy of birth” (and not shame), Sally sees in the “neglected knot” of colouredness “the beauty of being coloured, that we need not worry about roots at all” (27).²

Rachel’s vulgar tirade at Le Fleur’s deliberate manipulation of facts for his nationalist ambitions is another moment when Rachel resists patriarchal control. Her outburst follows her disgust at Le Fleur’s interpretation of the Natives’ Land Act by which black people lost their land to white settlers. Le Fleur sees the act as a miracle, as his predicted punishment for “savage natives” (*DS* 94). Yet for Rachel the act is an abomination and her “repulsion signals her identification with the larger African community, rather than just Griqua or coloured” (Driver 229). She rages: “Miracle, my arse! It’s a disgrace, a sin, a bloody disaster; it’s the end of all predictions, the very death of us all” (*DS* 163). Calling to mind Krotoa Eva, who was known for her curses and obscenities, she goes on to utter “profanities and obscenities” (163) which, according to the amanuensis, cannot be printed: “Ugly, unimaginable words that made [Le Fleur] press his hands against his ears and stare at her in mute disbelief” (163). While earlier we saw Rachel resisting by withholding her authorial services, here her resistance comes in the form of an obscene verbal (rather than written) text that does not only oppose her husband’s ideas but also shocks and silences male authority. Ironically, however, her words are recorded or imagined in writing, by the amanuensis who is commissioned to write David’s story because of his own unwillingness/inability to write his own story.

² While Le Fleur is driven by his desire for essentialist racial identities, both Sally and Rachel, her 19th century foremother, show non-exclusionary acceptance of colouredness which in some way speaks to Wicomb’s own questions about this desire for roots. She asks:

What is this business about finding out who you are? Why have we turned this into a problem? When is it not a problem then? When you’ve got pure blood? Isn’t it replicating the old identities of apartheid? (Wicomb, Interview with Willemsse 147).

The amanuensis can be seen as occupying a unique position in relation to David on the one hand, and the reader on the other hand. Such positioning is described in Aryn Bartley's reading of *David's Story* as mirroring and critiquing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC's) "assumption that the act of public narration can be a tool for nonviolent social reconstruction or healing" (Bartley 108). In fact, for Bartley, *David's Story's* structure, "a compendium of fictionalized but often historically-based stories united into one larger narrative – mimics the form of the TRC's report" (108). I would like to extend Bartley's reading to focus on how the amanuensis's moments of writing mimic the TRC's testimony and witnessing. Particularly interesting in this reading of *David's Story* is the dialogic relationship "between a speaking interviewee and a listening and questioning interviewer" (Oboe 62) which describes the relationship between David and the amanuensis. The amanuensis also becomes some sort of interviewee if we consider the reader as a silent interviewer of sorts to whom the amanuensis reports, explains and justifies certain strategies and choices she makes as she writes the story. Indeed, the reader's status as "interviewer" or "witness" is called into being in the very preface with which the amanuensis opens the narrative. Thus the amanuensis occupies the dialogic space between David and the reader, playing both interviewer and interviewee. She hears testimony from David and at the same time she "testifies" before the reader.

As noted above, the foregrounding of the amanuensis's moments of writing reveals the textuality of both the novel and the stories that make up the novel. The moments of writing that I would like to focus on first are those that have to do with the story of the Griqua chief, Andrew le Fleur. Here I am interested in how the amanuensis transcends her designated task as recorder of what David tells her, to become a critic of stories about Le Fleur which David wants to be part of his story. The stories are mainly those that David heard from his grandmother (who is cast as Le Fleur's illegitimate child, making David Le Fleur's great

grandson) and also those that David unearths through his own research on the Griqua chief. As readers we cannot fail to notice how the amanuensis's scepticism mirrors Rachel's and Wicomb's scepticism about coloured nationalism for which the amanuensis also critiques Le Fleur. In an interview with Willemse, Wicomb justifies thus her choice of a female amanuensis:

Well, I have to have a woman for starters for that's part of it. When David tells his story is [sic] doesn't quite make sense from a woman's point of view. I know women are supposed to be illogical but my experience of the world is that actually *rationality resides in the feminine*. (Wicomb, "Conversation" 148, emphasis added)

Wicomb's feminisation of rationality here is her deliberate and provocative intrusion into the jealously guarded patriarchal domain of public discourse from which women have been systematically excluded. Wicomb admits that the amanuensis is "by no means a figure to be admired and relied upon" and as Willemse notes "she is in fact not constructing [David's] story, but her own story; ironizing his obsessions and creating her own obsession" (148). Since we are told that she is writing a story which "is by nature an incomplete story" that "can't be told" (144) or as Wicomb says in another interview with Ewald Mengel, a tale "which foregrounds the difficulty of telling that story" (Wicomb, "Washing" 22), we sympathise with the amanuensis's position.

Parts of the novel that deal with the story of Le Fleur can be put under one heading that the amanuensis gives us quite early in the novel: "THE GRIQUAS OF KOKSTAD IN ONE SHORT CHAPTER – AND OUR ARRIVAL AT THEIR HISTORY" (DS 32). This heading, especially the last part, gestures towards how the amanuensis and David sift through different sources to "construct" the "short chapter" on Griqua history. Narrated in the third person, but through David as a focaliser, this preamble to this section appears to have been written by the amanuensis from stories told by David about his research on this history, and the history itself from fragments that David himself has written. The section on Griqua

history begins with a preamble in which the reader witnesses David, in a guest house in Kokstad, reading Francis Trevelyan Buckland's *Curiosities of Natural Science*. Coincidentally, David opens the book at a page where reference is made to Georges Cuvier, a French naturalist and zoologist, who was directly involved in scientific scrutiny of Sarah Baartman's genitalia. We are told that David's first attempt at writing his story was also a piece on Cuvier and Baartman, a protest against Baartman's humiliation in which he scripts Cuvier as "a portly, concupiscent gentleman with a deficient posterior" (34). The amanuensis reports to the reader that David's piece on Cuvier and Baartman was irrelevant to David's story, "a digression from the real subject of his narrative" (34). The narrative of David in Kokstad breaks off as she intrudes into the narrative, asking David: "And what... is the real subject of your story?" (34). Yet David is not even sure about the real subject of his story. David does not want to say he is the subject of the story but instead shifts the focus to such issues as problems in the movement in the wake of the establishment of the ANC in the country. When the amanuensis reminds him "about the previous answers [to this question] about the trip to Kokstad, about the Griquas, the maverick chief Le Fleur, about his own ancestors, who were among Le Fleur's converts in Namaqualand", he "[hides] behind impatience" and will not or cannot say how his stories are connected (34).

Elusive or even inscrutable connections between different stories complicate the tale the amanuensis is trying to tell. As she confesses to the reader in a remarkable passage that brings into view the act of her assembling the narrative through words typed into her computer: "we skirt about a subject that slithers out of reach, and I am reminded of the new screen saver on my computer that tosses the text hither and thither, prettily arranging and replacing, until the letters, transformed, slip into fluid, abstract shapes of mesmerising colour" (34-35). Notably, the words "hither and thither" are repeated at the end of this preamble to the history of the Griqua: "We banter about my kind, skirting about Dulcie, a

protean subject who slithers hither and thither, out of reach” (35). Through her choice of words, the amanuensis gives away or suggests her belief that Dulcie is probably the hidden subject of David’s story.

When we come to read the history of the Griquas of Kokstad after the preamble, we realise that the history has been fictionalised. In the preamble, still trying to assemble the “short history” of the Griqua, the amanuensis and David conspire to deceive the reader of this history by creating a link between Cuvier, whom they earlier excised from David’s tale, and Madame la Fleur, a woman who lived a century after Cuvier but whom the amanuensis and David decide to make Cuvier’s house keeper. When we thus read of Madame la Fleur, with whom the history of the Griqua begins, we are aware of the deceptive writerly process that has displaced her in time, while presenting her story as part of a “history” that claims to be true. Since in this version Madame la Fleur’s son, Eduard, is raised by Cuvier there is also a suggestion now that Eduard could be Cuvier’s illegitimate son and that David himself could be the descendant of Cuvier (Driver, cited in Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* 108). The amanuensis also later directs the reader to Eduard’s presence as recorded in a novel, making him an intertextual wanderer whose presence within the history of the Griqua humorously casts into doubt all the boundaries between history and fiction:

The rest of Eduard’s story can be found in Mrs. Sarah Gertrude Millin’s narrative about miscegenation, although the reader should note that she has taken several liberties with the tale, including casting the boy as an Englishman and adding some years to his age – in other words, that her narrative is as unreliable as David’s. (*DS* 38)

Apart from blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction, this reference to Sarah Gertrude Millin’s infamous novel *God’s Stepchildren* – which is represented here as a history with which Millin “has taken several liberties” rather than as a novel - and the amanuensis’s snide comment that Millin’s narrative is “unreliable”, recalls Wicomb’s own take on the text. In an

interview with Willemse, Wicomb admits to “an enduring obsession” with Millin and that *God’s Stepchildren* “infuriates [her]” (Wicomb, “Conversation” 147).

After focusing on what could be described as the roots of colouredness, the amanuensis turns to stories about Le Fleur, who is preoccupied with replacing “coloured shame” with “pure” Griquaness, a notion upon which he strives to build a separate Griqua nation. The amanuensis seems to rely largely on David for most of the stories about the Griqua chief, and David himself seems to rely on his grandmother’s stories about the chief, which he also supplements with his own research. As noted earlier, David’s obsession with Le Fleur has to do with a possibility that he could in fact be one of Le Fleur’s descendants, an idea hinted at by his grandmother, Ouma Ragel, whose birth circumstances suggest that she could be Le Fleur’s illegitimate child. This possibility is also suggested in the family tree at the beginning of *David’s Story*, in which Ragel’s mother is linked to Le Fleur through a dotted line (rather than a solid line denoting marriage). Yet it is clear from an early stage in the novel that the amanuensis is sceptical about Ouma Ragel’s stories about the Griqua chief, whom she casts as a mythical-cum-religious legend with divinely sanctioned powers. Employing the metaphor of food, the amanuensis imagines a young David tagging at his grandmother’s skirt asking for more and more of Ouma Ragel’s stories about the Griqua chief which “indelibly flavoured the story in the child’s memory” (*DS* 103). The domestic is here transformed into a place where public stories are (re)invented and passed on to younger generations. Divulging the fictional status of history or truth itself, the amanuensis suggests that the many times Ouma Ragel tells young David about Le Fleur construct a certain form of truth in David’s young mind since according to her, “truth far from being ready-made, takes time to be born, slowly takes shape in the very act of repetition, of telling again and again” (103). For the amanuensis, the stories that David heard from his grandmother about the Griqua chief were “seasoned and smoked in Ouma’s cooking shelter to last forever” (103).

The amanuensis's scepticism seems to be confirmed when David brings some incomprehensible scripts, apparently written by Le Fleur, which he needs help to read. The typescript, which is "indecipherable", as if "written by an illiterate madman" (145), seems to prove the amanuensis's suspicion that Le Fleur's heroic status is but a mythical construction. The "strange mixture of English and Afrikaans, the outlandish syntax, the madness that dripped from the ill-formed, fallen branches of those sentences" (145) all seem to confirm the suspicion of the amanuensis that Le Fleur was not necessarily a grand leader but a somewhat crazy zealot turned into a legendary figure by his followers. The amanuensis's suggestion that Le Fleur's incomprehensible writings were created by a male amanuensis after Rachel withdrew her labour recalls Wicomb's feminisation of sanity and rationality.

Moments of writing Dulcie's story are tenser emotionally for the amanuensis than those about Le Fleur, owing to the violence to which Dulcie seems (in truth and/or in the mind of the amanuensis) to have been subjected, and the fact that the amanuensis develops quite an obsession with both Dulcie and David. Her obsession with Dulcie is partly encouraged by what the amanuensis believes to be secrets about David's possibly romantic relationship with Dulcie that he has decided to keep from her. These "secrets" encourage the amanuensis to probe more into Dulcie's story until later her interest in Dulcie becomes obsessive. It is also possible that the amanuensis's insistence on establishing whether there is a romantic relationship between David and Dulcie has to do with her own attraction to David, and even possibly to Dulcie. The reader recalls that in the preface, the amanuensis admits to her relationship with David becoming more intimate as they worked on the story but she disavows any suggestions that it may have affected her work. She says:

We have never been close friends – possibly his very reason of choosing me as a collaborator – although we have since developed a curious, artificial intimacy. I would hate a reader to think that my failure to provide facts, to bridge the gaps in the narrative, has something to do with the nature of our relationship. (2)

The amanuensis's "artificial intimacy" with David appears to have fanned her interest in David's love life, particularly regarding his relationship with Dulcie. In all the eight sections in which she writes about Dulcie, the reader notices that none is without reference to Dulcie's supposedly romantic relationship with or attraction to David, which seems to stand in for her own. Significant in these sections though, is how the reader witnesses the amanuensis writing what largely seem to be her own thoughts about Dulcie and her supposedly romantic relationship with David. In the first section she imagines Dulcie longing for a nice man and David is mentioned as one possibility of such a man (19). In the second, David has to deny "anything irregular" (80) between himself and Dulcie as the amanuensis pressures him to confess. In the third section the amanuensis imagines Dulcie "after a tortured night" longing for David to see her "swollen heart" and to "feel his own drawn into its embrace of light" (115). After David tells her about the first day he met Dulcie and how they worked together setting up a UDF branch in Kliprand, the amanuensis wants to know whether afterwards David saw "much of her in town" (133). She finally gets David to admit that he and Dulcie "like each other, are attracted to each other" although there is nothing "physical" (137). Apparently, David "has no patience with that kind of messing up" and says that he believes Dulcie too "could not possibly have that kind of interest in him" (137). The amanuensis persists and wants to know if people in the Movement "are immune to physical relationships, to passions" (137). After arguing about the (un)representability of Dulcie the amanuensis reports how David looked "into me, with irises ghostly green" (151) suggesting what the amanuensis perceives to be David's attraction to her, by recalling Le Fleur's gaze "into" David's great grandmother, Antjie, a gaze that led to Antjie's pregnancy. When the amanuensis writes about Dulcie as having "an obsession with our hero, who cannot, as a man of honour, submit to that which he has produced in her" (183), the reader begins to wonder if the amanuensis is not talking about her own feelings. After all, the amanuensis acknowledges

her obsession with both David and his story becoming “dependent on seeing [him]” and feeling “uneasy when he does not keep in touch” (186). In one of her discussions with David she digresses from the topic of their discussion to think about “how extraordinarily good he looks when he smiles” (194). In fact Dulcie’s feelings, as described by the amanuensis in the following citation, read like the amanuensis’s own feelings about David: “She understands the question of honour, but what she cannot endure is his silence, the primitive fear that to speak of something will bring it into being, let loose the tokolos” (183). The amanuensis’s piece on “obsession and silence” which David rejects as “an absurd exercise in style” (198) might as well be speaking about her own obsession not just with Dulcie, but with David as well.

Owing to David’s silence about Dulcie which clearly frustrates the amanuensis, it would not be far-fetched to conclude that the story of Dulcie that the amanuensis relays to us is largely the amanuensis’s creation. In five of the eight sections focusing on Dulcie, the amanuensis (in some cases echoing David) clearly speaks of Dulcie as a person whose story cannot be known and therefore cannot be represented or written down. To a larger extent Dulcie’s story is shrouded in secrecy because David is unwilling to give out more information about her life to the amanuensis for fear of saying things the amanuensis is not supposed to know. One is inclined to believe that the torture of women within the ranks of the Movement is an example of “classified” information that must be kept within the Movement. It is highly unlikely therefore that the amanuensis heard these stories, so graphically rendered, from David. Since she confesses to inventing certain parts of the story, the reader (without denying that such incidents might have actually happened), is inclined to believe that parts of stories about Dulcie’s torture are largely from the amanuensis’s imagination.

The first time we encounter Dulcie, this is clearly a scene in the imagination of the amanuensis, who writes of Dulcie washing something “sticky red” from her hands, possibly

because the amanuensis has thought about Dulcie while washing her own hands and rubbing olive oil into them afterwards in her own home and has then sat at her desk to write (18-19). Clearly there is an imagined identification with Dulcie as the amanuensis strains to flesh out her story, which David claims she “would get quite wrong” (18), presumably if he did tell her anything substantial. Echoing perhaps her own feelings, the amanuensis writes that Dulcie’s body longs for someone who will take her hands “and kiss each fingertip”, a nice man “who will ask no questions about her left thumb with its crisscross patterned-tattoo” (18). Frustrated by David’s inability or unwillingness to be forthcoming about Dulcie, and about the “mystique” that subsequently surrounds Dulcie, the amanuensis uses the violent verb “crush” to express her desire to know more about Dulcie, suggesting the violence of a truth-seeking writing process, such as that of history, that requires facts:

Dulcie is surrounded by a mystique that I am determined to crush with facts: age, occupation, marital status, what she wears, where she was born and raised - necessary details from which to patch together a character who can be inserted at suitable points into the story. (78)

The amanuensis informs the reader that David protests “weakly” about the relevance of Dulcie’s story to his, which the amanuensis construes as betraying “the belief that some trace of [her story] is needed for his to make sense” (78). Despite the amanuensis’s persistence, David does not answer any question pertaining to Dulcie. The amanuensis is left to imagine stories as she confesses to the reader: “Since there is little to go by other than disconnected images, snippets of Dulcie, I must put things together as best I can, *invent*, and hope that David’s response will reveal something” (80, emphasis added). Her writing about Dulcie is thus initially a provocation, aimed at David as reader, in order for him to reveal more. These words are followed immediately by what appears to be the amanuensis’s invented story (or at least part of it) about Dulcie being tortured by unknown “men in balaclavas” (80). David’s reaction to the amanuensis’s story - he stares at her “impassively, shaking his head, refusing to speak” (82) - neither confirms nor denies this narrative. In response he simply tells her

about Dulcie's experience in a camp in Botswana when she was dared by her comrades to collect honey from a bees' nest and ended up being severely stung by the bees and swelling into "a roly-poly" (83).

The amanuensis, presumably to provoke David further, writes of her suspicion that Dulcie is not real, that she is "a decoy" who "does not exist in the real world" and that "David has invented her in order to cover up aspects of his story" (124). This strategy yields some results, as, to prove that Dulcie indeed exists, David tells the amanuensis about the first time he met with Dulcie. Yet he deflects the amanuensis's probing about what she suspects to be a romantic relationship between the two. David says he will write something about Dulcie, but instead he writes something on Baartman. Something similar happens earlier in the novel when he tries to write about Baartman but ended up writing about Cuvier. The amanuensis, who was looking forward to receiving this piece of writing on Dulcie, is disappointed by David's story on Baartman. To the amanuensis this is "an exercise in avoidance" by David (33). She thus misses the possibility that perhaps David is hinting at a link between the abuse of Baartman and an abuse of Dulcie - a link the reader of the text is left to make.

In one of their arguments over the details of Dulcie's life, David gives the amanuensis liberty to do as she pleases with Dulcie's story. Despite acknowledging that Dulcie is "a kind of scream somehow echoing through my story" (134), David confesses that "even if a full story were to be figured out by someone, it would be a story that cannot be told, that cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters" (151). Dulcie therefore "cannot be cast as a story" (158). When the amanuensis argues that "there is no such thing [...] as a story that cannot be told", David sneers: "Then it remains for you to show how it is done" (151). This is where the amanuensis possibly takes the cue to invent, fabricate and reorganise from "thin anecdotes, the sorry clutch of hints and innuendos [that] do not lead to anything" (151). As earlier noted, by working the "disconnected images, snippets of Dulcie"

into a story, she hopes to provoke David into revealing something about Dulcie (80), which does not happen, however. By the end of the novel the story that the amanuensis's efforts yield is largely about the impossibility of writing Dulcie.

The amanuensis clearly struggles with linking the different periods, characters and stories in David's story, using a domestic image to describe the ways in which these narratives may relate to each other: "a stack of so many dirty dinner plates that will not come unstuck as each bottom clings to another's grease" (197). The task of working through this "stack" of stories leaves the amanuensis confused. She confesses: "I no longer know which story I am trying to write. Who could keep going in a straight line with so many stories, like feral siblings, separated and each running wild, chasing each other's tales?" (201). From a domestic image of dirty dishes, the images become unhomey, wild and feral. What becomes of David's story is exactly what the amanuensis feared would happen. Her "inventions on the page" indeed "turn into a demon, an uncontrollable tokolos" that unsettles nationalist stories of colouredness and the struggle (202). As for David, he not only becomes disillusioned that his story "is full of old women" but also regrets trusting this "delicate job" to one whose "head is filled with middle-class, liberal bullshit" (197).

Notably, the novel ends with an image of the amanuensis sitting at her desk in front of her computer, confronted by her inability to turn "this scrambled thing" into a story:

My screen is in shards.

The words escape me.

I do not acknowledge this scrambled thing as mine.

I will have nothing more to

do with it.

I wash my hands of this story. (213)

Echoing her imagining of Dulcie washing her hands, the amanuensis now wishes to sever any authorial connection with the story. However, despite her claim that she will “have nothing more to do with it”, the amanuensis remains closely associated with “this scrambled thing” (213) precisely because, after taking the reader through every step of writing the story, the reader associates the story with her. She may disown the story, but she has taken up a position from which women, and coloured women in particular, have mostly been excluded. Her position opens up and challenges the monologism of the stories of the freedom struggle, nationalism and coloured identity, fulfilling Wicomb’s aim “to show that there is not one definite truth about that history” (Wicomb, “Washing” 24).

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the reader occupies a similar position of witnessing authorship. Here however, the reader occupies a “fly-on-the-wall” position in relation to the “he” who is writing “the book”, and the identity of the “he” writing remains uncertain until the final page of the novel. The question of authorship in *Half of a Yellow Sun* has received attention from a number of critics who focus on Ugwu’s rise as an author. This can be seen, for instance, in Amy Novak’s essay entitled “Who Speaks? Who Listens?: The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Novels”, in John Marx’s essay, “Failed-State Fiction”, in Joke De Mey’s “The Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*” and in a chapter entitled “An abnormal ordinary: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*” from Brenda Cooper’s book *A New Generation of African Writers*. For Marx, by making Ugwu the author, Adichie delegates “the authority to compose the definitive book on Biafra to a home-schooled refugee” (Marx 599). As Marx points out, pivotal to Ugwu’s growth into a writer is Odenigbo’s house, which is a library of sorts and also a space where “intellectual salons” (by which Marx refers to regular get-togethers involving Odenigbo and Olanna and their fellow academics) are held. These “intellectual salons”, according to Marx, transform a domestic space into “the setting for a kind of ad hoc

professional training” (611). In such a transformed domestic space, Ugwu is raised “as a son” and supervised “like a promising graduate student” by his “master”, Odenigbo, and by Olanna (615). Following from Marx, De Mey also notes how through these “intellectual soirées” (De Mey 30) Ugwu learns important history lessons.

Another issue the above critics dwell on in relation to Ugwu’s authorship is his involvement in the gang rape of a bar girl. For both Marx and De Mey, the incident spurs Ugwu on as a writer as he is determined to atone for his involvement in the rape. “Rather than undermining his authority” notes Marx, “the memory of the rape helps make Ugwu into a writer” (Marx 619). Cooper on the other hand, finds problematic not only the passing of authorship from Richard to Ugwu, but also, and more importantly, Adichie’s handling of the rape incident in the novel. For her, the passing of authorship from Richard to Ugwu means that *Half of a Yellow Sun* fails to sustain a position it has all along been propagating, namely that a white man could become Igbo. As for the rape scene, Cooper finds it highly problematic that Ugwu atones for his role in the rape by becoming the author of the book. To her, by resolving the rape incident “in favour of the penitent male subject, in the interests of an African cultural and national healing project” means that “Adichie has compromised her feminism” in the novel (Cooper 148). Thus, “[i]n the fanfare of metamorphosis of the devil penis into the liberating pen, the violation of the woman in the bar, in all its stark reality, disappears from view” (150).

While appreciating aspects of Cooper’s argument, I would like to read the above issues differently. Firstly, Richard becomes a “white Igbo man” in the extent to which he becomes fluent in Igbo, fully involved in Igbo politics, and towards the end of the novel he becomes part of Kainene’s family. Yet Richard is constantly reminded of his outsider status throughout the novel and his own weaknesses as an outsider combine with personal weaknesses to work against him in his efforts to write the Biafra story. Through his failure to

write the story, Adichie raises important questions about who should and should not be writing about Africa. Secondly and more significantly, however, I believe that the rape incident in the novel helps us to re-think Manichean representations of perpetrators *versus* victims. De Mey has observed that “the rape shows that in times of war, the line between perpetrator and victim is never clear as an outsider would believe it to be” (De Mey 31). I would like to extend De Mey’s line of thought by arguing that in her attempt to wrest authorial power over the African story from the West, Adichie does not create the stereotypical pitiful suffering war victim. While showing the atrocities of war, including rape (which for Cooper re-affirms the western stereotype of Africa as barbaric), Adichie draws the reader into appreciating the intricate interiority and complexity of several characters, thereby permitting what Njabulo Ndebele, in an essay entitled “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary” (1986), calls “the sobering power of contemplation, of close analysis, and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness, and limitation” (Ndebele, “Rediscovery” 150).

Ndebele’s essay cited above is evoked in the title of Cooper’s essay on *Half of a Yellow Sun*, “An Abnormal Ordinary”, and Cooper also cites Ndebele’s essay in the introduction to her book. Yet she does not mention it in her analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In fact, as I shall argue, despite Cooper’s evocation of Ndebele’s “rediscovery of the ordinary” in the title of her chapter, her final opinion on *Half of a Yellow Sun* as regards the rape incident seems to reaffirm some of the pitfalls of protest writing that Ndebele critiques. In “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary”, which deals with protest writing and its alternatives in South Africa, Ndebele calls for a change of focus from “the spectacle” of oppression to the intricacies of the everyday under oppressive circumstances. Ndebele observes that “[t]he visible symbols of the overwhelmingly oppressive South African social formation appear to have prompted over the years the development of a highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form of literary representation” (Ndebele, “Rediscovery” 150). This tradition is, among other

things, “demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority” (150). A focus on the ordinary under oppressive circumstances may reveal, among other things, oppression of victims by fellow victims such as the rape incident in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In fact, Ndebele’s short story “Fools” set during apartheid, also features a black on black rape which demonstrates precisely the problem of “victims spit[ting] upon victims” (Ndebele, “Fools” 278). In that story, Zamani, a respectable teacher in Charterston Township, rapes Mimi, one of his former students who has just matriculated, on a night when she comes to his house to thank him for the important role he played in her success. Mimi’s rape is similar to that of the girl in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in the sense that both women are raped by people who ought to protect them: a teacher and mentor in the case of Mimi, and the Biafran soldiers (defenders of Biafran people and sovereignty) in the case of the girl in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In both stories, Ndebele and Adichie take the reader into the minds of the perpetrators in order to show how the perpetrators themselves are victims of oppression and of their own violence. Zamani is “too fertile with shame” to face the public (Ndebele, “Fools” 196) after raping Mimi. Likewise, Ugwu hates himself for his role in the rape. He climaxes into “a self-loathing release” (*HYS* 365) and afterwards he is perpetually haunted by the image of the girl looking at him with “calm hate” (365). Abandoned in both stories is the image of a black hero, defiant towards the oppressor, that dominates protest writing. Such a black hero is often caricatured as benevolent and morally upright, qualities that are set in contradistinction with the oppressor’s meanness and violence. In that respect, both Zamani and Ugwu would be undeserving of any hero status in protest writing, and Cooper’s wish for a morally-unsullied hero seems to echo and affirm this aspect of protest writing. As such the “evil-Boer” versus “good black man” kind of polarisation noted by Ndebele in South African protest writing becomes reproduced in the “evil male rapist” vs. “innocent, vulnerable female victim” implied in Cooper’s feminist critique of the rape incident. Ugwu’s reluctance to participate in the rape and his

subsequent remorse are not taken into proper account by Cooper who considers these only as Adichie's defence for her "problematic role model for post-war Nigeria" (Cooper, *New Generation* 150).

I would like to argue that the wish for a "good black hero" implied in Cooper's position ignores the complexity and interiority of Ugwu's character as moulded by his oppressive circumstances. I also find Mahmood Mamdani's words on the aim behind his book *When Victims Become Killers* speaking directly to Adichie's handling of the rape incident. Says Mamdani: "I thought it important to understand the humanity of the perpetrator, as it were, to get under the skin of the perpetrator – not to excuse the perpetrator and killing, but to make the act 'thinkable,' so as to learn something about us as humans" (Mamdani 14). Such sentiments can also be extremely useful in reading Adichie's portrayal of Ugwu's involvement in the rape, especially considering that the character of Ugwu is based on Mellitus, Adichie's family's houseboy during the war of whom her mother spoke highly. Adichie is aware that besides being such a good and helpful person Mellitus "must have been flawed and human" (Adichie, "Stories of Africa" 5).

Given its *mise-en-abyme* focus on the process of writing, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, like *David's Story*, is highly metafictional, and *mise-en-abyme* scenes of writing become part of the project of questioning nationalist history. *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflects upon its own making by staging the writing process of "the book" which appears randomly at the end of certain chapters in the novel under sections titled "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died". Notably, in these sections (eight in total) the reader is not given the actual text of "the book", but fragments which show an unnamed writer going through the process of selecting material and writing the book. Thus, as readers we are drawn into the very moment of writing, thereby becoming witnesses to the writing of history. Unlike the rest of the novel, which is narrated in the past tense and divided into chapters each focalised by a different

character who is clearly identified, the sections about “the book” are narrated in the present tense, drawing us into the act of writing. Moreover, the third person “he” in these sections is not identified until the end of the novel.

For a large part of the novel, the reader is under the impression that “the book” is being written by Richard. This is so because the early sections about “the book” are situated at the end of chapters focalised through Richard, and from the first time the reader meets Richard in the third chapter of the novel, he is always associated with writing, either drafting his manuscripts on Igbo art or attempting to write a novel. Later on in the novel, he is also involved in writing to promote the Biafran cause. By the thirtieth chapter of the novel, the reader is convinced that it is Richard who is writing the book because in this chapter he comes up with the title “The World Was Silent When We Died”. On the last page of the novel, however, the reader realises that Ugwu is the one writing “the book” as the novel ends with his subversive Robinson Crusoe-like dedication: “For Master, my good man” (*HYS* 433). In Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Crusoe tells Friday to call him Master, indicating Friday’s position of servitude, and he refers to Friday as “my man Friday.” Crusoe’s relationship with Friday bears resemblance to that between Odenigbo and Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as Ugwu is Odenigbo’s servant, even though, ironically, both Ugwu and Odenigbo are African. Showing his internalisation of Western education, Odenigbo calls Ugwu “My good man”, recalling Crusoe’s reference to Friday. At the close of the novel, Ugwu dedicates his book to his master: “*For Master, my good man*” (433, italics original). In this mimicry of Odenigbo, Ugwu acknowledges the language and knowledge taught to him by Odenigbo, yet the power relationship between Ugwu and Odenigbo has now changed.

Questions about ineligibility to author African history are foregrounded in *Half of a Yellow Sun* as Richard’s exit as an authorial voice in the Biafra story can be read in

accordance with Adichie's aim of making a point about who should write stories of Africa. Adichie's grappling with this question constitutes her engaging with what she calls "The Danger of a Single Story." In her speech of that name recorded at TED Global, Oxford, in 2009, Adichie highlights how one sided stories about people and places creates stereotypical images of those people and places. Striking in her speech is the relationship she makes between power and storytelling, a theme inseparable from the question of authorship explored in this chapter. She says:

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is [...] an Igbo word that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world and it is *nkale* – a noun that loosely translates into "to be greater than another". Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principal of *nkale*. *How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.* Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person but to make it the definitive story of that person. (Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story", my emphasis)

Such influence of power relations on writing/telling stories produces the "knowing subject vs. passive object" binary with the former wielding epistemological power over the latter. In recent times this binary is reproduced in many narratives of war in modern day Africa in which the West usually assumes the position of the "knowing subject". According to Adichie such narratives "reduce Africa to a simple story and *often neglect African actors*" (Adichie, 'African 'Authenticity'' 44-45, my emphasis). Adichie's juxtaposition of Richard and Ugwu as author figures brings into play questions of positionality and authority/authenticity in telling a traumatic story. Throughout the novel, Richard struggles to write the story/history of Biafra as the narrative demonstrates his failure to "master" the African story.

One of the reasons why Richard fails to write the Biafran story is because he is an outsider. At first, he does not allow his outsider status to affect his work, especially when he wrote for Biafra's Propaganda Directorate. However, later on in the novel, he is constantly

reminded, overtly or otherwise, that he still remains an outsider regardless of his full involvement in Biafra affairs. Throughout the novel, Adichie shows how despite being deeply involved in the war, the perspectives of people like Richard are affected by their racially-privileged position which compromises their accounts of the war with an element of voyeurism. Richard is first reminded of his being an outsider at Odenigbo's house by Okeoma. In their conversation about his prospective book, Richard tells Okeoma about his fascination with Igbo-Ukwu art, "such marvellous complexity in the bronzes" and he finds it "quite incredible that these people had perfected the complicated art of lost-wax casting during the time of the Viking raids" (*HYS* 111). Okeoma reads in Richard's fascination and his use of Europe as a frame of reference in evaluating African art, a kind of surprise "as if you never imagined *these people* capable of such things" (111, italics original). Richard is disturbed especially by "a disdainful distrust" in Okeoma's eyes accusing him of being condescending towards African art.

Richard is also reminded of his outsider status by Madu and Kainene. In extending his invitation to Richard to write for the Propaganda Directorate,³ Madu clearly tells Richard that the invitation was not because Madu considered him as one of them but because he was a white man and therefore could be taken seriously by the western world. He openly tells Richard:

Look, the truth is that this is not your war. This is not your cause. Your government will evacuate you the minute you ask them to. So it is not enough to carry limp branches and shout *power, power* to show that you support Biafra. If you really want to contribute, this is the way that you can. (305 italics original)

³ Richard's invitation by Madu to write for the Propaganda Directorate mirrors that of Frederick Forsyth, who, after being fired by the BBC for telling the truth about the Biafrans' unwavering resolve in the war, was welcomed by the Biafran leader Ojukwu who offered him every imaginable assistance to help promote Biafra's cause in Western/European media. See Ken Waters, "Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War" *The Catholic Historical Review*, 90.4, 2005: 700. Colin Williamson in the novel also has close resemblance to Frederick Forsyth. Williamson in the novel left the BBC because his editors were supportive of Nigeria (*HYS* 308).

Earlier on Richard had felt that Madu's "we" as he recounted Biafra army's successes was "edged with exclusion" (304), that he was not part of the "we". Yet Madu believes a white man writing from Biafra to promote the Biafra cause is likely to be taken seriously. Thus he urges Richard to write to let the world know "the truth of what is happening, because they cannot simply remain silent while we die" (305), words that become the title of the book that Richard is apparently writing on Biafra.

When Richard tells Kainene about "The World Was Silent When We Died", the title of the book he intends to write, she picks on Richard's use of "we" in the title. Kainene's question evokes the point above: that Richard's racially privileged position undermines his identification with the tragedy, which renders the inclusive "we" in his title problematic. He cannot appropriate the loss as his because, as is the case with other whites, he is protected. Thus the "we" in his suggested title is undermined by the voyeuristic undertones implied by his privileged position. Later on in the story, Richard realises that, like other western journalists, he is somehow detached from the realities of Biafra. His own calmness amidst chaos and massacre frightens him into feeling like a voyeur. He realises that "he had not feared for his own life, so the massacres became external, outside of him; he had watched them through the detached lens of knowing he was safe" (168). After such realisation, it becomes difficult for Richard to write about the events. When he tries to write the gruesome killing of Nnaemeka, a customs officer at the airport in Kano, he finds his sentences "risible", "too melodramatic" which "sounded just like the articles in the foreign press" (168). He suddenly feels detached from the event so that to write it demands that he "reimagine it, and he was not sure if he could" (168). He begins to note in his own writing that "hollowness" he noted in accounts by other foreign journalists. The "echo of unreality" which he associated with these foreign journalists' articles now resonates through his own writing. We may conclude that his own recognition of this position leads him into giving up the writing of the

Biafra story. He is not insider enough to claim authorship of the story of Biafra. Despite his involvement during the war, he still remains “a modern day explorer of the Dark Continent” (62).

Ugwu’s rise to authorship, as has been observed by Marx, De Mey and Novak, is in keeping with Adichie’s aim “to make a strongly-felt political point about who should be writing stories of Africa” (Adichie, “Stories of Africa” 6). Novak sees Ugwu’s rise to authorship as “marking the exit of the Western subject from narrative control” of the African story (Novak 40). For Marx, Ugwu’s rise to authorship is the rise of a “nonaccredited expert” and “unaccredited analyst” of failed states (Marx, “Failed-State Fiction” 623, 628) as Odenigbo and his learned friends withdraw into silence. By assuming the role of narrator of trauma, De Mey also notes, this “unaccredited analyst” bears witness to Biafran trauma which is also his way of “taking back the right to his own history, and trying to present it in his own words on paper” (De Mey 26). Ugwu carries the burden of writing what Chinua Achebe has called the “sudden big traumatic experience” (Achebe, “On Biafra” 32) on behalf of other characters in the novel and also as an echo of Adichie herself, who found *Half of a Yellow Sun* “an emotionally exhausting book to write, and [...] often stopped just to cry” (Adichie, “African ‘Authenticity’” 51).

De Mey reads *Half of a Yellow Sun* as Adichie’s way of bearing witness to trauma she did not experience first-hand but only through stories her parents told her. Thus for De Mey, by listening to her parents’ stories about the war, Adichie becomes “a secondary witness; [...] she becomes a witness to the act of bearing witness” (De Mey 38). In her essay cited above, Novak also reads *Half of a Yellow Sun* as “contemporary trauma fiction” which “does not concentrate on those at the centre of the conflict – soldiers fighting in battle – but on the effect of traumatic events on the daily domestic lives of civilians” (Novak 33). While these critics have thus approached the novel in terms of bearing witness to trauma, I would like to

focus not only on Ugwu's rise as an author, but also on the ways in which the novel brings the reader into the position of witnessing the very act of turning that trauma into narrative.

Ugwu's journey to authorship is foretold quite early in the novel when he mouths the word "street" as he arrives in Nsukka to work for Odenigbo (*HYS* 1). This incident signals Ugwu's struggle for literacy on the road to authorship under the mentorship of Odenigbo and Olanna. Later on in the novel, Odenigbo foretells Ugwu's rise to authorship when he refuses to be addressed as "sir" by Ugwu, because Ugwu "could be the sir tomorrow" (13). Ugwu also foretells his own intellectual growth in an incident where he sits in Odenigbo's chair and "imagined himself speaking swift English" and "using words like *decolonise* and *pan-African*, moulding his voice after [Odenigbo's]" (20, italics original). Notably, his struggle for literacy resembles African-American slave narrative authors like Frederick Douglass, whose autobiographical narrative inspires Ugwu to authorship. In fact the title of Ugwu's initial narrative about the Biafran war, "Narrative of the Life of a Country", echoes Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

In Odenigbo's house, Ugwu first attempts to read the titles of books on Odenigbo's shelf but finds them too long and too difficult (6). Later however, he reads books like Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, journals like *Socialist Review*, and a sex guide, *Concise Couples' Handbook*. From the intellectual soirées in Odenigbo's house, Ugwu learns about historical events that resemble and pre-date the Biafran war. Ugwu also learns an important lesson about African history as taught in schools, that "[t]here are two answers to the things they teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass" (11). Odenigbo urges Ugwu to "read books and learn both answers" (11). These experiences "constitute the staple of Ugwu's 'home studies'" (Onyokwu 186). Ugwu's desire to write about the war starts during his time in the Biafran army when he decides to keep a diary of his war experiences to show Eberechi, one of the girls he likes. It seems that he begins to

write “the book” towards the end of the war while helping at Kainene’s refugee camp, writing “in small careful letters on the sides of old news papers, on some paper Kainene had done supply calculations on, on the back of the calendar” (*HYS* 396). He listens to conversations about the war and writes “in his mind what he would later transfer to paper” (399).

As noted earlier, the “fly-on-the-wall” position the reader is given in relation to the “he” who is writing “the book” draws the reader into a moment of witnessing both the events of the Biafran war and the act of narrating those events. Notably, unlike the rest of the novel which is narrated in the past tense, these sections or fragments relating to “the book” are narrated in the third person and the present tense, which gives the impression of immediacy, drawing the reader into the act of writing. The reader is “in” the writing process through the use of the present tense, but also at a curious distance through the third person narration. The sense of distance or disassociation is furthered since the reader does not immediately associate the “he” who is writing “the book” with Ugwu but instead with Richard.

The reader’s first moment of witnessing the writing of “the book” comes at the end of the third chapter which is focalised by Richard, when we see the act of writing a prologue to “the book”:

For the prologue, he recounts the story of the woman with a calabash. She sat on the floor of a train squashed between crying people, shouting people, praying people. She was silent, caressing the covered calabash on her lap in gentle rhythm until they crossed the Niger, and then she lifted the lid and asked Olanna and others to look inside.

Olanna tells him this story and he notes the details. She tells him how the bloodstains on the woman’s wrapper blended into the fabric to form a rusty mauve. She describes the carved designs on the woman’s calabash, slanting lines criss-crossing each other, and she describes the child’s head inside: scruffy plaits falling across the dark brown face, eyes completely white, eerily open, a mouth in a small surprised O.

After he writes this he mentions the German women who fled Hamburg with the charred bodies of their children stuffed in suitcases, the Rwandan women who pocketed tiny parts of their mauled babies. But he is careful not to draw parallels. For

the book cover, though, he draws a map of Nigeria and traces in the Y shape of the rivers Niger and Benue in bright red. He uses the same shade of red to circle the boundaries where, in the southeast, Biafra existed for three years. (82)

Three aspects of the writing process can be singled out here. Firstly, the reader observes the writer listening to other people's experiences, making orality an important element of writing the book. Olanna's story is one among many other stories that are included in "the book". This does not only make the writer "a witness to the act of bearing witness" (De Mey 38), it also makes "the book" a plethora of voices becoming, in Bakhtinian terms, truly "heteroglossic". "The book" is evidently formed from "a diversity of social speech types" and "a diversity of individual voices" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 262). Secondly, the writer makes references to other historical events which resemble events that Ugwu learnt about in Odenigbo's house through the earlier noted "home studies". The writer's reference to the Hamburg bombing by the Allied forces during World War II and the Rwandan genocide impresses upon the reader the character of the writer as a widely-read person in the fields of European and African history. Images of women fleeing with charred bodies and pieces of their children's body parts speak to the Biafra tragedy which the writer delves into later on in "the book". Thirdly, the reader also witnesses the writer carefully selecting his material as shown by the choice of a map for the cover of "the book".

By tracing the Niger and Benue rivers in "bright red", says De Mey, the writer seems to emphasise natural borders and not the colonial borders of Nigeria, which give "a false impression of coherence" (De Mey 32). While I would acknowledge that that, by drawing the boundaries of Biafra in the same colour as the two rivers, Ugwu seems to claim that Biafran borders are more natural than the Nigerian ones created by the British, I would argue that the red borders Ugwu draws to mark Biafran territory also suggest bloodshed and the idea that ethno-nationalities may be as problematic as colonial amalgams in the violence they unleash.

Thus Adichie, like Wicomb, finds ethno-nationalities to be a problematic alternative to those created by colonialism.

In the second moment of witnessing the act of writing “the book”, which also appears at the end of a chapter narrated from Richard’s perspective, the reader bears witness as the writer critiques the British “experiment of one nation” (Achebe, “On Biafra” 32) in the creation of Nigeria. Beginning with the words “He discusses”, which brings the reader into the moment of scripting, the reader witnesses the writer composing a critical review of historical events that in one way or another led to the Biafran war. He shows awareness of the colonial manipulation of tribal and religious differences between the Hausa-Fulani north and the Yoruba-Igbo south. He notes how the British drew contrasts between the “pleasantly dry” north and the “humid south”, between the “narrow-featured and therefore superior” Hausa-Fulani in the north and the “negroid Southerners” (*HYS* 115). He also notes how the two radically different regions were joined by the colonial governor into a fragile nation bedevilled by tribal and religious tensions. The artificiality and fragility of Nigeria as a nation is emphasised by the casual and playful manner in which the country’s name is chosen: after the governor-general had joined north and south territories “his wife picked a name. Nigeria was born” (115).

In the reader’s third moment of witnessing the act of writing “the book” (which appears again at the end of a chapter about Richard), the “he” who is writing continues with his critical review of historical events leading up to Igbo secession. Recalling the first and second sections on “the book”, which begin with “For the prologue, he writes” and “He discusses”, this section begins: “He writes”. The writer’s focus this time switches to Nigeria’s independence in 1960, and particularly to how, at independence, the “prized creation” of the British (*HYS* 155) was a “loose, half-formed colonial construct” (Morrison 5) already falling apart along tribal and religious lines. British favouritism towards the north continued: “they

fixed the pre-Independence elections in favour of the North and wrote a constitution that gave the North control of central government” (*HYS* 155). The constitution was not disputed by the South because ending British rule meant “good things for everyone: ‘white’ salaries long denied Nigerians, promotions, top jobs” (155). In the euphoria of independence celebrations “the clamour of minority groups” and fierce competition among them were papered over, making Nigeria “a collection of fragments held together in a fragile clasp” (155).

In the fourth section that focuses on writing “the book”, which for the first time appears at the end of a chapter focalised through Ugwu, the writer puts forward an argument about the colonial state being “a benignly brutal dictatorship designed to benefit the British” and about how the British continued to exploit Nigeria’s resources after independence (204-5). Even though the fourth appearance of “the book” is at the end of a chapter narrated from Ugwu’s perspective, the reader still associates the writing of “The Book” with Richard because at this time Ugwu is still an illiterate houseboy; still learning to read and write. Recalling the opening of the previous sections, this section begins “He argues”, and what the writer is arguing here is that that Nigerian leaders, blinded by the euphoria of independence “were naive in accepting exploitative loans” and that they were “too interested in aping the British and in taking over superior attitudes and better hospitals and better salaries long denied Nigerians” (205). The reader witnesses an act of writing in which tribal hatred is shown to have finally reared its head in the 1966 killing of Igbo people in a counter-coup by Northern military officers following an Igbo-led coup in the same year. This incident, after which the Igbo seceded, is seen to follow from the historical events the reader witnessed the writer reviewing in the previous two moments of writing.

Having witnessed the writer of “the book” write about how, why and when Biafra as a nation was born, the fifth and sixth moments of witnessing the writing of “the book” (both appearing at the end of chapters focalised through Richard) move on to witness not only the

horrors of the Biafra war, but also how the world turned a blind eye to such enormous suffering. The fifth account in fact doubles back on processes of representing and witnessing in a highly metafictional manner, by highlighting what became synonymous with Biafra in the western media: starvation. The writer of “the book” notes that starvation “broke Biafra” because it weakened Biafra’s resolve to defend its independence, but that ironically it also “brought Biafra fame and made Biafra last as long as it did” (237) because the images of starving children in the European/Western media attracted international attention. Yet, as witnessed in the sixth moment of writing, the world still “remained silent” as each country pursued their own interests: “He writes about the world that remained silent while Biafrans died” (258). Britain wanted to preserve its colonial construct and therefore supported Nigeria. The United States and the Soviet Union sided with Britain; and the Canadian Prime Minister “quipped: Where is Biafra?” To white supremacist governments in Rhodesia and South Africa, Nigeria was “proof that black-run governments were doomed to failure” (258). Communist China rendered very little support to Biafra besides opposing the “Anglo-American-Soviet” imperialism and while the French supplied arms, they did not recognise Biafra. Black African governments sided with Nigeria because they were afraid that an independent Biafra would inspire secession attempts in their own countries.

In the seventh moment of witnessing the writing of “the book” (375), the reader’s “fly-on-the-wall” position is significantly destabilised by a direct mode of address which draws the reader from the position of an observer to that of an addressee. The reader witnesses the writing of an epilogue to “the book” which takes the form of a poem modelled after one of Okeoma’s poems. This reminds the reader of Richard’s confessed admiration of Okeoma’s poetry and because the epilogue appears at the end of a chapter about Richard, the reader also associates this moment of writing with Richard. The addressee in the poem is not explicitly stated, yet the title of the poem has undertones of accusation towards the reader:

“Were You Silent When We Died?” (375). The reader is thus made to reflect upon his or her own position. The persona in the poem asks:

Did you see photos in sixty-eight
Of children with their hair becoming rust
Sickly patches nestled on those small heads,
Then falling off, like rotten leaves on dust? (375)

These graphic images of children whose “skin had turned the tawny of weak tea/And showed cobwebs of vein and brittle bone” (375) bring the reader closer to the horror of hunger and disease that characterised Biafra at that time. Again, in a highly metafictional manner, the reader is also called upon to witness how the Biafra tragedy was appropriated by international journalists:

...There were photos
Displayed in gloss-filled pages of your *Life*
Did you see? Did you feel sorry briefly
Then turn around to hold your lover or wife? (375)

Reference to the publishing of these photos in international magazines such as *Life* suggests that the intended addressee in the poem is the Western public. In that respect, the poem is aimed at making this public aware of the voyeuristic tendencies implied in the taking and publishing of such photographs and the West’s silence while helpless people perished.

In the final moment of witnessing the writing of “the book”, which comprises the final words in the text of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ugwu’s name is mentioned for the first time in connection with authorship of “the book”: “Ugwu writes his dedication last: *For Master, my good man*” (433, italics original). This annuls the reader’s earlier identification of authorship with Richard. We are led to conclude that either Ugwu adopts the idea of

Richard's book and scripts it as his own, or "Narrative of the Life of a Country", the book we are told Ugwu is writing at some point, merges with Richard's idea of writing about the Biafran war and the history of the war becomes Ugwu's. According to Marx, Ugwu's final dedication "affirms the mentoring model by recycling one of Odenigbo's favoured phrases" (Marx, "Failed-State Fiction" 618). Yet, as I have mentioned above, Ugwu's mimicry of Odenigbo's phrase – which mimics Crusoe's phrase and reveals Odenigbo's internalisation of Western education – also reflects overturned "mentor and pupil" power relations. Ugwu's dedication subverts power relations between master and servant and between the "ordinary" Biafran and the educated middle class in terms of authorship of stories of the nation.

Conclusion

In *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Wicomb and Adichie respectively invest the task of authorship of history in agents usually excluded from the conventional historiographic exercise, i.e. the coloured female amanuensis in *David's Story*, and Ugwu, who first appears as an illiterate house boy, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. While *David's Story* deconstructs male subjectivity in the authorship of history, *Half of a Yellow Sun* troubles the question of Western views on Africa as well as the ability of an African middle class to author African stories. In doing so, both Wicomb and Adichie allow a re-thinking of conventional history that exposes history's exclusiveness and contradictions. Notably, both authors draw the reader into *mise en abyme* moments of witnessing the process of writing history, calling into question notions of authority and truth in narrating the history of a nation.

Chapter Two

“Daughters of the Nation”?: Women, Class and the Burden of History in Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of women Adichie’s and Wicomb’s fiction that is set in traumatic and oppressive national pasts – under apartheid in the case of Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and during the Biafran war in the case of Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). In their separate interviews (with Eva Hunter and Aminatta Forna respectively), both Wicomb and Adichie make assertions about the portrayal of women and gendered marginality in their narratives which provide a suitable beginning point for this chapter. Commenting on Eva Hunter’s observation about the “resurrection” of the protagonist’s mother in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, whom we know as dead until we meet her alive again in the last story, Wicomb says:

Women aren’t heard so it allows the mother that wonderful opportunity when the father’s dead to be able to talk about him, to be able to do things . . . In a sense I have to kill off the father, in order for her to speak. the reason the mother doesn’t have influence is because she is suppressed, she is silenced by the father. Perhaps her reported death in the early stories can be read as her suppression. (Wicomb, Interview with Hunter 94-95)⁴

Referring to silencing of women’s voices in history Wicomb goes on to say:

I find much of *the so-called political discourse doesn’t take into account what women actually are saying*, and even female commentators on women’s issues in South Africa talk about how important it is that we sort out the racial thing first. (90, emphasis added)

For her part Adichie answers thus the question about women in her novels in an interview with Aminatta Forna:

⁴ Wicomb’s killing off the father followed by her resurrection of the mother creates an interesting intertext with J.M. Coetzee’s novel *In the Heart of the Country* (which is read by the protagonist of *Playing in the Light*). In Coetzee’s novel Magda, who lives with her father on a farm in the Karoo after her mother’s death, apparently “kills off” her father. As in Wicomb’s story, the apparent death of the father makes room for a woman’s voice. Towards the end of this story the reader realises that, just like the mother in Wicomb’s story, Magda’s father is not actually dead, that Magda invented her father’s death the way Frieda possibly invents her mother’s in Wicomb’s story.

I don't sit down and say I'm going to write women's fiction. However, I am a woman, I care about women's issues, and there are many to care about. When I write I suppose they come out, but what I found myself very conscious of trying not to do was to not impose my politics on my fiction. If I did, all my books would have strong women who were proud and independent. However, I realise that in reality this is not the case; it's very important for me to write truths that I can relate to. Because of that *I am interested in writing about women who are weak, who are not independent, who make poor choices . . . this is the reality of their lives.* (Adichie, "New Writing" 56-7, emphasis added)

As these statements suggest, Wicomb's "murder" of the father and Adichie's telling of stories of powerless women in stories set in traumatic national histories stem from these writer's concerns with the realities of women's lives which are often subsumed under oppressive historical moments. Useful in this regard is Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's comprehensive survey entitled "Gender Biases in African Historiography" which focuses on how "women remain largely invisible or misrepresented in mainstream, or rather 'malestream' African history" (Zeleza 207). In this survey of what he regards as "some of the most widely used history textbooks" Zeleza notes that authors of these textbooks share two similarities:

... they are predominantly male and sexist in so far as their texts underestimate the important role women have played in all aspects of African history. In more extreme cases women are not mentioned at all, or if they are, they are discussed in their stereotypical reproductive roles as wives and mothers. The language used often inferiorises the women's activities, or experiences being described. Also, women's lives are usually cloaked in a veil of timelessness: the institutions in which their lives are discussed, such as marriage, are seen as static. In viewing them as unchanging, as guardians of some ageless tradition, women are reduced to trans-historical creatures outside the dynamics of historical development. (208)

Zeleza goes on to say that in view of such biases in African history, feminist historians have been occupied with "restoring women to history" by "writing about the historical experiences of women" (220). Akin to Zeleza's study but this time in the field of African literature is Florence Stratton's *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. In this book Stratton's concern is also to restore women to narrative but in her case the field in question is that of African literature. Through the reading of canonical authors of the African literary tradition like Chinua Achebe, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Stratton's

book rejects the “mother Africa trope” that dominates male-authored texts precisely because the trope “legitimizes the practice of excluding women from the creation of culture, of writing them out of the literary tradition” (Stratton 52). Stratton argues that “whether [the woman] is canonized as a mother or stigmatised as a prostitute” in these male-authored texts, “the designation is degrading” and the woman’s experience “is trivialised and distorted” (52). The woman figure is therefore only made to “bear the [male] writer’s interpretation of history, just as she might bear his baby” (52). Stratton goes on to claim that these male writers “seem to have been attracted primarily by the metaphorical potential of the situation of women” rather than by the task of exposing women’s oppression (53). It is against this background that Stratton, following Mariama Bâ, calls for the creation of space for women within African literature both as authors and as characters with agency. In so doing, the African woman will be restored to history as an individual in her own right.

I maintain in this chapter that in their own ways, both Wicomb and Adichie are involved in the restoration of women to history through their fiction although the two authors imagine history in different ways. In Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* the historical moment of apartheid is “firmly in the background” (Attwell “Foreword” 8) and its violence is, according to Carol Sicherman, “only glimpsed” (Sicherman 188). The narrative instead foregrounds the ordinary, the “small-scale epics of the heart and mind” (Attwell 7). Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, on the other hand juxtaposes such “epics of the heart and mind” with the horrors that characterised the Biafran war. Personal stories in Adichie’s narrative are explored within the larger picture of the Biafran war, but in such a way that the war is foregrounded. I also maintain that besides highlighting women’s experiences in the historical moments of apartheid and the Biafran war, the two writers’ foregrounding of women’s “small-scale epics of the heart and mind” is their way of etching women’s names into African literary history.

Besides grappling with political oppression and/or war, women in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* often find themselves fighting on multiple fronts, which according to Obioma Nnaemeka, can be categorised into two: “battle front” and “home front” (Nnaemeka 237). I would like to propose that these spaces are interpenetrated and deconstructed in Wicomb and Adichie’s fiction, rather than being dualistic. Moreover, women’s bodies in the work of both writers are shown to become sites or symbols of men’s national or personal aspirations. What comes to mind here, especially in relation to men’s nationalist aspirations, is Elleke Boehmer’s assertion, cited in the introduction to this study, about nations and nationalist ideologies being shaped by gender. Boehmer further notes that in the story of the “national family”, the female child, as compared to her male counterpart – “the self-defining inheritor of the post-independence era and the protagonist of the nation-shaping narrative” – “is, if not subordinate, peripheral and quiet, then virtually invisible” (Boehmer, *Stories* 106). I find the following assertion by Boehmer about the position of what she calls “national daughters” relevant to the work of Wicomb and Adichie:

Their intervention is *double-edged* [original emphasis] for, by articulating their own struggles for selfhood [...] they not only address their traditional muteness and/or marginality in the national script, but also, in so doing, rewrite their roles within it. *Writing becomes their vehicle of agency* [emphasis added]. By writing themselves as children and citizens of the nation, they rework by virtue of who they are the confining structures of the national family to encompass alternative gender identities. (108)

I would like to use Zeleza’s, Stratton’s and Boehmer’s postulations, which are primarily about pioneering African feminist historians and female African novelists, in two ways. Firstly, these comments are useful in situating Wicomb and Adichie within the group of women writers who through their work have revised and written in relationship to national scripts, and, secondly, these comments can be deployed in reading the two authors’ portrayal of daughters in the (“national”) family, in the two narratives analysed in this chapter. Besides highlighting women’s experiences in political struggles, Wicomb and Adichie complicate the

so-called “gender war” by revealing variations among women. Of particular interest is how class influences not just women’s perceptions and experiences but also how it affects relations between women characters themselves. I have chosen to focus primarily on Frieda Shenton in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and on Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* because of their prominence as protagonists against the backdrops of apartheid and the Biafran war respectively, but also because of interesting similarities that they share. Firstly, all three women grow up under the tutelage of their fathers: a strict school headmaster in Frieda’s case, and an influential but corrupt business mogul in the case of Olanna and Kainene. Secondly, the three women are part of an emerging middle-class group of women whose education sets them apart from other women both physically (they live in the city/town, and even travel abroad) and in how they see the world. Their class evidently determines how these women are affected by oppressive and traumatic historical moments in the narratives and how they react to these. Moreover, their middle-class status also influences how they relate to other people, especially fellow women who are considered “uneducated”. Thirdly, all three women remain childless which puts them in contravention of a definition of womanhood based on childbearing. Frieda makes a conscious decision not to have babies. We are told that she had once sworn with her two childhood friends, Sarie and Jos, “never to have babies” (*YCGL* 38), and after she falls pregnant while in a relationship with Michael, a white man, she decides to terminate the pregnancy. As for Olanna and Kainene they “did not have that fabled female longing to give birth” something their mother finds “*abnormal*” (*HYS* 104, italics original). However, Olanna’s attitude towards child bearing changes after a confrontation with Odenigbo’s mother, who infers that Olanna is not good enough for her son. A longing to carry Odenigbo’s child suddenly comes upon Olanna: she felt “the longing in the lower part of her belly” for “the solid weight of a child” (104). Despite such a longing, Olanna still remains childless. The three women’s lives make for interesting reading against

the larger canvas of “communities of women” who have internalised patriarchal definitions of womanhood which the three women fall short of or defy in their own different ways.

“Daughterly Texts”?: Father-daughter relationships and the Burden of History

To borrow Boehmer’s words, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* may be described as “daughterly texts” (Boehmer, *Stories* 118), a term Boehmer uses to describe three postcolonial texts by women writers: Christina Stead’s *The Man Who Loved His Children*, Buchi Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* and Carol Shield’s *Unless*. These texts, according to Boehmer, foreground the daughter figure who has for a long time been an absent member of the (national) family as represented in postcolonial (African) literature. Particularly, these texts redraft “the daughter’s relationship to the national father” (107). I begin my reading of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* by paying attention to father-daughter relationships, and especially to how Frieda, Olanna and Kainene relate to their fathers. Focus on father-daughter relationships also allows for an interesting reading of motherhood since “the subjectivity of mothers [...] is to a large degree displaced in order to foreground the subjectivity of daughters” (120). Frieda’s mother in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* is “killed off” in the stories that Frieda writes, until the last story when she is resurrected. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna’s mother’s powerlessness and voicelessness before her husband is also tantamount to being killed off in a narrative sense. In my reading of these texts, however, I would also like to show how the idea of “daughters of the nation” and even of “daughterly texts” is rendered problematic by the behaviour and attitudes of the female protagonists of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Although the early lives of these protagonists are shaped by their roles as daughters and by their fathers’ expectations, these women also struggle for their own identity, freedom from being defined as daughters, and their political or ideological positions are very different from their fathers’ views on political oppression and war.

The three daughters are raised in ways aimed at enhancing their fathers' interests, which are moulded by particular histories. Yet as I show, these women eventually break away from their fathers' control. In *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Mr Shenton's aspirations are influenced by apartheid's racial politics in which "coloured" is categorised as an inferior racial group to white. For many like Mr Shenton, this results in a desire for whiteness or at least for "respectable colouredness" which usually involved claiming European ancestry (English ancestry in Mr Shenton's case) while at the same time distancing oneself from "native" roots. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chief Ozobia's interests are shaped by the history of patriarchy which was enhanced by British control of Igboland from around the 1870s. British influence did not only place political power entirely in the hands of men but also initiated massive corruption especially following the introduction of warrant chiefs, most of whom "were simply ambitious, opportunistic young men who put themselves forward as friends of the conquerors" (Van Allen 172). It is suggested elsewhere in the novel that Chief Ozobia is an example of such men. Odenigbo's mother alleges that Chief Ozobia "came from a family of lazy beggars in Umannachi" and obtained his wealth through dubious means after "he got a job as a tax collector and stole from hard-working people" (HYS 97). While pursuing their separate agendas, both Mr. Shenton and Chief Ozobia bring these histories into their homes which in turn make their daughters face the world in the home, thus blurring the "home" front and battle front divide noted above.

In both narratives, daughters are raised by their fathers in ways that are reflective of the fathers' aspirations: achieving respectable "colouredness" in the case of Mr. Shenton in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and furthering business interests in the case of Chief Ozobia in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Mr Shenton seeks to fulfil his ambition of maintaining the respectability of the Shenton name through his daughter by giving her an education that sets her apart from her coloured peers and relatives. Visible in Mr. Shenton's ambition is the

aspiration to scale up the ethnic ladder, hence his claim to English ancestry and the insistence that his daughter speak English, and not Afrikaans, which was considered the language of uncouth Boers whose name suggested “a poor white element and a generally backward culture” (Wright x). As Judith Raiskin points out, language in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* becomes symbolic of “the tangled histories and relationships among the different groups in South Africa and the complex negotiations of power and assertions of identity” (218). As I will show in due course, Frieda becomes a field on which Mr Shenton plays his own version of apartheid's racial game.

Frieda's father occupies a place of privilege in the coloured community. We are told in the first story “Bowl Like Hole” that he is a school headmaster who speaks English and acts as an interpreter for Mr Weedon, the English owner of a gypsum mine in Namaqualand. Mr Weedon is the embodiment of the respectability to which Frieda's father aspires: “a gentleman, a true Englishman” who is not like “the uncouth Boers from the dorp” (*YCGL* 12). Among his Afrikaans-speaking kin and neighbours whom he racially denigrates as “a pack of Hotnos” (40), Mr. Shenton enjoys a sense of superiority because of his “English” identity. One is reminded here of Robert Young's book entitled *The Idea of English Ethnicity* in which he notes how English identity is constructed, performatively, by those who are at the peripheries of empire. Young argues that “Englishness in the nineteenth century was not so much developed as a self-definition of the English themselves”, but rather as “an ethnic identity designed for those who were precisely not English, but rather of English descent” (Young 1). Thus:

Englishness was constructed as a translatable identity that could be adopted or appropriated anywhere by anyone who cultivated the right language, looks and culture. It then allowed a common identification with a homeland often never been seen. Englishness paradoxically became most itself when it was far off. (2)

As part of performing his Englishness, Mr. Shenton's house is littered with fetishes of English culture: "the Queen Mother in her youth" and a picture of "an English thatched cottage in the Karoo headed with the flourished scroll of Home Sweet Home" (*YCGL* 109). The domesticated image of the cottage in the Karoo does not only point to English settlers who made for themselves homes in the Karoo but also establishes a connection between the settlers and their coloured descendants in whose house the picture of the cottage now hangs. Among the fetishes of English culture hanging in Mr. Shenton's house is a photograph of his father Oupa Shenton. The hanging of Oupa Shenton's photograph alongside that of the Queen mother situates Mr. Shenton's father among his English forebears and thus becomes symbolic of Mr. Shenton's claim to English ancestry.

From an early stage Mr. Shenton sets his daughter on a journey towards being "respectable". This begins literally with Frieda's journey to St. Mary's, a formerly "whites only" but now desegregated, high school. The journey to St Mary's becomes symbolic of Frieda's physical and emotional growth as a woman. Also foretold by the journey to St. Mary's is Frieda's migration first from Namaqualand to Cape Town, and then later abroad to self-imposed exile in England. Mr. Shenton's self-professed reason for sending his daughter to the prestigious high school is because he wants a good future for his daughter so that she doesn't become a servant in white homes. However, what is really significant for him is the respectability that an educated daughter would bring to the Shenton family. Frieda would eventually become what her childhood friend Sarie becomes for her father: her father's pride in a student nurse's starched white uniform and her "Junior Certificate framed in her father's sitting room" (38). To Mr. Shenton there is no better way of setting themselves apart as "respectable coloureds" from the rest of uncivilised "Hotnos" than having his daughter obtain qualification from a prestigious high school. In doing so, Frieda would be fulfilling not just

her family's aspirations but also, according to her father, her "duty to God to better ourselves, to use our brains, our talents, not to place our lamps under bushels" (42).

Mr. Shenton also deploys his daughter's body as a means of hiding traces of his Khoi ancestry which he distances himself from because such ancestry compromises his claim to the English ancestry he so much values. He encourages her to overeat in order to grow "big and strong" so that she conceals "cheekbones that jut out like a Hottentot's" (34). For the same reason he also likes his daughter's hair treated and "pulled back tightly to stem any remaining tendency to curl" (36). Because she ate to please her father, Frieda acquires a body that is considered fat and ugly by her peers, and for which she is taunted. Frieda internalises society's perception of her body as ugly despite her friends' efforts to make her believe otherwise. She considers herself "not the kind of girl whom boys look at", that she is only "a mere obstacle in a line of vision" (31). She is convinced that boys do not look at her because she is fat with breasts "flat as a vetkoek" (32). Even young children in the neighbourhood taunt her by calling her "fatty fatty vetkoek" (40) and, in a twist of black humour, she wishes an early death for herself "certainly before [she] become[s] an old maid" (41).

Yet the journey to St Mary's presents Frieda with an opportunity to start looking at the world through her own eyes and not through her father's. Recalling Sarie's companionship on this journey to St. Mary's, Frieda remembers how away from home, their "fathers faded and [they] were free" (38). The fading fathers represent the fathers' loss of control and influence in the girls' lives and thinking. This element of freedom allows the daughter to form her own opinions about life and things around her. Frieda's development as a writer, which I reflect upon later in this discussion, is also dependent, among other factors, on this freedom from patriarchal influence.

A similar situation appertains in *Half of a Yellow Sun* where Olanna and Kainene are raised by their father, this time in line with the father's business interests. Like Mr Shenton in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Chief Ozobia in *Half of a Yellow Sun* sees his twin daughters as assets in his entrepreneurial advancement. Like Frieda, both Olanna and Kainene are sent to prestigious schools by their father, firstly to the "iniquitous, expensive and secretive British secondary school" in Nigeria (HYS 61) and then to university in England. All this because, like Mr Shenton in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Chief Ozobia "was determined that [his daughters] be as European as possible" (61). Apart from their education, Chief Ozobia wants to exploit his daughters' bodies to further his business interests. On the one hand, Olanna, who is described as "illogically pretty" and as "a water mermaid" (49), is useful to her father precisely because of her beauty which he tries to use as bait for prospective business partners. On the other hand, Kainene's assertiveness and her "excellent eye for business" (31) makes her suitable to take care of some of his business interests. Kainene in fact marvels at the "benefit of being the ugly daughter" because "nobody uses you as sex bait" (35). According to her father, Kainene "is not just like a son, she is like two" (31). Kainene's masculine attributes are confirmed by Richard who later in the novel becomes her lover. Apart from noting that "she was not pretty at all" Richard's first impression of Kainene is that she looked "almost androgynous, her tight maxi outlining the boyishness of her hips" (57, 60).

The names of the two twins also speak to what their father expects to gain from them. "Olanna" means "God's Gold" (58) which connotes wealth, but wealth belonging to a male "God". The possessive indicates that Chief Ozobia sees in his daughter God's given wealth for him to exploit. Kainene's name on the other hand means "Let's watch and see what next God will bring" (58). The reader will note that while Olanna's name carries with it a sense of attainment, Kainene's is marked with a sense of anticipation for something better. Through

their names, Olanna and Kainene are marked according to the entrepreneurial aspirations of their father. In the novel this is revealed as a trend in Igbo culture, as observed by Kainene who criticises socialism as unattainable among the Igbo people because Igbo people have become extremely capitalist and their ambitions are reflected in the names they give their children, especially girls. She cites the name “Ogbenyealu”, which means “Not to be married by a poor man” (69) as being tantamount to stamping parent’s capitalist interests on an innocent and unsuspecting child. “To stamp that on a child at birth” opines Kainene, “is capitalism at its best” (69). Her twin sister, as noted earlier, carries such a name which reflects their father’s capitalist ambitions.

As shown above, in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, fathers appropriate their daughters’ bodies according to their aspirations. What unites Frieda, Olanna and Kainene is not only their histories of struggle for selfhood in oppressive and war-torn contexts, but also how their bodies are initially appropriated by men. The relationships these daughters have with their fathers are microcosms of their relationships with the larger society of men, reminding us of Susan Andrade’s assertion that “in the narratives of many African women writers the family becomes the nation writ small, in a microcosmic allegory of power and policy” (Andrade “Gender” 47). This brings us again to the so-called separation of the home and battle fronts. What Frieda faces in her home in terms of being used by her father for his racial aspirations is not different from the sexist and racist world she faces outside her home. Likewise, the sexism that Olanna and Kainene face in their father’s home is also what they face outside the home especially when war breaks. However, as I demonstrate below, the three women do not ultimately submit to their father’s aspirations. Owing to their education, they become independent women whose perception of life differs not just from their fathers but from their fellow womenfolk as well. It is also important to note that their opinions about the political situations they are caught in differ from that of

their fathers. Frieda's dislike of apartheid and of her country contrasts with her father's perception of apartheid's racial system. Frieda's father, like many of Frieda's coloured relatives, seems to have accepted the identity scripted for him by apartheid. As such, his main concern is not about apartheid's racial oppression but rather about gaining respectability as a coloured person. For Frieda, this means that her father is complicit in apartheid's racism. Olanna's and Kainene's opinion about the Biafran war also differs from their father's. Being the businessman that he is, Chief Ozobia is more concerned about his business empire than with Biafra's sovereignty. When war breaks out, Chief Ozobia flees together with his wife to England and returns after the war. Unlike their father, both Olanna and Kainene decide to stay on in Biafra to help fight for Biafra's independence. Notably, Olanna runs a school in her yard where together with Ugwu, they teach young children "pride in our young nation" (HYS 291) which Odenigbo calls "changing the face of the next generation of Biafrans with their Socratic pedagogy" (293). Kainene's political commitment is shown mainly through the refugee camp she runs during the war. Despite identifying with the Biafra cause, Kainene is critical of the would-be Biafra nation, and especially of its leader, Ojukwu, whom she accuses of grabbing other people's wives. She also accuses Ojukwu of using ordinary people to fulfil his "ambition". When Richard reasons that the war is "about a cause... not a man" she responds: "Yes, the cause of benign extortion" (182).

The Importance of Being Educated: Gender and Class

The inextricability of gender and class in relation to historical moments in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* makes for interesting reading with regard to how both Wicomb and Adichie imagine gender as a form of marginality in the two texts. The three women's education as discussed above does not only influence how they look at political situations in their respective countries but more importantly, how they survive those situations. Their being in a class different from many other women also affects how the other

women, “rural” and “uneducated”, perceive them. As mentioned above, Frieda, Olanna and Kainene become involved in their own ways in the political struggles of their countries. For Frieda the feeling towards her homeland is initially that of revulsion, however. She comes to hate apartheid South Africa and resolves to go into self-imposed exile in Britain. As noted above, both Olanna and Kainene stay in Biafra and become part of the struggle for an independent Biafran nation. However, Olanna’s almost unquestioning loyalty to the Biafran cause contrasts with Kainene’s critical attitude towards certain things she finds wrong with the yet-to-be-born Biafran nation, and the novel thus puts into play voices and countervoices. Indeed, Kainene’s character thus echoes that of the “discomfiting heroine – frank, sometimes amused, often uncertain” (Sicherman 187) in Wicomb’s narrative. One clear difference between them however, is that while Frieda keeps her opinion to herself most of the time, Kainene voices whatever she feels or thinks about a particular situation or incident. For instance, she openly expresses her distrust of Ojukwu the revered Biafran leader whom she accuses of sexual immorality (*HYS* 313). She is also honest with Olanna about Odenigbo whom she considers ugly and accuses her sister of loving him blindly (388).

Denise Handlarski’s reading of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, especially her observation about the positioning of Frieda “between her lovers Michael and Henry, and her patriarchal father” (Handlarski 52), is a useful summation of forces that Frieda must contend with, that is, racism and sexism. Her involvement with Michael, a white man, puts Frieda in direct conflict with apartheid laws that prohibit sexual relations between whites and non-whites. Her involvement with Henry, considered an inferior coloured by her father, goes against the father’s aspirations to turn the Shenton family into respectable coloureds. The same goes for her body which must be subjected to certain behaviours in order to conceal her Khoi Khoi roots. Frieda’s location in relation to the three men is aptly summed up by

Handlarski in the following terms: “She is too ‘white’ for Henry, too ‘black’ for Michael, and too ‘coloured’ for her father” (52).

In the narrative of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* the harsh realities of apartheid are somewhat withdrawn into the background of the story, and Frieda's resistance is quite subtle. Most of the time she is not directly in contact with apartheid itself but only through her interaction with her community, most of whom, according to Frieda, accept and live by apartheid's racial definition. Frieda's resistance to these definitions is usually manifested alongside her resistance towards how patriarchy within her own community defines her as a woman. As noted earlier, Frieda's experience of her people's entrapment in apartheid's racial politics begins with her own father who strives to maintain his so-called “respectable colouredness” by claiming and promoting his English ancestry. Apart from Mr Shenton, there are a number of people and incidents in the narrative who illustrate racially-prejudiced perceptions of the coloured community. For example, Truida, wife to Frieda's cousin, Jan Klinkies is despised as being racially inferior to her husband: “in spite of her light skin [she] came from a dark complexioned family and there was something nylonish about her hair” (YCGL 24). Truida's “blackness” is further betrayed by “the little hairs in the nape of her neck” which “rolled up tightly like fronds, unfurled by the cautious hot comb” (24). From this perspective, Truida's marriage to Jan means that she “made a good marriage” while for Jan it means that he “had regrettably married beneath him” (24). Another example of racial stratification among the coloured people is Frieda's first lover, Henry Hendrikse who, as noted above, is dismissed by her father as “almost pure kaffir” (123) and not regarded as suitable for his daughter in relation to the sacred memory of their English ancestor, the memory which “must not be defiled by associating with those beneath [them]” (123). Even Frieda's mother is looked down upon by the Shenton family as being racially inferior. She is called “a Griqua meid” by Oupa Shenton (173) and the Shenton family is disappointed when

Mr Shenton proposes to marry her until they meet her and realise “such nice English she spoke and good features and a nice figure too” (175). To keep up with the Shentons’ racial aspirations and probably to please her husband and his family, Frieda’s mother, like Truida as noted above, endures “the terrible torment of the [heated] comb” to undo “the tangled undergrowth” into “sleek black waves” (172). She also takes on the Shenton family’s racist language admonishing her daughter not to be like “a tame Griqua” (19). That Mrs Shenton does this to fit in with the Shenton family becomes evident after her husband’s death when she takes a swipe at the so-called respectability of the Shentons, calling them “Boerjongens” who “have lower lips like spouts – from slurping their drinks from saucers” (173).

Frieda’s defiance of apartheid’s politics of race and space comes out significantly in the title story “You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town” where she is in a love relationship with Michael, a white man with whom she conceives a baby - but she later terminates the pregnancy. In the first place, by getting involved with Michael, Frieda defies apartheid’s laws, the Immorality Act in particular, which prohibited sexual relations between whites and non-whites. The relationship is, in the words of Carol Sicherman, “a highly unusual contravention of both custom and law” (Sicherman 202). With her white boyfriend Frieda further defies apartheid’s racial segregation laws by having access to places reserved for “whites only” like the beach at Cape Point where Michael first proposes marriage to her, writing solemnly in the sand “Will you marry me?” and Frieda, with “trembling fingers traced a huge heart around the words” (*YCGL* 83). Cape Point is an interesting setting, especially in relation to Frieda and Michael’s love story and apartheid’s prohibition of such unions between whites and non-whites. We are told in the story that Cape Point is the place “where the [Indian and Atlantic] oceans meet and part”; a place where the two oceans fight

“for their separate identities” (83).⁵ Frieda and Michael, united by the mutual feeling of love sit on the beach “huddled together, his hand on [her] belly” (83) watching the two antagonistic oceans.

The centrality of the sea in the history of South Africa’s racial politics is a well-known and recently discussed subject in South African literary studies. One study that focuses on the centrality of the sea particularly in Wicomb’s fiction is Meg Samuelson’s “Oceanic Histories and Protean Politics: The Surge of the Sea in Zoe Wicomb’s Fiction.” Samuelson notes in her study how Wicomb uses the sea “to explore gendered politics of authorship” as well as using it as “a model of textuality with which to record – without reiterating – the historical fragmentation of women’s bodies, while unleashing the potential of their bodies” (Samuelson, “Oceanic Histories” 544). She further notes how “the sea provides the shifting terrain on which Wicomb inscribes the fragmentation and fluidity of textual meaning, national and/or racialised identities and genderd bodies” (545). With particular reference to “You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town” Samuelson argues that the scene where Michael and Frieda are at a “whites only” beach urges us as readers “to consider the implications for South African identities of the violent meeting of these two oceanic worlds” (545) gesturing towards the centrality of the sea in the history of miscegenation. In that history the place where land meets sea is the place where the native first met the European from yonder across the sea. Yet this place of contact between natives and Europeans is designated a “whites only” area in Frieda’s and Michael’s time. It is interesting that the mixed couple chooses this “whites only” area to enjoy a secret moment of their forbidden

⁵ The belief that the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet at Cape Point is itself considered to be a myth. Instead the two oceans are said to meet at Cape Agulhas considered the southernmost tip of the African continent. According to an article published in *The Economist* ([362.8257](http://www.economist.com/3628257), Jan 26, 2002: 85) a line demarcating the Indian Ocean from the Atlantic ocean was drawn 50 years ago by the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO) “at 20° East, from the Antarctic to Africa” and the line “comes ashore beside Africa's second-oldest lighthouse, at the continent's most southerly tip, Cape Agulhas.” Nevertheless, the IHO’s demarcation of the two oceans only buttresses the fictionality of the boundary between the two bodies of water.

union. The two lovers are in deliberate contravention of “apartheid’s stridently policed ‘colour-bar’” (545) and they seem to enjoy their mischief. In some sense the event at Cape Point and especially Michael’s proposal to Frieda recalls the first sexual encounter between natives and white settlers which, as I noted in chapter one, led to the birth of what came to be known as a separate racial identity under apartheid– colouredness. In fact, Michael’s hand on Frieda’s belly is suggestive of Frieda’s reproductive potential and the coloured child who will be conceived in that womb. While for Samuelson Michael’s caressing of Frieda’s belly gestures towards “the life giving properties inside the belly as having the power to transcend these man-made laws”, I read that moment as recalling precisely the initial moment that led to the birth of colouredness. Thus, in the supposedly “whites only” space at the Cape Frieda metamorphoses into an image which recalls such women as Krotoa–Eva in the Dutch castle.⁶

The battling oceans seem to speak to the segregated coloured and white racial categories that Frieda and Michael represent and the segregation which they are now clearly defying. United by their passion, they seem to supersede warring racial identities; they are like the two oceans which appear as one large expanse of water yet with separate identities. One striking similarity between the two oceans’ identities and the two lover’s separate identities is that in both cases, boundaries between the identities are largely imaginary. The two lovers’ supposedly separate identities could be said to be as artificial and imaginary as those between the two oceans.

The two lovers’ idyllic world is disrupted when Frieda falls pregnant and suddenly their love for each other is not enough to blur their separate racial identities under the

⁶ According to Lauren Beukes in her book *Maverick: Extraordinary Women from South Africa’s Past* (2004), Krotoa-Eva was born Krotoa, a Khoikhoi girl who was taken into Jan van Riebeeck’s fort at the Cape at the age of ten or 11. Besides doing domestic chores which included babysitting van Riebeeck’s children, Krotoa, (who was re-named Eva in the Dutch castle) became an interpreter for the Dutch East India Company. According to Beukes, Krotoa was “one of the first South Africans to enter into an inter-racial marriage [with Pieter Meerhoff, a Danish surgeon] and have mixed children” (Beukes 180).

oppressive system of apartheid. Frieda does not respond to Michael's proposal that they flee to England where they would get married and "be happy forever, thousands of miles from [the apartheid] mess" (*YCGL* 82) with the drawing of a huge heart around his words but with a reminder that "there are laws against that" (82). Frieda's decision to abort the baby is, on the one hand, most probably because the reality of apartheid as her historical context finally catches up with her. She probably does not want to end up like her cousin Marge who had become "a disgrace" to the family for being "used by white trash" (74). In the words of Sicherman, the abortion also "symbolises the impossibility of successfully crossing the colour line" (Sicherman 125) and therefore erases "the physical mark of both [Frieda's] relationship with Michael and its implicit consequences for her as a woman and a coloured South African" (Handlarski 52).

Yet the abortion can also be looked at as Frieda's way of asserting control over her own body in keeping with her childhood oath she took together with her friends Sarie and Jos never to have babies (*YCGL* 38). Despite Michael's reasoning with her to keep the baby (reasoning that aims to make Frieda feel guilty that aborting the baby would be foiling "God's holy plan" [82] and therefore a sin in both the eyes of God and man), Frieda still goes ahead in terminating the pregnancy. It could be said in this case that Frieda defies not just the apartheid laws by having an affair with Michael but also the religious moral code that Michael cites in a bid to persuade her to keep the baby. Both apartheid laws and religious moral code share the common characteristic of being systems of patriarchal control.

It is somehow ironic that the abortion is performed by a white woman in the white part of Cape Town where Frieda has to lie about her identity in order to be assisted. She denies being coloured when Mrs Coetzee, who will perform the abortion, asks her and she assumes white identity under the name "Sally Smit" (86). According to Handlarski "[d]uring the scene of abortion, Frieda is literally lost – in terms of her geographic locale, but more

importantly in terms of her identity as a coloured woman” (Handlarski 52). Handlarski further argues that Frieda’s lie about her race “demonstrates how Frieda’s identity is submitted to a powerful obfuscation” (52). Alternatively, this incident could also be read as another moment when Frieda defies apartheid yet again by infiltrating a “whites only” area. Geographically, Frieda sneaks into the white part of Cape Town and into Mrs Coetzee’s “whites only” chambers. She momentarily passes for white as she becomes “Sally Smit” accessing the “whites only” “privilege” of an illegal abortion in Mrs Coetzee’s chambers. The incident may thus count as another moment of Frieda’s subversion of apartheid’s racial and spatial legislation.

Although the abortion is brought about partly by despair, it could also mean that Frieda refuses to fulfil her so-called “natural” duties of child-bearing and motherhood as per patriarchal expectation. By terminating the pregnancy, Frieda refuses patriarchy the chance to appropriate her body especially regarding its reproductive potential. This can also be read in Tamieta, a character in “A Clearing in the Bush” from *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, who adopts Beatrice, her alcoholic cousin’s daughter. Tamieta feels that, like the Virgin Mary, she had been chosen as the rightful mother for Beatrice. Adopting the child means that Tamieta can “have a child *without the clumsiness of pregnancy, the burden of birth, and the tobacco-breathed attentions of men with damp fumbling hands*” (YCGL 55, emphasis added). Two interesting things are notable in Tameita’s thinking. Firstly, she rejects the essentialist notion of motherhood that is premised on the ability to conceive and to suffer labour pains to bring forth offspring. Secondly, and somehow closely related to the essentialist conception of motherhood, she rejects patriarchy’s appropriation of the female body and its reproductive potential. Thus, unlike Virgin Mary whose body is appropriated for the masculine duty to save the world, Tameita keeps hers to herself (like Frieda) but still manages to become a mother. To borrow the words of Obioma Nnaemeka in her introduction to a collection of

essays entitled *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*, Frieda's adoption of Beatrice indicates her "eagerness to 'mother' while rejecting the abuses (physical, sexual, emotional, etc) of the institution of motherhood under patriarchy" (Nnaemeka 5).

Frieda's decision to go into self-imposed exile is her way of dealing with the reality she cannot change. She is accused by her "endless network of uncles and aunts" (Marais 33) in "Home Sweet Home" who feel betrayed by her decision to go to England leaving those who laboured to send her to school "to stew in ignorance" (YCGL 94). They believe, especially her Uncle Gerrie, that Frieda's future is in Cape Town "[t]he most beautiful city in the world ... and the richest" (94). Yet Frieda does "not give a fig for the postcard beauty of the bay and the majesty of the mountain" because this cosmetic view of the city is compromised by such stories as that of District Six, "the bulldozers, impatient vultures, that hover about its stench" (94). Obviously, Frieda sees what her family cannot see. She sees things differently, perceiving the oppression beyond the beautiful postcard beauty of Cape Town. Frieda's struggle for difference is underlined by her aunt Cissie who labels Frieda as being "stubborn as a mule, always pulling the other way" (94). Oom Dawid makes similar reference while talking to Frieda about his troublesome mules: "Like you they've always got somewhere to go. More trouble than they are worth (103).

On her last visit home to Namaqualand before sailing to England, Frieda is confronted with the idea of home, especially her people's intimate connection to the land. Oom Dawid tells her "you are home now with your own people: it can't be very nice roaming across the cold water where you don't belong" (102). Obviously Oom Dawid here disapproves of Frieda's decision to leave for England, a place where according to him, she has no relatives and therefore no place she can call home. Implied here is the thinking that no strange place can be made/called home; that home is home because of one's people. Oom Dawid also

refers to Frieda's connection to the land through her apparently dead mother. In this place where she "can always see the white stones of [her] mother's grave on the koppie" (103), Frieda ought to feel at home. By leaving this place where the remains of her mother are buried and going away to England means that Frieda severs her relationship with both her mother and the motherland. Oom Dawid's sentiments are echoed by Auntie Cissie's interjection "There's no place like home" and Frieda's father's clichéd rejoinder that "home is where the heart is" (107). As rightly noted by Marais, these sentiments "gloss over the harsh realities of apartheid, of dispossession and racial segregation" (Marais 36) and therefore contradict Frieda's earlier noted feeling about the place. To her, the place has become unhomely and since "home is where the heart is" then South Africa can no longer be called home for Frieda because her heart is no longer in this place. That her heart is not in this place is already clear during the family gathering on the eve of her departure when her mind drifts off, losing track of the family conversation. Thus even before her physical departure Frieda is already not part of their talk, and this is because she looks at the world differently from how her community views it. She has different stories to tell about this place and she knows that her people would not like the stories if she were to tell them because her "awareness of the textuality of reality and of the fictionality of self as a unified sensibility, a coherent and autonomous subject" (Marais 36) would destabilise their perception of themselves and the world around them. Frieda is aware that her people would not like such interference with their tales which like "the watermelon that grows out of this arid earth, have come to replace the world" (*YCGL* 95). Implied in the watermelon image is Frieda's people's own resilience not just in the semi-arid region of Namaqualand like the watermelon, but also in the harsh racist world created by apartheid. Like the watermelon that makes the best out of the little moisture from the dry land, Frieda's community makes the best out of their oppressive situation creating stories that can be called their own.

One problem Frieda has with these stories is their lack of confrontation of the oppression that the people suffer. Her wish to smash that watermelon-like wholeness of her people's stories is her wish to reveal realities that the stories paper over. Overwhelmed by this unhomely feeling, Frieda thinks she will leave South Africa for good: "I will not come back" she says, "I will never live in this country again" (98). Frieda does not see her land as she used to when she was a young girl growing up in the veld. She has since lost that "feather-warm familiarity" of the land she had known as a child when "young and genderless" she belonged "without question to this country, this world" (100).

On her return to the Cape in the 1980s after ten years of an equally disappointing stay in England, Frieda comes back to a South Africa that is as changed as it has remained the same. Her father is dead, her close friend Moira is married with children and there is a new clinic that accommodates other races apart from whites. Yet things have not really changed because her people still remain trapped in apartheid's racial politics. Apartheid is as much a reality now as it was ten years ago before she left, and her people still do not want to talk about it, let alone resist it. This reality strikes her immediately after landing at the airport. In a conversation with one of her many aunts, Frieda asks whether they have seen coverage of the South African riots on TV, as she has done in England, but Aunt Cissie is not willing to discuss politics and tells her "don't start with politics now" (176). Similarly, Frieda's own mother in "A Trip to Gifberge" disapproves of young people's involvement with the United Democratic Front, which she refers to as "playing with fire" (179). To her, the young people "[d]on't care a damn about the expensive education their parents have sacrificed so much for" (179). This becomes interesting considering the mother's apolitical stance later in the story.

Frieda too has changed by the end of the short story cycle, especially in her attitude towards her people. She is more willing upon her return from England to listen to her people's stories, the same stories she wished she could smash like a watermelon on the eve of

her setting sail to England. Frieda's change of attitude towards her coloured community is in part a result of her not so very pleasant stay in England and her realisation that England is no better a place than her home country. The England she experienced was not like Hardy's England of "bright green meadows" she used to imagine before she left, "a land anyone could love" (98). When Henry (in "Behind the Bougainvillea") asks her to tell him about England which to him sounds "green and peaceful" (130), Frieda tells him to watch television if he is to get a better picture of England because hers "will always be the view of a Martian" (130). Thus, Henry should not expect to get an objective opinion from her about England because she is an alien to that place. The question of "home" as in belonging thus resurfaces here as Frieda re-enters the space she at first rejected as home.

Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* face similar problems to Frieda's but their predicament is made worse by the fact that they have to experience firsthand the violence and starvation of the Biafran war. Events of the Biafran war are firmly foregrounded in the narrative and both Olanna and Kainene among other women are caught in the middle of it. These women have been described as "girls at war" by Chinua Achebe in one of his short stories of the same name or as "wives at war" to use the title of Flora Nwapa's short story collection, which according to Marian Pape in her essay entitled "Nigerian War Literature by Women: From Civil War to Gender War", defies Achebe's "belittling title" (Pape 237). However, like the phrase "daughters of the nation", Achebe's title is as problematic as Nwapa's. While Achebe's title is diminutive and gestures towards the naivety, inexperience and vulnerability of women during the war (like Gladys the female protagonist in "Girls at War" who needs male protection and yet gets sexually abused by the same men), Nwapa's title seems to yoke women's experiences of the war to their patriarchal designated roles as wives, which poses the risk of their experiences being read only in

relation to their relationship with their men. I propose a reading of women's experiences in Adichie's novel that focuses on women at war and their struggles for selfhood.

Besides showing how women are united in and by suffering during the war, Adichie also shows in nuanced ways how both age and class meant that different women suffered differently during the war. Like Chinua Achebe's Gladys in "Girls at War", young unmarried women in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are more prone to sexual abuse than married women, and these two groups of women are thus exposed differently to the war. The incident of sexual abuse in *Half of a Yellow Sun* that has so far attracted the most attention is the rape incident discussed earlier in chapter one in which a girl working in a bar in Biafra is gang raped by Biafran soldiers, including Ugwu. This incident is significant mainly because Ugwu (one of the most interesting characters in the novel, following his rise from a mere houseboy to author of "the book" on Biafra) takes part in that rape. As also noted in chapter one, the rape incident is one of the reasons critics like Brenda Cooper have argued that Adichie compromises her feminism in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. As I claim on the other hand, Ugwu's participation in the rape deliberately unfixes Manichean divisions between victims and perpetrators by showing the ways in which victims or the oppressed (on a racial or class level) can become perpetrators (in this case, on a gendered level).

Apart from this rape incident there are a number of similar incidents of sexual abuse in the novel. Many of these involve vulnerable young women whose bodies are traded for favours from relief workers and Biafran soldiers and officials. Eberechi, one of the girls Ugwu has feelings for, is given to an army officer by her parents in return for her brother being employed in the essential services department of the army. Eberechi's body is sacrificed to family goals as she becomes an object of exchange to enable her brother to get a job and thereby avoid going to the battle front. Eberechi seems indifferent about this, most likely because she is powerless in the whole transaction. The detached tone with which she

narrates the incident to Ugwu could be her way of coping with the trauma which the reader notices beneath the sense of humour with which she narrates her ordeal. One commander, a family relation to one of Olanna's and Odenigbo's friends called "Special Julius", takes advantage of "young-young girls that crawl around looking for sugar daddies" and "he takes five of them into his bedroom at the same time" (*HYS* 278). Okeoma also talks about a white mercenary who "throws girls on their backs in the open" in full view of everybody (323). Ugwu too sees for himself while serving in the army girls entering the commander's compound and leaving a while later "with sheepish smiles" (360). He also learns after the war that his own sister Anulika was gang-raped by five men during the war in an incident that calls for counter-focalisation – for Ugwu and the reader to imagine rape from the victim's perspective. The most heartless and calculated incident of sexual abuse is perpetrated by a priest, Father Marcel, who impregnates one of the girls at a refugee camp where he works with Kainene. He takes advantage of starving young girls and "fucks most of them before he gives them crayfish" (398). Offering a critique of the sexism of nationalism and nationalist leaders, even Ojukwu the Biafran leader is implicated in sexual abuse when Kainene alleges that he imprisoned men whose wives he wanted (313).

The issue of class comes into play because for women like Olanna and Kainene their burden during the war has more to do with their being deprived of material things associated with middle class life than with exposure to sexual violation. What seems to trouble Olanna is how her conditions of living during the war mock her middle-class status and values:

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

When she receives a package containing underwear, bars of soap and chocolate from her former lover, Mohammed, Olanna is not only reminded of the luxuries of middle-class life

but she is also angered by his enclosed letter in which he talks about the least of Olanna's worries in her present situation, his improved game of polo. Olanna feels insulted by Mohammed's letter because it mocks her present situation which is so desperate that she has to sell her wig in order to buy basic commodities (377).

The question of the "educated" versus the "uneducated" troubles a solidarity of gendered marginality in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The difference in class as influenced by education leads to conflict within the women's camp – "educated" against "uneducated" – such that a struggle for gender equality is not waged with a wholly united front. It is significant to note how "uneducated" village women like Odenigbo's mother and Ugwu's aunt look at educated women like Olanna and Kainene. The general perception of "educated" women by "uneducated" village women is given quite early in the novel as Ugwu is schooled by his aunt about university women who "wore bouncy straight hair wigs" and "used hot combs to straighten their hair . . . because they wanted to look like white people" (19). Here class ascendancy, as in Wicomb's fiction, overlaps with associations of "whiteness." Miss Adebayo, the only woman apart from Olanna who usually joins evening gatherings of Nsukka academics at Odenigbo's house is the first university woman Ugwu meets that matches his aunt's description. Agreeing with his aunt's opinion, Ugwu finds Miss Adebayo contrary to his "imagined quietness, delicacy" of an educated woman, "the kind of woman whose sneeze, whose laugh and talk, would be soft as the under feathers closest to a chicken's skin" (19). Reflected in both Ugwu's and his aunt's opinion about university women is the conservative definition of "woman" in rural Igbo societies. Clearly, the dislike of university women is on the one hand due to their rejection of patriarchal definition of "woman" and "womanhood" and on the other hand because of their adoption of European ways of life.

The above-noted perception of university-educated women plays a significant role in the conflict between Olanna and Mama as Odenigbo's mother is referred to in the novel. Mama does not approve of her son's affair with Olanna, a woman who did not suck her mother's breast, which refers to the fact that Olanna's mother used a wet nurse for Olanna and Kainene. Apparently, Olanna and Kainene were breastfed by their aunt Aunty Ifeka "when their mother's [breasts] dried up soon after they were born" (39). The ever sceptical Kainene however, thinks that "their mother's breasts did not dry up at all" but that she "had given them to a nursing aunt only to save her own breasts from drooping" (39). Mama believes that Olanna is a witch sent by fellow witches to cast a spell on her son, an opinion that reflects the Igbo belief of twins as evil. She blames Olanna for Odenigbo not yet being married "while his mates are counting how many children they have" (97). Like Ugwu and his aunt, Mama thinks "[t]oo much schooling ruins a woman" because "[i]t gives a woman a big head and she will start insulting her husband" (98). She opines: "these girls that go to university follow men around until their bodies are useless" (98). As if foretelling Olanna's seeming inability to fall pregnant, she adds "[n]obody knows if she can have children" (98). She calls Olanna a "loose woman" (98) whom she will not allow to plunder what her son worked so hard to put together. Olanna is earlier dismissed in a similar fashion by Mohammed's mother who does not approve of an Igbo woman as a prospective daughter-in-law because she would "taint the lineage with her infidel blood" (46).

Odenigbo's mother represents the general opinion of rural women about womanhood and its value which is often attached to how many children one can produce. Failure to have children devalues a woman's worth in society, especially in the eyes of her mother-in-law. As a result many young women desire to have babies as a way of asserting their worth as women. Driven by such desire, Olanna's cousin, Arize is desperate for marriage so that she can have her own children. When she learns that Olanna is taking her time before deciding on

getting married, Arize believes it is only educated women like Olanna who can afford to think like that. She tells Olanna “[i]f people like me who don’t know Book wait too long, we will expire” (41). Notable in Arize’s words is the commodification of the female body complete with the “use-by” date. Also hinted upon in Arize’s opinion is how lack of education limits the rural women’s possibilities of navigating out of patriarchal definitions of womanhood. When she fails to fall pregnant in the first three years of her marriage, Arize is taunted by her mother-in-law who tells “her to confess how many abortions she has had before” (130). Both Mama and Arize’s mother-in-law are burdened by patriarchal expectations of womanhood. Both women are objects of ridicule among their fellow women because their sons are unable to give them grandchildren. Their status in society is thus compromised because they fall short of this mark of womanhood. In Mama’s case she does not have grandchildren from Odenigbo because he is not yet married. Interestingly, Odenigbo is not even keen on having children because in his opinion, “to bring a child into this unjust world was an act of a blasé bourgeoisie anyway” (104). In the case of Arize’s mother-in-law, she is convinced that her son has not given her grandchildren yet because Arize is barren. For both mother-in-laws, their sons are involved with women of whom rural society does not approve, a woman who has too much education to make a good wife, in the case of Olanna, and a barren women in the case of Arize. Like Olanna, Arize’s failure to fall pregnant is wholly attributed to her and nothing is said about her husband which attests to patriarchal tendency to associate defect with the female body.

In her earlier cited introduction to *The Politics of (M)Othering*, Nnaemeka notes that besides “exposing the insidiousness of male violence and abuse” essays in *The Politics of (M)Othering* also “show how oppression of women is not simply a masculinist flaw [...] but that it also entails women-on-women violence that is often an outcome of institutionalised, hierarchical female spaces that make women victims and collaborators in patriarchal

violence” (Nnaemeka 19). Olanna’s treatment by Mama, and Arize’s treatment by her mother-in-law are illustrative of Nnaemeka’s observation above. The idea of women as victims and collaborators in patriarchal oppression is also illustrated by the relationship between Mama and Amala, the young woman she coaxes into sleeping with Odenigbo. Through Amala, Odenigbo’s mother hopes to end her ridicule as “the mother of an impotent son” (HYS 238). She also hopes that Amala’s sleeping with Odenigbo would be a way of getting rid of Olanna.

Amala is a victim through whom Mama plans to fulfil her patriarchal-influenced desire to become a grandmother. Clearly Amala was forced into the situation, as evidenced by her attempt to abort the baby. After the baby is born, she refuses to touch it, which could be read as a form of protest against being used by Odenigbo’s mother. It could also be because she gives birth to a girl instead of a boy as Odenigbo’s mother had anticipated. The question of silence and power comes into play here as Amala is powerless at the hands of both Odenigbo and his mother. She neither protests against Odenigbo’s mother sending her into Odenigbo’s bedroom nor against Odenigbo’s sleeping with her “because she had not considered that she could say no” (250). She “submitted willingly and promptly” to him because he “was the master, he spoke English, he had a car” (250). In short “[i]t was the way it should be” (250). Yet an important question is asked by the narrator: “How much did one know of the true feelings of those who did not have a voice?” (250).

When Olanna decides to raise the baby after both Amala and Odenigbo’s mother refuse to keep it, it is neither because she wants to please Odenigbo nor because she feels sorry for the baby. It is purely because she feels like keeping the baby and chooses to obey those feelings: “holding that tiny, warm body, she had felt a conscious serendipity, a sense that this may not have been planned but had become, the minute it happened, what was meant to be” (251). Like Tameita in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, Olanna becomes a mother

without the clumsiness of pregnancy and labour, without necessarily having her body and its reproductive potential appropriated for patriarchal needs. Olanna's claim to selfhood here recalls an earlier lesson she learnt from her aunt, Aunty Ifeka, about a woman's self-worth and also recalls an incident between "educated" Frieda and "uneducated" Skitterboud in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Olanna is schooled by her "uneducated" aunt on how to deal with Odenigbo's infidelity. Aunty Ifeka advises Olanna, following Olanna's devastation because of Odenigbo's cheating on her with Amala, to start doing things for herself, to make herself the centre of her decisions and the purpose for her actions: "*You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man Your life belongs to you and you alone*" (226, emphasis added). Aunty Ifeka's statement that "Odenigbo has done what all men do and has inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away" (226) has been deemed problematic by Brenda Cooper who reads it as positing that men's infidelity is down to their biology, "that it is in their biological make-up to be sexually promiscuous" (Cooper, *New Generation* 149). While agreeing with Cooper on Aunty Ifeka's potentially problematic generalisation about male behaviour one is left wondering at Cooper's partial citation of Aunty Ifeka's advice to Olanna. Equally important and most likely the intended message in Aunty Ifeka's advice to Olanna, as shown above, is her insistence that Olanna begins to make herself the main purpose of her life, and that a woman's life need not be absolutely dependent on a man. Like Frieda in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Olanna is an educated, modern and supposedly independent woman who learns a valuable feminist lesson from an unlikely source, an "uneducated" market woman.

Aunty Ifeka's advice is echoed by Edna, Olanna's African-American neighbour, as well as by Olanna's priest, Father Damian. Edna's fiancé ended their relationship on the eve of their wedding day and afterwards showed no remorse and went on with his life as if nothing had happened. As noted in chapter four, themes of betrayal of women by men in

marriages and love relationships characterise much of Adichie's fiction. Like aunty Ifeka, Edna urges Olanna to recognise and cherish her worth: "Look at you. You are the kindest person I know. Look how beautiful you are. Why do you need so much outside yourself? Why isn't what you are enough?" (*HYS* 232). Father Damian echoes both Aunty Ifeka's and Edna's opinions when he urges Olanna to forgive Odenigbo and to do so not for Odenigbo but for herself as a way of "allowing [herself] to be happy" (230). By holding the grudge, Olanna's life would be controlled by Odenigbo through the misery he has caused her. Forgiving him and letting go would unshackle her from that misery. Following the advice from her aunt, her neighbour and the priest, Olanna begins to live her life for herself. She engages herself in new things as a way of creating a new world for herself: she "cooked long meals, read new books, bought new records" (229). She also plants a new garden, an act which is symbolic of her new beginnings. However, Olanna's control over her life and affairs takes extreme expression when she sleeps with Richard, her twin sister's boyfriend. Despite the guilt she feels after the incident, Olanna found sleeping with Richard somehow liberating: "It was as if she was throwing shackles off her wrists, extracting pins from her skin, freeing herself with the loud cries that burst out of her mouth. Afterwards, she felt filled with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace" (235). Yet by repaying Odenigbo's infidelity with her own, Olanna does not solve her misery but only complicates it, because she now has to worry about how she would face her twin sister Kainene if she were to find out about her sleeping with Richard.

Authorship, Orality and Healing

In the final section of this chapter I would like to return to the theme of authorship discussed in chapter one, and which becomes a thread throughout the thesis as a whole. While in that chapter the focus was on Wicomb's and Adichie's investment of authorial agency in characters who are usually marginal in the writing of history, in the present chapter I turn towards authorship as a way of claiming selfhood. So far in this chapter, I have read the foregrounding of women's experiences in the two narratives as Wicomb's and Adichie's way of writing women's experiences into the otherwise "malestream" narratives of apartheid and the Biafran war. Now I would like to focus on characters in the two narratives who are involved in acts of authorship, specifically Frieda and Olanna. I read their involvement in moments of writing/authorship as working in a similar manner that authorship does for the authors: as way through which female subjects script their experiences into a history that has hitherto not paid enough attention to women's experiences. It has to be pointed out however, that while Frieda actually writes her own stories which she later intends to publish, Olanna's involvement in authorship is only through the passing on of her experiences during the war to Ugwu who then writes them down to include in his book. As I point out in chapter 4, women as writers/authors feature more prominently in Adichie's later short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

In her essay "Siblinghood and Coalition: Zoë Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*" Denise Handlarski points out that Wicomb's book "is fundamentally concerned with the act of writing as resistance" (Handlarski 56) and that "[w]riting is a centrally significant act in the novel" (57). Similarly, Judith Raiskin in *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* observes that Frieda's "attempt to be a writer of new stories is the subject of the novel" (Raiskin 214). Though Handlarski and Raiskin refers to Wicomb's book as a "novel", both critics are aware of how the book "moves towards a space of

ambiguity in its construction” (Handlarski 56) hovering between the short story and novel genres. According to Raiskin, Wicomb’s narrative “undermines the traditional genres of novel, short story, and autobiography (Raiskin 215). Other critics have referred to the book as “a cycle of stories” (Richards 74) or as a “short fiction cycle” (Marais 29). The narrative’s state of “in-betweenness” in as far as its precarious location in terms of genre is concerned, could be read as speaking to the protagonist’s own state of “in-betweenness” as a coloured person. According to Wicomb “she intentionally plays with form [in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*] in order to complicate the notion of literature as documentary” (Handlarski 56).

The act of writing in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* functions for Frieda in the same way it does for Wicomb as a writer. Authorship for Frieda becomes the one way through which she re-enters the space she once rejected as home and through which she reconnects with her people. I particularly focus on two stories in which Frieda’s act of writing is prominent: “A Fair Exchange” and “A Trip to Gifberge”. In “A Fair Exchange” Frieda listens to Skitterboud narrating the events of his divorce case which she later turns into a story. Central to the plot of the story is Skitterboud’s disgust with the magistrate’s ruling in the case, a ruling which instead of granting him custody of their children as he had petitioned, the court went on to denigrate his wife, Meid: ruling that she had no right over anything in the house and that everything, including her clothes, belonged to Skitterboud (*YCGL* 150-51). What does not sit well with Skitterboud in the ruling, it seems, is the magistrate’s apparent lack of respect for Meid’s body. According to Skitterboud’s understanding of the ruling, the magistrate wanted him “to make [his wife] undress and keep all her clothes and send her running across to Geil naked under the roasting sun” (150). His reaction towards the magistrate’s “filthy words” (150) is one of disgust and shame:

... I shut my ears and listened no more and when I came out I spat out those words into the hot red sand and watched them sizzle away. And there was nothing to do about my shame. I just had to wear it like tie and jacket. (150)

Later, Frieda turns Skitterboud's experiences into a story that we read in "A Fair Exchange". The process of turning Skitterboud's experience into narrative, however, is not straightforward for Frieda. Firstly, because years have passed since the story happened, it is "yellow with age and curled at the edges" (143) and owing to Skitterboud's earlier mentioned disgust and shame, he cannot (or he is reluctant to) remember all the details of the story: it "was torn in sadness and rage so that now reassembling, the cracks remain all too clear" (143). In fact, "[a] few fragments are irretrievably lost" (144). Reminiscent of the amanuensis in *David's Story*, who every now and then comments on the story she struggles to write, Frieda informs the reader through an authorial comment that Skitterboud's original story "has long since ceased to exist for him" (145) and that what the reader is reading are the bits and pieces of what Skitterboud could remember, to which she has given some coherence. Secondly, owing to the years Frieda spent away from this community, the process of piecing together Skitterboud's story makes her "uneasy" (145) precisely because she feels unhomed in this place. "The silence of the veld oppresses me" she says (145) and she nearly asks Skitterboud for dagga which she reckons could be the only way "of getting through this visit after years away from home" (145).

In this particular story, orality becomes a useful tool through which Frieda discovers herself and grows as a writer and as a person. On the one hand, it is through listening to and writing her people's stories that Frieda begins to appreciate the ways through which they survive apartheid's oppression. Through Skitterboud's story Frieda's earlier one-dimensional perception of her people as being complicit in apartheid's racial politics is challenged. Skitterboud's reaction to the magistrate's ruling, and his wife's naming of their daughter after a local flower (instead of giving her a European name as is common among colonial subjects), are forms of resistance that Frieda fails to notice earlier on. Similarly, Frieda's mother's rejection of the appropriation of proteas for Boer nationalism in "A Trip to

Gifberge” is a form of resistance which, earlier on in the narrative, Frieda could never have thought her people as being capable of. Orality thus brings Frieda closer to her people thereby allowing her to overcome the feeling of being unhomed in the veld and also gives her a chance to write her people’s stories. That Frieda has confronted and to some extent exorcised her unhomely feeling is evident towards the end of “A Trip to Gifberge” (the last story in the collection) where she contemplates relocating from England back to Cape Town (189). Scripting her experiences alongside those of her people becomes her way of claiming and asserting her space within this community. It could be said therefore that her people’s stories offer her some useful grounding both as a writer and as a coloured woman.

The relationship between Frieda as a writer and her community is a symbiotic one. While people like Skitterboud depend on Frieda to have their stories recovered and written, Frieda depends on such people’s stories to further her career as a writer. It is in this respect that Frieda’s leaving her spectacles with Skitterboud becomes symbolic. Dorothy Driver has observed that by giving her spectacles to Skitterboud, it means that “[Frieda] sees less than Skitterboud sees” (Driver, “Transformation” 50). In this exchange, spectacles become a metaphor for sight and knowledge that comes with sight. In that case what Skitterboud and Frieda exchange are each other’s ways of seeing the world. From Frieda’s perspective, to borrow Driver’s words, “[b]ook learning gives way to a different kind of knowledge” (50). With the spectacles Skitterboud now sees better and more clearly and by listening to Skitterboud’s story Frieda moves closer to overcoming her unhomely feeling and begins to understand and can write about her people better than before. As Judith Raiskin has noted, “[t]hrough Skitterboud’s stories, Frieda begins to explore the oral tradition and perspective denied her by her colonial education and gains a critical perspective on that education and her relationship to both Anglo-European and African values” (Raiskin 228).

In “A Trip to Gifberge” focus shifts from Frieda’s actual moment of writing to the critical reception of her stories, particularly by her mother. Raiskin calls the story “an ironic and self-conscious unwriting of the novel that precedes it” (Raiskin 229). In this story the relationship between mother and daughter transforms into one between author and reader/critic. Frieda’s mother is enraged by her daughter’s stories especially by Frieda’s fictionalisation of her people’s stories which includes the invention of the mother’s death. She labels the stories as mere gossip: “Dreary little things in which nothing happens” (*YCGL* 179). When Frieda defends her stories that they are merely stories “[m]ade up” and therefore “not real, not the truth” (179), her mother’s response raises important questions about Frieda’s authority as author of her people’s stories and the authenticity the stories she has written:

But you have used the real. If I can recognise places and people so can others, and if you want to play around like that why don’t you have the courage to tell the whole truth? Ask me for stories with neat endings and you won’t have to invent my death. What do you know about people, about this place where you were born? About your ancestors who roamed these hills? You left remember? (179-80)

In the mother’s opinion the years Frieda spent away from her homeland make her an outsider to this community and therefore not fit to write the community’s stories. The mother seems to confirm Frieda’s state of being unhomed from her motherland, a feeling that we saw Frieda grapple with in “A Fair Exchange”.

Frieda’s mother’s take on her daughter’s stories also challenges Frieda’s distinction between fiction and reality. Frieda’s platonic view of art, in this case fiction, as something removed from reality and therefore not to be taken seriously or something that has independent existence is challenged by her mother’s idea of fiction. To borrow Handlarski’s words, the mother’s response seems to postulate that “fiction is not fact but the truth it reveals can still be relevant” (Handlarski 56) something Frieda is certainly aware of owing to her

training in literary studies. She certainly might not have anticipated such a critical reaction from her “unschooled” mother.

What seems particularly enraging to the mother is what Sue Marais has called Frieda’s “Electra complex and matricidal literary tendencies” (Marais 37). She rages:

To write from under your mother’s skirt, to shout at the world that it’s all right to kill God’s unborn child! You have killed me over and over so it was quite unnecessary to invent my death. Do people ever do anything with their education? (*YCGL* 180)

As readers, we realise that Frieda’s mother has been reading same stories that we are reading. This highly metafictional moment presents Frieda’s mother, a character in Wicomb’s story, reading Frieda’s story in which she is also a character. As a mother, Frieda’s mother is embarrassed that her daughter could write about such things as her abortion for the entire world to read. She also most probably feels rejected by her daughter in whose stories she has no place but only as a dead person, an absent mother in a daughter’s life. Handlarski observes that the killing off of the mother is an interesting meta-narrative in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* precisely because the mother is killed off twice: first by Wicomb in the plot of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* and then by Frieda as a character writing her people’s stories in Wicomb’s narrative (Handlarski 56). As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, for Wicomb the mother’s earlier reported death could be read as “her suppression” (Wicomb, *Between the Lines* 95) by the father, or even by Frieda herself. In Frieda’s life, the death of the mother in earlier stories is the absence of meaningful maternal influence which was suppressed by the father under whose exclusive influence Frieda grew up. The absence of maternal influence in Frieda’s formative years is tantamount to the mother being dead and is scripted as such in the stories. Wicomb’s resurrection of the mother in the concluding story becomes Frieda’s moment of reconnection with the maternal influence her father’s patriarchal tyranny deprived her of. It seems that it is this reconnection with the maternal side

of her life that makes Frieda contemplate coming back to Cape Town for good - to which, in response, her mother's "eyes glow with interest" (*YCGL* 189).

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna and Kainene are not actively involved in the authorship of the story of Biafra the way Frieda is in the writing of her community's stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In fact it is only Olanna who participates in a more direct way in the writing of the book by passing on to Ugwu through word of mouth her experiences during the war notably, her encounter with the woman who carried her dead child's head in a calabash. It is unlikely however, that Olanna's is the only voice Ugwu incorporates into his book. We are told that he listened to conversations in the evening mostly between Olanna and Kainene which he later wrote down. Thus his written narrative stems partly from oral accounts exchanged between women, and is a collaborative history that incorporates women's stories and experiences. As we saw in chapter one, this makes Ugwu's a proliferation of different voices: "a diversity of social speech types" and "a diversity of individual voices" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 262).

We first come across Olanna's involvement with authorship of "The Book" in the initial account of the writing of "The Book" which mentions Olanna telling the story of a woman carrying her dead child's head in a calabash (*HYS* 82). It is later on towards the end of the novel that we realise that Olanna was talking to Ugwu who incorporates Olanna's story into the book he is writing. This is the first time Olanna is able to narrate her traumatic ordeal which also includes the brutal murder of her uncle and aunt whom she went visiting in Kano. Previously when she tried to talk about the ordeal "her lips were heavy. Speaking was labour" (157). In fact she "had not even tried to talk about it" (157). But her participation in Ugwu's effort to write the Biafran story helps her to talk about her own traumatic experiences. She is able to talk about events which previously made her lose mobility in her legs. By opening up to Ugwu, Olanna relieves herself of her traumatic burden and allows her memory to be

narrated as part of the larger and collective memory project that is Ugwu's book. For Olanna, Ugwu's "writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she could not be sure of" (410).

Conclusion

You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town and *Half of a Yellow Sun* provide complex readings of gendered marginality in relation to oppressive and violent historical moments. Wicomb's text does what Wicomb herself sees Miriam Tlali's story titled "Fud-u-u-a" as doing. According to Wicomb, Tlali's story "stir[s] that which an official policy keeps still, in order that a new space can be created for the crushed and degraded female to articulate her plight" (Wicomb, "Variety of Discourses" 67). As for Adichie, she joins her literary foremothers like Nwapa who "have used the topic of civil war to engage in a gender war" (Pape 233). Through their respective texts both Wicomb and Adichie trouble the idea of gender as marginality by focusing on how unstable "woman" is as a category, particularly in relation to class interests. Womanhood and motherhood are disconnected in their narratives, and the category "woman" is deconstructed, rendered non-universal, because of race and class differences between women. In both texts education is central both as a motif as well as a determining factor for one's class which in turn determines the women's perception of and involvement in political resistance as well as their relations with other women. In terms of authorship, Wicomb returns to that theme by making it the way through which Frieda gains new knowledge about herself and her people. In Adichie's narrative, although authorship is not directly central to the lives of Olanna and Kainene, Olanna participates in Ugwu's authorship of "The Book" by telling him her experiences during the war. By passing her stories on to Ugwu, Olanna ensures that her experiences are scripted into the story of Biafra as told by Ugwu. This chapter has been structured by looking at relationships between daughters and parents, and in the chapter that follows, I continue with the discussion of children's relationship with their

parents in Wicomb and Adichie's fiction, but this time turning my focus to oppressive domestic spaces that are a result of particular histories.

Chapter Three

Cultivating Purity: Unhomely Homes in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Apartheid's identity politics and colonial Christian doctrine informing Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) respectively share one important similarity: the desire for purity. In both cases, such purity is supposed to be achieved by keeping out "the Other", in the form of anything that threatens the boundaries of an acquired identity. As I shall argue, the desire for racial whiteness at the centre of *Playing in the Light* may be placed in conversation with the desire for religious purity in *Purple Hibiscus*. The Campbell family in *Playing in the Light* strive for whiteness, distancing themselves from any taint of their coloured past. Since white is supposedly the colour of purity in colonial Christian ideology, with God himself being seen as "white" by colonials who spread the word of God in Africa, then in some sense the desire for religious "cleanliness" in *Purple Hibiscus* also becomes an aspiration towards some sort of "whiteness". In both novels, the desire for purity is expressed through a forced way of life within the domestic space, but which is shown to be destructive to family life, to life within the home. Along with an overemphasis on purity, be it religious or racial, comes repression, but also the return of the repressed, which is shown to rear its head in uncanny ways – in the cast-off coloured family members who haunt the "white" childhood home of Marion in *Playing in the Light*, and in the extreme brutality of Papa Eugene towards his wife and children in the narrator's home in *Purple Hibiscus*. This chapter focuses on how histories of a desire for purity find their way into what Homi Bhabha calls "the recesses of the domestic space" which in turn become "sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha, *Location* 13). In turning my attention to purity and the cultivation of a desired identity, in this chapter I examine family histories and

domestic spaces, but also images of the garden, of the cultivation of flowers and plants, in each novel.

As I shall argue, interesting parallels can be drawn between histories of purity informing the two novels. Both apartheid and colonial Christianity held the promise of better life for a certain category of people. The lure of comfortable life that came with being white in apartheid South Africa, and the promise for preferential treatment by the colonial government (over and above the promise for everlasting life) for those who embraced Christianity in colonial Nigeria made racial whiteness in apartheid South Africa and Christianity in colonial Nigeria highly sought after categories. Although one could convert to Christianity in colonial Africa with greater ease than one could pass for white (if black or coloured) under apartheid, Christianity in Igboland held somewhat similar promises as those of whiteness in apartheid South Africa. Whereas “whiteness” meant a “reassuring promise of a lifetime’s worth of privileges for those classified as ‘white’” under apartheid (Posel 62), “it became fashionable to be called a Christian” (Ekechi 103) in Igboland where “church attendance became a new status symbol” (104) and Christianity “had suddenly become a badge of honour” (105). Most importantly, in Igboland Christianity became a way of escaping oppression, such as forced labour and military expeditions. “To most people,” writes Ekechi in his study of colonial Christianity in Igboland, “it became quite obvious that those who were associated with the Christian missionaries received preferential treatment” (105). In certain cases converts were exempted from appearing before local courts because, the missionaries argued, “a ‘pagan’ chief had no jurisdiction over Christians” (106), further underlining the special status Christianity afforded those who converted.⁷

⁷Interestingly, the word *kaffir*, used as a derogatory term for a black person under apartheid, is derived from an Islamic word meaning “infidel” thereby making apartheid’s sense of racial purity speak to a sense of religious purity.

In their respective ways, the Campbells in *Playing in the Light* and Papa Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* desire purity that would, as they claim, ensure opportunities for a good life for their children. As shown later, the Campbells' desire to raise their child "without the burden of history" (PL 152) resonates with Papa Eugene's attempt to raise their children without the burden of sin. Thus the loathing towards bodily slovenliness (falling into racial degeneration, or lapsing into behaviour that reveals one's "coloured" roots) and racial impurity in *Playing in the Light* can be put into conversation with the loathing towards what is perceived as spiritual contamination and impurity in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Both the apartheid situation and the Christian colonial enterprise involved boundaries that were to be policed. This stemmed from the desire to keep the race "wonderfully pure" (cited in Posel 55) in the case of apartheid, and from a sense of spiritual purity in the case of colonial Christianity. In the apartheid situation those with "pure white" blood had privileges, but as the novel suggests, what came to be the criteria for determining one's whiteness (i.e. "the bioculturalist version of race" (Posel 64), the "coupling of race and 'way of life'" which relied upon "racial appearance and social habits" (56)) meant that even those with the "admixture of blood" could find their way into whiteness. Similarly, the agents of colonisation meant first and foremost that the Christian principle of the kingdom of heaven belonged to them as their rightful inheritance, but in the process of Christianising "the natives", "the kingdom" came to belong also to those who were not part of the "chosen race" but had accepted to live by the holy teachings.

Family Histories and Unhomely Homes

Sigmund Freud's theory of 'the uncanny' and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial reading of that theory informs this chapter's theoretical orientation. We saw in the introduction to this study how Freud defines the uncanny as something familiar yet terrifying. According to Freud, uncanny moments occur "when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 17). The uncanny effect of the intrusion of a suppressed past into consciousness comprises one of the two main areas of focus in this section. The second area of focus is informed by Bhabha's reading of how the disruption of "the symmetry of private and public" (Bhabha, *Location* 13) leads to "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" and subsequently to "the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home in the world" (Bhabha, "The World" 141). In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha is interested in places where the "borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other" (Bhabha, *Location* 13). In these blurred boundaries between "private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social" there develops, according to Bhabha, "an interstitial intimacy" that "questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed" (19). The resultant disturbance of the private-public divide tears apart what Meg Samuelson calls "the threadbare curtain separating the home from the world" (Samuelson, "Home" 32). Useful also in my reading of the unhomely domestic space in the two novels is Rosemary Marangoly George's idea of "home" as expounded in the introduction to her book *The Politics of Home*. As George points out, much as the word "home" connotes that "private sphere" characterised by "shelter, comfort, nurture and protection", homes can be "places of [both] violence and nurturing" (George 1). As such "home" becomes "a place to escape to and a place to escape from" at the same time (9). Home "is not a neutral place" (9). George's ideas here allow for interesting readings of the

Campbell and Achike homes in *Playing in the Light* and *Purple Hibiscus* respectively. In fact, I read George's observations as somehow speaking to Freud's etymological illustration of how the word *heimlich* – translated directly as “homely” - which refers to that which “is familiar and comfortable” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132), “becomes increasingly ambivalent until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*” (134) - translated directly as “unhomely”- which refers to that which “evokes fear and dread” (123). In other words, we could read Freud, Bhabha and George as illustrating how the homely space that home is supposed to be, becomes unhomely such that the word *heimlich* acquires the meaning of its antonym, *unheimlich*.

Freud's assertions, in his etymological reading of the word *heimlich*, provide a useful entry point into the reading of unhomely homes in *Playing in the Light* and *Purple Hibiscus*. According to Freud, besides “homely”, the word *heimlich* also connotes that which is “concealed and kept hidden” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 132) or that which “is withdrawn from knowledge”; that which is “locked away, inscrutable” (133), in other words that which is secretive, or secretly done or felt. In this sense the *unheimlich* or uncanny situation would exist when that which “was intended to remain secret” or “hidden away”, “has come into the open” (132). As such, the “uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (148). In both novels, family histories become “the uncanny element,” which, though repressed by the two families, threaten to come into the open. These repressed family histories constitute what Bhabha in his essay “The Home and The World” calls “the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (“The World” 147).

In their effort to attain purity and repress uncanny family histories, both the Campbell parents and Papa Eugene find themselves creating unhomely domestic spaces where certain family members become saddled with aspirations that are not their own. In both novels,

parents burden their children with aspirations which are disguised as the parent's love for the children. As both novels reveal, however, this so-called love for the children is the parents' way of overcoming their own anxieties through (to use Bhabha's earlier cited words) the repression of "the un-spoken, unrepresentable pasts" haunting their "historical present" (Bhabha "The World" 147). Thus John and Helen Campbell's desire to raise Marion without the "burden of history" is in fact their own attempt to escape "coloured shame" and embrace whiteness and its promise for a comfortable life. In a like manner, Papa Eugene's self-proclaimed love for his family and his desire to raise a morally-upright family in Christian terms is in fact his own way of dealing with his repressed desires, guilt and cultural anxieties. To use Bhabha's words, what ensues in the end in both cases is that "home does not remain the domain of domestic life" (141) for it is invaded by history, thereby blurring the private-public divide which leads to an interstitial intimacy that questions the binary division between inside and outside the home. This interstitial intimacy leads to "an 'in-between' temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history" (Bhabha *Location*, 19) resulting in the unhomely sense of "the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha "The World" 141).

The "uncanny" families that Marion's parents in *Playing in the Light* and Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* try to avoid, become opportunities that finally hold the promise of liberation from domestic spheres that have been yoked to and suffocated by the desire for purity. Towards the end of *Playing in the Light*, a surprise party - whose "blended company and harmonious humour" Robert McCormick reads as representing "Wicomb's vision of the "New South Africa" (McCormick 68) - is organised at the Campbells' home. Attending the party is Elsie, Marion's father's sister who represents her father's coloured family with whom he had to cut ties in his pursuit of whiteness under apartheid. Laughter returns to the Campbell household in the person of Elsie who is known to be "a giggler, as they say of

women who laugh a lot” (PL 166). In a similar manner, in *Purple Hibiscus* Kambili begins to open up during her frequent visits to Aunt Ifeoma’s cramped household, which is filled with resounding laughter as compared to their spacious home where oppressive silence reigns. In a Bakhtinian sense, as we noted earlier in chapter one, laughter here serves both a cathartic function as well as a challenge to authority. Laughter both purifies (in a different sense from the purity meant by racial or religious purity) and liberates:

Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning.... (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*123)

Both Elsie and Aunt Ifeoma play roles similar to that of Bakhtinian “medieval clown” who, according to Bakhtin’s reading of the history of laughter in medieval times, carries the unofficial truth of laughter and mocks authority. Elsie’s laughter contrasts with her brother’s sadness and loneliness brought upon him by his status as a “play-white”. In a similar manner Marion and the librarian at National Library “rock with quiet laughter” after reading racial classification laws which were “designed to formalise and fix the categories of coloured and white” (PL 120). According the Act No. 30 of 1950 a white person was defined somewhat ridiculously as: “one who in appearance obviously is white, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person” (121). It is the 1962 amendment to the 1950 act that Marion finds interesting in the sense that it “defines whiteness in terms of what it is not” (121):

A white person is a person who (a) in appearance obviously is a white person and who is not generally accepted as a coloured person; or (b) is generally accepted as a white person and is not in appearance obviously not a white person, but does not include any person who for the purposes of classification under this act, freely and voluntarily admits that he is by descent a native or a coloured person unless it is proved that the admission is not based on fact. (121)

After reading this amendment Marion “hears shocking laughter peeling from her own throat” before the librarian “too succumbs to laughter”, thereby judging these laws as “decades’ worth of folly trapped in these pages” (121).

Contrary to the joyfulness and joviality suggested by the term “play-white” on the other hand, Marion observes that “[t]here was nothing playful about [the Campbells’] condition” (123). Theirs “was a deadly serious business” which was shrouded in secrecy, making the whole business less “playing” in the light than “hiding in the light” (124). The unhomely feeling that passing for white brings for the Campbell family contrasts with the giggles and “running-water laugh” in Elsie’s home where Marion hears for the first time the other side of her parents’ story.

Aunty Ifeoma’s laughter in *Purple Hibiscus* functions in similar ways to Elsie’s. In his study entitled “Journeying Out of Silenced Familial Spaces” Christopher Ouma notes how the oppressive silence and violence under which Kambili and her brother Jaja grow up in their parents’ house is contrasted with and “ruptured by the laughter and music in Ifeoma’s household” (Ouma 27). Comparable to Elsie’s “running-water laugh” (*PL* 169) is Ifeoma’s “crackling and throaty” laughter (*PH* 78). When she comes visiting one Christmas to the Achike’s village home in Abba, “her laughter floated upstairs into the living room” (71). Like Elsie, Ifeoma’s laughter sounds like mockery directed at her brother’s religious autocracy at home as well as the larger political farce of General Babangida’s military junta both of which, according to Ouma, perpetuate certain monologues. For both Kambili and Jaja, Aunty Ifeoma’s house becomes “a dialogic space away from the monologue of [their father]” (Ouma 62). The contagiousness of Ifeoma’s laughter shows when, just after being with her aunt for a short while, Kambili too dreams that she is laughing:

That night I dreamed that I was laughing, but it did not sound like any laughter, although I was not sure what my laughter sounded like. It was crackling and throaty and enthusiastic, like Aunty Ifeoma's. (PH 88)

When she spends time at Aunty Ifeoma's home, Kambili realises that for the first time she is in a place "where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished" (120). "Laughter," notes Kambili, "always rang out in Aunty Ifeoma's house and no matter where the laughter came from, it bounced around all the walls, all the rooms" (140). Amaka's provocations also help Kambili find a voice. Kambili is shocked by her own voice as she speaks back to her cousin: "I did not know where the calm words had come from. I did not want to look at Amaka, did not want to see her scowl" (170). To her surprise, Amaka only laughs showing that her teasing was with no malicious intentions.

Kambili's flirting with Father Amadi also gives her a sense of herself and her own agency beyond her father's demand for spiritual purity. This is the first time Kambili experiences positive appreciation of her body by other people. Evidently, she has a crush on Father Amadi who responds whenever he is with Kambili. After spending time with Father Amadi, Kambili blooms, feeling refreshed and light inside:

I had smiled, run, laughed. My chest was filled with something like bath foam. Light. The lightness was so sweet. I tasted it on my tongue, the sweetness of an overripe bright yellow cashew fruit. (180)

Upon return to Enugu from Nsukka, Kambili's true opinion about their home is clear but remains unsaid as she returns to silencing herself. When Mama asks her "It feels different to be back, *okwia?*" Kambili tells us:

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

But instead she says “You polished the étagère” (192). She notices her mother’s swollen eye and it goes without saying that it is the result of another beating at the hands of her father. Moments later she is called upstairs by her father to receive her own punishment for staying in the same house at Aunty Ifeoma’s with their “heathen” grandfather. It really does feel different for Kambili to be back to this unhomely household where bodies in pain; sad, swollen and bleeding bodies, contrast with laughing and elated ones in her aunt’s Nsukka home.

In *Playing in the Light*, the Campbells’ uncanny coloured past is heavily present in their household as Marion grows up. Apart from the cloud of silence and secrecy, Tokkie and her chair and mug become resounding symbols of that uncanny past that the Campbells labour to keep away from their daughter. Tokkie occupies a very ambivalent but vital position in the Campbell household. Through Tokkie the Campbells’ past is both present and absent from the household. Sitting in the backyard, Tokkie represents the physical presence of colouredness in the Campbell home and genealogy. But she is also an absent past because she exists in the Campbell household, as far as Marion is initially aware, not as family but as a domestic worker who comes a couple of times in a week to help in the house. This absent-presence of Tokkie in the Campbell household imbues Marion’s dreams later as an adult. The “palpable absence of a woman threatening to materialise” (*PL* 30) that Marion dreams of, speaks to the potential resurfacing of the past embodied by Tokkie. Marion’s coloured family history is right there in the house under her nose but she does not realise it until much later. Every time she tries to access it, she is prevented by her mother who, in Marion’s other dream where Marion climbs into the loft looking for the absent woman, “is at the foot of the ladder, pleading with her to come down, giving the ladder a gentle shake to frighten her” (31).

The image of the old woman in Marion's second dream is deeply symbolic. When Marion opens the loft door, the old woman is illuminated sorting through peaches in "a white enamel basin on her lap" (31). This illumination of the loft and the woman inside – which echoes the archetypal "woman in the attic", the return of the repressed in literary texts such as *Jane Eyre* - prefigures Marion's own discovery of the family past and the truth about Tokkie (and the coloured family she represents) who, like the woman in the dream, is locked out from the Campbell family, but somehow occupies its space. In Freudian terms, Tokkie represents the Campbells' repressed past that is intended to remain "removed from eyes of strangers, hidden, secret" (Freud, *The Uncanny* 133). As a result she is "locked away" (133.). Marion's opening of the loft door then becomes symbolic of her prising open the Pandora's box of her coloured ancestry that has been locked away from her consciousness by her parents. The "white enamel basin on the woman's lap" and the "white bonnet" the woman puts on can be read as symbolic of the whiteness which Marion must take on. Yet the fact that the woman does not look up when Marion opens the door to the loft, let alone invite her into the loft, means that Marion cannot be part of her grandmother's past – there is a reversal of unacknowledgement/disavowal in the image. Even when Marion later discovers the truth about her coloured ancestry, she cannot easily belong; she cannot easily appropriate that past as her own. Marion's dream, which significantly takes place inside a home, is illustrative of what Freud notes as moments when the "unhomely" may arise: "when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function of what it symbolises" (Freud, *The Uncanny* 150).

Playing in the Light in fact begins with an uncanny image that foregrounds Marion's own dilemma about belonging and her subsequent quest for family history. Standing on the balcony of her flat "the space both inside and out" (PL 1) where Marion spends most of her

time, a guinea fowl drops dead to her feet. While the balcony as a space both inside and out resonates with Marion's "precarious positionality" (Robolin 305) as a play-white (she is inside but at the same time outside the white race), the black and white "fine plumage" (*PL* 1) of the guinea fowl speaks to Marion's admixture of blood as a coloured person which unlike the fowl's beauty, is an uncanny element that her parents manage to hide from her for years. The balcony imagery also resonates with Marion's position in her family: as the only child of John and Helen she is "at home" with her parents, yet there is a sense of unhomeliness in the silence that conceals her real family history.

Even Marion's birth threatens to be an unhomely moment in the Campbell family, especially for her mother. At first Helen fears that the child "would be slow in learning, mentally retarded [and that] she would become a *kaffirboetie*" (125). But when they see that she comes out looking as if she will pass for white easily, the task becomes that of keeping her away from her coloured family, her coloured past. As a young child Marion is at first indifferent to the silence and secrecy, she takes it in with a child's innocence. Yet her childhood experiences later on become significant entry points into the past. Raised as a white girl, she grows up with indifference to the history of apartheid and its legacy. In the comfort zone of her borrowed whiteness she can afford, at least for a while, a somewhat detached attitude towards apartheid's racial oppression. She is impatient with people who bother themselves with the past, "those who choose not to forget, who harp on about the past and so fail to move forward and look to the future" (48). Ironically, "the so-called misdemeanours of history" (48) become Marion's greatest preoccupation as an adult. While John and Helen raise their daughter supposedly "without the burden of history" (152), history becomes Marion's heaviest burden because she inherits "a legacy of confusion and shame" (Olaussen 152). The moment Marion embarks on these "exhausting journeys of discovery" she begins to disrupt her parents' "essentialised, homogenous whiteness" (Jacobs, J.U.

“Playing in the Dark” 12) and the fictionality of the white identity they bequeathed to her. The “disruptive truth” (to borrow J.U. Jacobs’ phrase) that ensues, means that the ordinary she once took for granted takes on new meanings as history “slid from the text book into the very streets of the city, so that these landmarks that constitute her world – Robben Island, Table Mountain – are no longer the bright images of tourist brochures” and as a result “[n]othing is the same” (*PL* 177).

As noted earlier, the Campbells’ desire for whiteness is a product of apartheid’s identity politics concretised in laws that defined and classified people according to race. These laws were meant to protect the Caucasian race from “lower” races, from impurities that would contaminate the white race. Since being white meant opportunities for a good life, many coloureds who were close to white in appearance passed for white. Such laws also provided that if upon proof a person claiming to be white is found to be coloured, they should be reclassified as coloured. So too was the case when a person once considered coloured is proven to be white. The situation was heightened in the early fifties when a separate coloured voter’s roll was created after the coloured population lost their vote. According to Marion’s father, “there was a helluva mix-up with identities” that led to “enforced crossings to and fro in order to get the voters’ roll off the ground” (157). It was also “a time of uncertainty, of general upheaval as people were shuffled about like a pack of cards, waiting to find their lawful places, or just any place at all that could be made lawful” (157). This back and forth movement across boundaries drives the plot of *Playing in the Light* as a novel. Notably, the journey motif is prevalent in the novel where the protagonist’s main occupation is also running a travel agency.

The Campbell’s journey to whiteness follows what Graham Watson, in an analysis of racial passing, calls “a continuum at the one end of which is the farm labourer and towards the other end of which occurs a bifurcation, one branch leading to elite status, the other to

white status” (Watson 26). Watson further notes that “[t]he process of passing is facilitated by *cultivating* the ways of the White man, by leaving towns in which the passer’s identity as coloured is known, and by moving to a district ... where whites and coloureds intermingle” (26, emphasis added). Geoffrey Bowker and Shelley Star summarise the process in the following terms:

The person wishing to pass for white manages a kind of shell-game sequence: first obtain employment in a white-only occupation that is not too fussy about identity cards . . . The next step is to move on to a mixed neighbourhood, and quietly join local white associations. Working with the fact that even a racist white may find it difficult to confront a person face to face as passing, pass-whites are able to manage face-to-face interactions such as attending white churches. Over time this established a track record that can be used as leverage for reclassification based on general acceptance and repute. (Bowker and Star 216)

This is very much how John and Helen’s journeys from the *platteland* to Observatory in Cape Town could be mapped. These journeys eventually lead to their complete separation from their coloured families and it is through this separation from family that they are able to build their “general acceptance and repute” as (play)whites. Their active pursuit of whiteness is triggered by an error when John is mistaken for a white person by an officer at the traffic department where he goes looking for employment unaware that traffic officers’ jobs were reserved for whites only. John is thus “caught accidentally in a beam of light” and, following his mistaken identification, he “watched whiteness fall fabulously, like an expensive woman, into his lap” (*PL* 127). It is his wife, Helen, however, who works to make more of John’s mistaken identification:

She read his triumph at the traffic department as an epiphany. It was a gift, a sign from above that they should set about the task of building new selves, start from scratch and not be contented with what happened accidentally. (128)

The incident of mistaken racial identity feeds Helen’s already-conceived plans. It becomes, for Helen, “more than a revelation”, it becomes “a reward for her own forward thinking, a helping hand on the path she had in a sense already chosen” (128). She takes a significant

step towards whiteness by changing her name from Helen Karelse to Helen Charles. Since “the fine linen shop had alerted her to the many shades of whiteness” “there was no need to settle for anything other than the brightest” by which she meant the English shade of whiteness. Claiming an English shade of whiteness by changing her name from Karelse to Charles “was simply a way of claiming her liberty” more so because “these Afrikaans names that ended with –se [seemed to imply] an unspeakable past, of being the slave of someone” (128). Besides, “nice coloured people, those with at least good hair, would have nothing to do with Afrikaans” (128). This later corresponds with her insistence upon English as the language of the home and her annoyance every time her husband spoke Afrikaans. Helen’s preference for the English shade of whiteness can partly be attributed to the attitude towards Afrikaans at that time as “the language, by and large of the ‘roffs’”, and also to its status as a coloured language (Watson 7).

Helen’s passing for white is somehow foretold by her mother, Thomasina, fondly called Tokkie by Flip Karelse, her husband. When Helen was born, she “doted on her pale-skinned, skinny child with rosy cheeks and tints of copper hair” and she showed her friends how her little girl’s hair “glinted with reddish-golden lights, and how the roots held no telltale frizz” (*PL* 132). She saw in baby Helen those “distant genes of Europe” coming out and thought “that the child was the chosen one,” the saviour of future generations from the burden of colouredness. When Helen later passes for white, Tokkie suggests that she act as servant to the Campbells hoping that “in the role of servant, she could visit every week and at the same time provide a history of an old family retainer, which the types of those who were working their way up in that part of Observatory could not boast of” (132). It was thus her idea “to wear the funny wrap-around apron when she came visiting at the new terraced house, to use the back gate” (132). She sat in the Campbells’ Observatory backyard and “sipped coffee from an enamel mug” (133). Contrary to Marion’s thinking that her mother put “a servant’s

mug” (103) into Tokkie’s hands, it is clear here that Tokkie chose on her own to put the mug into her own hands by offering to aid her daughter’s pursuit of whiteness. Since “being so black” (137) she could not pass for white herself, Tokkie sees in her daughter’s passing for white the fulfilment of her own desire for whiteness as well as the redemption of her own white ancestry, for we are told that “her mother’s sister [...] was white as driven snow with good red hair” (135).

The Campbell’s newly-found identities require that they begin from a “clean slate” and for that reason they have to shut out the past; they have to be “free of family” for “there was no future in attachments to such people” (129). And they begin writing the story of their new lives with a “hasty marriage without family and friends” (129) followed by Helen’s bold application for a job as white saleslady in the city; and the retreat to Observatory “without giving her address to anyone” (129). Their movement up the ladder of whiteness coincides with their movement closer to “the slopes of the mountain” (130) their topographic rise becoming symbolic of the racial rise.

The Campbell’s move to Observatory makes for two interesting readings. Firstly, it is said that Jan van Riebeeck established his first farm in the area which later came to be known as Observatory. According to John Young in *A History of Observatory, 1881-1913*, van Riebeeck found the Liesbeck valley suitable for wheat growing and started “the experiment in wheat planting” to ensure that “the settlement became self-sufficient in grain” (Young, *A History* 1). Land was then allocated to some officials of the Dutch East India Company including van Riebeeck whose farm was known as Uitwyk which later came to be known as Malta Farm.⁸ Van Riebeeck’s mission “to dig a garden and grow spinach and onions for the East India fleet” (Coetzee cited in Saguaro 139) led to sexual unions between his men and indigenous peoples as well as slaves, which eventually produced the so-called “coloured

⁸ “The History of Observatory.” Observatory Civic Association. 5 May 2008. Web. 20 March, 2012.

shame". Thus the 'shame' that the Campbells and many like them try to shed by passing for white has its origins in van Riebeeck's garden. It therefore becomes interesting that on their flight from "coloured shame", the Campbells seek refuge in the very space where the whole question of "coloured shame" started. To borrow Maria Olausen words, the Campbells become complicit not just in "the power structures of apartheid South Africa" and its "history of human rights violations" but also in "the legacy of perceived shame and immorality of coloured history" (Olausen 14). Secondly, the name "Observatory" itself, which denotes that the area was named after the astronomy centre founded in 1820 also connotes an observation point; a place where something is observed or placed under surveillance for a while. Significantly, the Campbells enter a space where they will be under observation after which, depending on the reputation they build for themselves, they may be accepted as white people.

As the novel demonstrates, their feeling of being under observation results in a kind of self-surveillance both inside and outside the home. It is because of such self-surveillance that the Campbells find themselves in that condition Bhabha refers to as "the world-in-the-home" (Bhabha "The World" 141). Outside the home, their self-surveillance usually involves paying attention to their dressing, language and also people with whom they associate. Marion must end her friendship with Annie Boshoff (the only friend Marion had as a child) when Annie's father declares his colouredness after being caught having sex with a coloured girl. In another instance, Marion's mother refuses to go to Tokkie's funeral because that would be associating with those supposedly "lower" and this would not be good for the Campbells' reputation as whites. She cannot afford to jeopardise her whiteness by mourning her coloured mother in public. But even in the privacy of her home, Helen must suppress her mourning: "her eyes red with tears, all in slow motion clutched the robe as choked animal sounds escaped from deep down her stomach" (*PL* 33).

Inside their home the Campbells' self-surveillance, masterminded by Helen, becomes intensive and at times neurotic. In what is supposed to be their private space, the Campbells' always carry themselves as if they are being watched. They remain indoors most of the time even in summer and their curtains are usually drawn. Inside their home "all the loose ends were tied, the rules established" (131) to govern, among other things, what food they eat, what stories they talk about and in what language they speak to each other. John's brandy too must be rationed because Helen does not want him "falling about like some drunken Toiings" (52). He needs to control his drinking because "control was key [...] to being respectable, acceptable" (52). Besides respectability, Helen is concerned that John, in his drunken state may give away the uncanny secret of their coloured roots to their daughter as it nearly happened one day when he "slobbered drunkenly over to Marion" and told her that "he was sorry that she was an only child, a lonely child" and nearly told her about his "nine brothers and sisters" before Helen took young Marion away (52). Marion also gets her share of her mother's anger when she lies half naked in their backyard. Conscious that other people may hear her, and "hissing with rage and disgust", Helen reprimands Marion for behaving like "a disgusting native rolling half naked in the grass" (60). In another incident, Marion tells her parents (who are in the middle of an argument about Helen's wearing a pair of trousers) about a curtain that is not drawn, and both John and Helen rush to draw the curtain "bumping into each other, the question of trousers dissipated in the *panic of being on display*" (11 emphasis added). Their being conscious of public gaze into their private space blurs the private-public divide allowing the world to intrude into the home. As a result, the home ceases to be that private space that it is usually thought to be.

The possibility of native genes resurfacing makes childbearing initially "too risky a business" for Helen (130). When she falls pregnant "[h]aving avoided it for twelve years, the pregnancy unleashed a hatred she found impossible to hide" (124). She hates John as "an

animal who had ruined their lives” (124). With the fear that genetics would betray their new white lives, motherhood becomes an abject experience Helen cannot look forward to. She “thought of the baby as an uninvited guest arriving with an extraordinary large cheap suitcase” of coloured shame “that bumped along through the birth canal” (134).

One ironic thing about this whole journey to whiteness is that it takes an act that is doubly “immoral” – as adultery and as interracial sex under apartheid’s Immorality Act – for the Campbells to gain their ultimate admission into whiteness. To obtain their identity cards, Helen prostitutes herself to Councillor Carter, the municipal officer. This incident recalls the earlier noted sexual encounters that started in Van Riebeeck’s garden with their resultant “coloured shame”. After this encounter, Helen does not feel violated but rather “remade” and while “[s]he may have been defiled, [...] she had also been obliterated and believing in the miracle of rebirth her own thoughts had remained pure” (144). The irony here is that sexual “immorality” begets racial purity in the form of whiteness for the Campbells while it is the same sexual immorality by “the vagaries of their distant European ancestors” who “could sink so low as to consort with hotnos and slaves, as to fuck with hotnos” (131) which resulted into the “stain of colouredness” which the Campbells want to get rid of.

The acquiring of wholly new identities turns the Campbell home into “a fortress” where their “racial attentiveness” as they live their new white lives “swells into an agonisingly extreme consciousness of space” (Robolin 358). Contrary to the promise of a comfortable life in whiteness, the Campbell household becomes engulfed in silence; it becomes a “house of choked history” (*PL* 149) as they try to shut the past out. Their “pursuit of whiteness” is set up “in competition with history” (152). As such, “[b]uilding a new life means doing so from scratch, keeping a pristine house, without clutter, *without objects that clamour to tell of a past*, without the eloquence – no, the garrulousness – of history” (152, emphasis added). Notice that as a way of “keeping a pristine house [...] without objects that

clamour to tell of the past” there are no family pictures in the Campbell home, “only picture nails” (193). The past is the uncanny narrative that must be avoided: “If the whiteness they pursue is cool and haughty and blank, history is uncool, reaches out gawkily for affinities, asserts itself boldly, threatens to mark, to break through and stain the primed white canvas that is their life” (152). Their process of “reinvention was nevertheless a slow process of vigilance and continual assessment” “and naturally in such a crusade there would be suffering involved, sacrifices to be made” (131). Indeed the Campbells must endure isolating silence in the home which turns them into a quiet, loveless white family. The major sacrifice they make is to deny and live without their own families. Helen has to endure the fact that she has to interact with her own mother as her maid. As for John he must always fight the temptation of sneaking to Sunday lunches at his sister’s place where all his siblings gather as family. As will be shown below, John always recollects the pain of this separation from family.

While Helen takes pride in bequeathing to Marion a “new generation unburdened by the past” (150), her achievement is outweighed by the very burden of the past which brings unhomely air into her home. With family ties cut and interaction with other people in the neighbourhood heavily regulated, the Campbells become “a small new island of whiteness [...] steeped in silence” (152). Contrary to the much expected security that whiteness promised, the Campbells are an insecure lot: “In the blinding light of whiteness, they walked exposed: pale vulnerable geckos whose very skeletal systems showed through transparent flesh” (123). Their selves are like “mended structures” with “cracks that kept appearing” (123). The stern demand for alertness as they work to find “the lineaments of their new role” (123) is itself a source of anxiety. Despite successfully passing for white, the Campbells cannot fully acquire whiteness hence the need to watch themselves constantly, to pretend, to play white. As Olausson notes, the Campbells’ “decision to ‘play in the light’ ... turns out to constitute a dead end rather than an exit from racialised oppression” (Olausson 154). Fear

abounds of being re-classified coloured which means “the more unsettling finality of sealing a person’s fate to a lower rung on the ladder of opportunity, reward and power ... and removing the prospect of mobility” (Posel 62).

Similar to the Campbells’ fear of the “stain of colouredness” is Papa Eugene’s loathing towards sin in *Purple Hibiscus*. Being a sinner in this case is comparable to being classified as “beyond the pale”, one would not only miss out on the promise of paradise, but also on God’s earthly blessings – the privileges of a system inherited from colonialism would bypass them. As pointed out earlier, this fear is also translatable in Papa’s case to his fear of compromising his public image as an upright man. Papa’s public image is achieved through repression of those elements of his past that stand to compromise his public image as well as his Christian faith. Thus, in the name of “love” for his family Papa takes responsibility for ensuring their spiritual uprightness. This responsibility extends to the community and even the nation, playing into Rosemary George’s reading of communities as “extensions of home, providing the same comforts and terrors on a larger scale” (George 9). Papa is father to his family in the way Father Benedict is father of his St. Agnes Catholic congregation: both take an active role in ensuring a holy relationship between God and their “families”. But unlike Father Benedict, Papa’s fatherhood degenerates into violence as he takes God’s responsibility to punish into his own hands, prompting his sister Ifeoma to suggest that he “has to stop doing God’s job” for “God is big enough to do his own job” (*PH* 95). For any sin that any member of his family commits, Papa feels he must mete out punishment not just to purge the person of sin but also, as he claims, as an expression of his love for the family. Yet as shall be discussed below, Papa’s moments of violence are shown to be reflective of his own repressed anxieties. He seems haunted by the “heathen” Igbo culture he abandoned for Christianity, as well as by his own shortcomings as a person which he works so hard to eclipse with his Christian stature.

Ifeoma's description of her brother as "too much of a colonial product" (12) provides vital insight into Papa's character and the unhomely home he provides for his family. In an interview with Aminatta Forna, Adichie points out that the character of Papa was developed "not so much from [her] desire to show the theme of a colonised mind as from [her] desire to portray a man who, in many ways, represents many men that [she] knows and [has] observed" (Adichie, "New Writing" 51). Her portrayal of Papa's religious fundamentalism seems to stem directly from her concern with religion in Nigeria. Responding to a question from the audience during the above cited interview with Forna, Adichie expresses her deep worry about "modern religion" as well as "the state of the world" (56). She says:

We have to engage with religion because it's a huge force. I think it is shocking in debates that go on to invoke God in spaces where really God has no business of being invoked. There's a problem with people telling you constantly how "born again" they are, how close to their pastor they are when actually we should be talking about why pensions aren't being paid etc. I believe religion can be a force for incredible good but I have a problem with the brand of religion that seems to be exploding in Nigeria now. In Lagos there's a church in everybody's backyard and poor people are giving their money to pastors who then buy private jets ... Nobody sees the horror of it, because it's all in God's name, covered if you like by God. I think that is very worrying and it's something we should talk about more in Nigeria rather than covering up this kind of corruption in Jesus' name. (56)

While financial "corruption in Jesus' name" is not a major issue in *Purple Hibiscus*, Papa's appropriation of Catholicism, which leads to a corruption of his family home, warrants the kind of concern expressed by Adichie above. Like Oduche in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*,⁹ Papa learns too well the colonial lesson that white is good and black is bad, becoming what Brenda Cooper calls "a sycophantic Anglophile slavishly aping white ways and narrow church doctrine" (128). In his pursuit for religious "whiteness", Papa must repress what Lily Mabura has called "the possible Gothic reappearance and influence of [his] Igbo past" (Mabura, "Breaking Gods" 210) which is starkly present in the novel through his father, Papa

⁹ Papa's religious fanaticism recalls Oduche, Ezeulu's beloved son in Achebe's *Arrow of God* who is sent by Ezeulu to be his eye in the Christian mission school. However, Oduche becomes a Christian fanatic who begins to preach against his people's traditions. To show commitment to the Christian faith, Oduche attempts to kill the royal python, the symbol of Ulu the chief god of Umuaro and for whom his own father was the chief priest.

Nnukwu. As Anthony Chennells notes, Papa's God "can never manifest itself in the ordinary or more precisely the Nigerian ordinary" (Chennells, "Catholicism" 18). Instead, following his colonial teaching, Papa's God becomes "another false God whose worship is recorded in a devotion of all things European" (19). For that reason, Papa Nnukwu becomes the uncanny element that must be locked out of Eugene's life and family and he makes it a point to protect his children from their heathen grandfather. The children must eat nothing from Papa Nnukwu when they visit him because that would "desecrate [their] Christian tongues" (*PH* 69). When the children spend time with Papa Nnukwu at Ifeoma's house, they must be punished because "they saw the sin clearly and [...] walked right into it" (192). Thus Kambili's feet must be soaked in boiling water for "[t]hat is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet" (194). The incident recalls Papa's own punishment when he was caught masturbating and had his hands soaked in boiling water by the priest in whose custody he was. Papa's violence is seen here as emanating from the kind of life he lived with the Catholic fathers who fathered him both in the spiritual and physical senses while his own father "spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone" (47). As Heather Hewett notes, Papa "is trapped in a cycle of abuse emanating from colonialism and Christianity" (Hewett 84), the history that in turn invades his domestic space.

As in Wicomb's novel, the desire for purity in *Purple Hibiscus* overlaps with a desire for whiteness. In total contrast to his relationship with his own father, Eugene reveres his wife's father, simply referred to as Grandfather by Kambili. Grandfather, says Kambili, "was very light-skinned, almost albino, and it was said to be one of the reasons the missionaries liked him" (*PH* 67). He spoke English and Latin and "often cited articles of Vatican I" (67). Kambili remembers "the way he seemed to use the word sinner in every sentence" (68). According to Papa, Grandfather "opened his eyes before many of our people did" and "he did things the right way, the way the white people did" (67-8). It is clear here that in the eyes of

Papa white is right. For that reason, Grandfather occupies a very special place in Papa's house and heart. He "talked about him very often, his eyes proud, as if Grandfather were his own father" (67). On the wall in Papa's house hangs "a photo of grandfather, in the full regalia of the knights of St. John, framed in deep mahogany", an example to be followed by Papa and his family. He forbids his children from speaking Igbo in public and he "liked it when the villagers spoke English around him" for "it showed that they had sense" (60). He is also against the use of Igbo in church for he considers that language unholy. Papa's loathing of the Igbo language stems from years of what Mabura calls "the Colonial-Romanist project" which elevated English as the language of instruction and government business and systematically suppressed local languages like Igbo robbing them of "their cultural, religious, commercial and educational functions" (Mabura 211). For that reason when Father Amadi, a "reformist Igbo priest" bursts into Igbo song during mass at St. Agnes where Papa worships, it can only be the reintroduction of "past anxieties and fears for people like Father Benedict and Eugene as they are against the reclamation of Igbo language and song" (212). In Freudian terms, Father Amadi, as is also the case with Papa Nnukwu, represents the "primitive" Igbo beliefs that Papa repressed but that keep on resurfacing to haunt him thereby bringing upon him a feeling that is unhomely. Mabura further argues that Father Amadi "seems to advocate for a new direction or an amendment of Catholic evangelical strategy in Igbo land.... His association with the name St. Peter connotes that he is the rock on which the new is to be founded" (214).

Papa takes pride in the children he has raised who "are not like those loud children people are raising these days with no home training and no fear of God" (*PH* 58). What Papa does not realise is that his children grow up not with the fear of God but the fear of their father. The rules drawn up by Papa for his house are meant to guide the family in behaving according to God's word; all their actions must in one way or another glorify the creator's

name. For example, the performance of both Kambili and Jaja at school is supposed to exalt God. When Kambili comes second in a class of 25 pupils, she can only be “stained by failure” (39) in the eyes of her father who never wanted his children to come second. He tells Kambili: “Because God has given you so much, he expects much from you. He expects perfection” (47). Papa’s expectation of his children is framed as God’s expectation. It is this translatability of Papa’s expectations into God’s or vice versa that makes Papa punish his family on God’s behalf for “sins” they commit.

Papa’s wish for a clean family corresponds with but also contrasts with his wish for a clean Nigeria, revealing his hypocrisy. He uses the pen in his battle for a just nation as he publishes the liberal newspaper, *The Standard* which carries issues “about the value of freedom, about how his pen would not, could not, stop writing the truth” (42). He is praised for his charitable work and donations he makes to the church and the public. His criticism of the government earns him an Amnesty World award for human rights which is highly ironic considering his extreme violence at home. His family lives in perpetual silent fear of his violence, they are not free and cannot tell the truth about how they feel,.

Papa’s meticulous attention to order is similar to that of Helen in *Playing in the Light*. Similar too are their ends for such attention to order: to make sure that their uncanny pasts do not derail their chosen destinies. Papa plans his family’s everyday activities to the last detail. Kambili and Jaja have their time carefully divided between school, prayer and family time and failure to follow the timetable begets heavy punishment. As a result Papa’s family becomes a group of rigid almost automated bodies whose individual capacities are thwarted by the strict rules. While pregnant, Mama requests on one of the family’s routine after-mass visits to Father Benedict, that she stay in the car due to nausea. For this she is beaten by Papa when they get home until she miscarries. Mama’s pregnancy here could be seen as a reminder of Papa’s sexual engagement with his wife, which he probably perceives as shameful, and as

posing a threat to Papa's pursuit of the family's righteousness. Thus like a weed in a garden – and also in keeping with the biblical teaching that any part of your body that leads you into sin must be removed (Matthew 5: 30) – the pregnancy has to be terminated. Similarly, when Kambili breaks the Eucharist fast by taking breakfast cereal in order to take Panado to ease her menstrual pains, Papa descends on the whole family with his heavy belt. Kambili's "flowering" here becomes problematic in Papa's eyes because she leads the family into committing sin. These two incidents recall the casting of the female body in religious narratives as unclean and how the female body constantly leads man, beginning with Adam in Eden, into sin. In both cases, the female body becomes a threat to Papa's moral and spiritual integrity as was the case with Adam in Eden. Kambili and her mother become "daughters of Eve"¹⁰ of sorts. These two incidents also speak to Papa's own troubled sexuality. It seems the violent punishment he received at the hands of the priests that raised him, taught him violence as the only way of dealing with any manifestation of sexuality and to assume that it is sinful.

It is clear that both the Campbell and Achike homes as seen above are built on tainted privileges. For the Campbells for instance, their white privilege is tainted by their coloured 'stain' hence their every effort to ensure that this impurity does not out. Their white privilege is also tainted by sexual immorality which begets their identity cards as whites. As for the Achikes, their privileged spacious home is tainted by the father's perception of sin, but also by his violence. Thus the comfort and security that often comes with material well-being is subsumed by deathly silence as Papa's fanatical pursuit for spiritual uprightness turns into violence against his family. As it will be shown in the following section, the children being raised in these homes embody not only victims of such uncanny domestic spaces but they

¹⁰ The phrase, as cited by David Torevell, is from Clare Jenkins's *A Passion for Priests* and it is a label given to wives and lovers of Catholic priests as confessed by the women themselves. See Torevell, "Taming the Lion of Judah" p.390.

also become sites for alternative readings of these uncanny spaces and the different histories at play in such silenced spaces.

The language of gardens

Notable in both novels is the prevalence of images of cultivation, of gardens and gardening which I read as metaphors for the families that grow them. According to Manfred Kusch, the garden in its basic form “constitutes a closure containing a rationally controlled system surrounded by an often amorphous wilderness” (Kutsch 1). The Campbells’ pursuit of whiteness and Papa Eugene’s pursuit of religious piety can be read in such terms because the two families are enclosures of sorts, protecting those inside from the corrupting environment surrounding them. Gardening or cultivating takes on interesting meanings if read in the historical contexts of the two families and especially when read against the backdrop of Freud’s theory of the uncanny. In both *Playing in the Light* and *Purple Hibiscus* gardens become illustrative of and also counter-texts to the families that grow them. The meticulous tending of the family gardens echoes the two families’ efforts to cultivate and nurture their racial and religious purity. The emergence of weeds in the gardens would then become symbolic of uncanny elements in the histories of the two families and weeding would speak to repression of such uncanny elements by the families. Failure to tame the weeds - as eventually happens with the Campbell garden which is finally left untended - could be likened to the Campbells’ ultimate failure to repress the past which uncannily resurfaces to haunt their lives. Interestingly, South Africa as the multicultural society we know today started “simply as a garden” (Saguaro 139) at the southern tip of the continent where, as earlier noted, Jan van Riebeeck set up a refreshment centre for the Dutch East India Company.

Gardening is also significantly present in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. But unlike in *Playing in the Light* where I read the garden as being illustrative of how the repressed uncanny past eventually encroaches into the Campbells' cultivated whiteness, I read the garden of Papa's home in *Purple Hibiscus* with its tranquil and fecund air of flowers in bloom and fruit in season in stark contradiction to the melancholic and violent atmosphere in Papa's household. The language of abundance and fecundity spoken by the flowers in bloom and fruits in season echoes Papa's materially well-off family, but the fullness of life is thwarted inside the home by Papa's violence and strictness.

As mentioned previously, the Campbell household is a microcosm of the garden of apartheid that started with van Riebeeck at the Cape. In fact, it is a product of the apartheid garden. Incidentally, the Campbells themselves grow a garden, "a good-sized garden" which is "private too" (PL 12). Signalled here are two central tenets on which the Campbells' whiteness is anchored: secrecy and privacy. But we are also told, on one of Marion's regular visits to her father after her mother's death and after the end of apartheid, that the garden "is not a garden any more" and that "weeds in what was once a lawn are ankle high" (12). We are also told about a "potted geranium" on the *stoep* whose dead leaves Marion pinches: the plant "is quite dried out" with "the soil coming away from the sides" (10). This image of a neglected garden is juxtaposed with what used to be an Edenic garden of "dahlias, marigolds and Christmas roses, whose colour [John] would doctor with doses of potassium to get the correct shade of blue" (12). He also grew runner beans, "their scarlet flowers towering over the rest" (12). The past and present of the Campbells' garden suggested here speak directly to their lives as (play) whites during and after apartheid. In their Observatory garden during apartheid, John "doctors" the colours of the flowers, in the same way their racial hue is symbolically "doctored" to conform to a white identity. After apartheid and the death of his wife, however, John loses interest in his childhood hobby of gardening. Marion's effort to

revive his interest in gardening by buying him a book about gardening yields nothing. I read John's loss of interest in working their family garden as corresponding to his loss of interest in cultivating their whiteness.

John realises at some point the futility of cultivating their whiteness. Since "to achieve whiteness is to keep on your toes" it seems to him that "they cannot achieve it after all; being white in the world is surely about being at ease, since the world belongs to you. But they, it would seem, cannot progress beyond vigilance, in other words beyond being play whites" (*PL* 152). Indeed the artificiality of their whiteness is signalled very early in the novel by the "artificial blooms" (6) in their home delivered weekly by a florist. As the novel reveals, for John the moment of playing white is an anxious one as he struggles to come to terms with forfeiting his coloured family after passing for white. Later in his old age and after his wife's death, John recollects the pain he had to endure in playing white, especially the extent to which it deprived him of family. He remembers how signing the forms declaring that he was white "was like turning a knife in his own flesh, his very heart" (157), how "swearing before God that according to the laws of the land he no longer had brothers and sisters had been the very worst thing, a shooting pain through his heart and nothing short of sin" (157-8). This is where John's neglect of the garden at their Observatory home allows for interesting reading. To recoup the derelict garden described earlier, the bloom and groom of what used to be a carefully cultivated garden is gone, along with his investment in whiteness. John's opinion about weeds in the now neglected Observatory family garden is particularly interesting. When Marion insists upon bringing someone to weed the garden, John "does not understand this urge to fight nature" and because he "grew up in the veld" he does not "mind things going a little wild" (12). Previously, John could not afford to let things go wild in their family garden in the backyard let alone in their garden of whiteness. Any threat to their whiteness had to be contained in the same way that weeds are dealt with in a garden. John's shaving off

skin from Helen's feet – an act that resembles weeding a garden - becomes illustrative of this and speaks directly to Freud's reading of the uncanny as "something familiar [...] that has been repressed and then reappears" (152). This foot-shaving, which horrifies young Marion, represents one of the many efforts by the Campbells to tame their wayward bodies so that they do not give away their concealed colouredness. Helen wears stockings even in summer because "her treacherous feet, her *bête noir*, had at all costs to be covered" (147). These feet represent not just Helen's coloured past but by extension, that of the Campbells as a household as well. These are feet conditioned by "[y]ears of going barefoot in the village" into "a tough hide capable of withstanding the buffeting of stones and the penetration of thorns" (147-8). Such feet, which speak of tough coloured country life, become shameful when Helen passes for white and pose the danger of giving away the Campbell's concealed coloured past. The tough hide is no longer necessary in the comfortable life of whiteness which "is without restrictions" and "has the fluidity of milk" (151). Ironically though, Helen knew "that the roughness of her soles was what saw her through the trials and tribulations of life in the city" (148).

While Helen wills to obliterate her past, her body naturally refuses to deny its coloured past. Her vigorous efforts to annihilate the past are met by the body's "astonishing memory of skin" (*PL* 148). It "could [not] forget its past, could [not] allow her to forget the unshod coloured child" (148). Recalling the gardening metaphor again, "the skin, *like any weed, grew more vigorously in spring*, bubbling here and there, moulting as a tough new layer pushed its way through" (my emphasis). The body's stubbornness and its "memory of skin" become an uncanny presence in Helen's life, speaking to Freud's note of the uncanny as occurring "when primitive beliefs that have been surmounted appear to be once again confirmed" (155).

As noted earlier, both the garden in the backyard and “the garden of whiteness” of the Campbell household are partly of Tokkie’s making. She initiated the planting of the garden in the backyard and she “took pride in rooting bits of stem” she brought from the garden of the Macdonalds a white family she once worked for in Constantia. Incidentally, Tokkie’s apron is embroidered with flowers which she calls her “Garden of Eden” (*PL* 32) and which somehow reflects both the Campbell’s garden in the backyard and their “garden of whiteness”. As noted earlier, after seeing her daughter’s dream of whiteness become reality, Tokkie offers to help nurture their new identities by becoming a maid for the Campbells. To use the flower metaphor, Tokkie is a “coloured” flower that brings colour to the Campbells’ “white and loveless” (153) garden. Her presence in the household brightens up the mood and fills it with laughter in the same way dahlias, marigolds and roses embroidered on her apron would brighten up a garden. Without Tokkie in the house, “[l]ittle happens” because the Campbells “have little to say to each other” (153). It is not surprising then, that after she dies the absence of “colour and sound” (150) in the Campbell household is conspicuous. Little wonder that the image of Tokkie recurs in Marion’s memory and becomes vital in her probing the past which her parents keep from her for many years. In Marion’s adulthood, Tokkie becomes part of the ordinary but meaningful “clues to a world whose authenticity, she realises was always in question” (60). Her engaging with that memory feeds and later confirms Marion’s suspicion about her parents; that they “have always kept something from her; something they did not want her to know” (58). She begins to notice that her parents kept “something secret, something ugly, and monstrous, at the heart of their paltry little family” (58); something that would explain her parents’ “marital misery, the gloom and silence of her childhood, the air of restraint” (47). The ironic part of course is that Tokkie’s love for her daughter and granddaughter means that she is complicit in the misery that the Campbells face as they try to keep up appearances of whiteness. Through Tokkie, Marion talks across racial

boundaries, firstly as an unsuspecting child and then later as an adult actively unearthing her hidden history by engaging “the endless dreary rows of parcelled days” that were her childhood (60).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Papa’s family becomes a garden through which he aspires to glorify God. In the commonly known Judeo-Christian story of creation, God placed the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden which, besides providing for them, was illustrative of God’s might and glory. As such, in Christian terms growing a garden does not only serve to recall the Edenic days lost through sin, but in such an attempt to recreate that lost glory also lies the attempt to glorify the name of God. Papa’s compounds both in Enugu and the family’s village home in Abba have “gardens” which mimic God’s Garden of Eden. However, Papa’s abundant garden does not speak the language of bliss associated with the Garden of Eden as Papa struggles to deal with uncanny elements encroaching upon and threatening his personal as well as his family’s religious purity. Like the Campbells who turn their house into a “fortress” complete with apartheid’s panoptic sense of surveillance, Papa turns his house into a “Catholic fort” over which he “looms as large as God” (Mabura 210). Papa’s fort with “compound walls topped by coiled electric wires” (*PL* 9) is erected not only against sin but also “against his Igbo cultural past” (Mabura 210).

While the garden in *Playing in the Light* resembles the crumbling Campbell household, in *Purple Hibiscus* the different plants and flowers constitute a resounding contradiction to the atmosphere in Papa Eugene’s household. Like Marion in *Playing in the Light*, Kambili is born and grows up in a household premised on strict and neurotic attention to meticulous order which is itself predicated on the desire and search for purity. Papa’s desire to raise a family that is upright in Christian terms reduces his spacious home to a jail of sorts, a place of resounding silence as his family cowers under his heavy hand. His wish for a clean, pious family is tantamount to growing an Edenic garden where his family would live in

harmonious communion with their creator. Like Adam in Eden (incidentally the gates to Papa's compound are manned by a man named "Adamu"), Papa holds absolute reign over his family and makes sure in any possible way that God's will is done. Unlike Adam, Papa does not take kindly to being led into sin by anyone and he assumes God's role in punishing any member of the family whose acts threaten to drag the family into what he perceives as sin. In the spacious home where silence is often "broken only by the whir of the ceiling fan" (*PH* 7) Kambili feels suffocated and the walls "narrowing, bearing down on [her]" (7). No one in this house speaks to Papa; only Papa speaks, giving commands and directives to others. With his insistence on piety, his children (especially Kambili) cannot think of the possibility of their father doing anything wrong. Thus when he violently punishes anybody in the house, he cannot be rebuked. When he breaks Mama's figurines, Kambili cannot blame her father for it. Her consoling words to Mama do not implicate her father. Instead of the more implicating "Sorry, Papa broke your figurines" Kambili utters the non-implicating statement in the passive: "I'm sorry your figurines broke" (10). Kambili's voice, as is also the case with her brother and mother, is reduced to whispers. Often times they whisper about things they do not want to talk about. They skirt around real issues to focus on trivia – so long as their father is not implicated – as a way of surviving the silence. Says Kambili: "We did quite often, asking each other questions whose answers we already knew. Perhaps it was so that we would not ask the other questions the ones whose answers we did not want to know" (23). Alone at the dinner table after Papa's beating of Mama while she is pregnant, which causes her to miscarry, Kambili and her brother are too tongue-tied to talk about what happened to their mother (because by doing so they would be implicating their "incorruptible" father) but they are able to talk about an equally horrendous incident, the televised public execution of drug trafficking convicts. In this loveless family, the "GOD IS LOVE" message emblazoned on Mama's t-shirt which she seems to like so much, mocks the situation in Papa's house where

blood is shed and bodies deformed in the name of God. The children are like flowers that cannot bloom under Papa's meticulous but violent tending. Mama's multiple miscarriages and Kambili's punishment when she breaks the Eucharist fast because of her menstrual cramps are illustrative incidents of how Papa nips the blossoming lives of his family in the bud. Noticeable also is how Papa's pouring of hot water at Kambili's feet (as punishment for staying in the same house at Ifeoma's with her "heathen" grandfather) recreates the image of a gardener watering his plant which in turn points towards how Papa waters his garden/family with pain.

It is clear that Kambili fears her father more than she fears God. Her vision of God is also shaped by the image of her father, and she sees God in her father's image. As a young child she visualises heaven through her father's bedroom in whose "cream blanket that smelled of safety" she finds refuge (41). But with age Kambili begins to realise, albeit without overtly saying it, the irony that the hands she sought refuge in as a child are the same that shed blood in the house and beat everybody into silence. Kambili's realisation that her father is violent becomes her source of discomfort. She clearly does not agree with Ade Coker, her father's editor at the *Standard* who wrote about her father as "a man of integrity, the bravest man" (42). Ade's praise for her father gives Kambili an uncomfortable "clear tingling sensation" (42). Partly she is proud, but also she would contrast his public role as 'brave liberator' with his private one as family tyrant.

Like Marion in *Playing in the Light*, Kambili's contact with her Aunty's "little garden" of "unusual flowers" (16, 128) opens up new and alternative possibilities of reading her unhomey home as well as her own being. Kambili compares her brother's defiance towards their father to the "experimental purple hibiscus" in Aunty Ifeoma's garden that is "rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom" (16). Under their aunt's different kind of tending, Kambili and Jaja begin to flourish and for the first time they experience the

“freedom to be” (16). Indeed for the first time, Kambili experiences positive appreciation by others of her blooming as an adolescent. The most obvious incident of such appreciation is the affectionate appreciation of her body and being by Father Amadi.

Kambili finds her aunt (obviously in comparison with her own mother) to be “exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life” (15). Kambili’s contact with her Aunt’s garden of exotic flowers offers Kambili the possibility to think about herself positively, to explore the other side of her self, the side that was suppressed as she lived according to her father’s word. Aunt Ifeoma’s house, a tiny, stuffy flat, is the very antithesis of Papa’s spacious mansion, yet while the latter has silent obedience as its hallmark, the former is built on open conversation and laughter. As Ouma notes, Kambili’s home in Enugu is a “monologic space” where Papa’s word is law and that space stands in stark contrast with Ifeoma’s “dialogic space” where music, laughter and hearty conversations are the order of the day. The two contrasting spaces are represented by two types of hibiscuses growing in the separate gardens of the two homes: the red hibiscus in Papa’s compound in Enugu and the exotic purple hibiscus in Aunt Ifeoma’s garden in Nsukka. As Brenda Cooper notes the “startling red” hibiscuses are symbolic of Papa’s “uncontested and absolute” law in the family (Cooper, *New Generation* 125) and also represent “the red blood that he spills in his family” (126). Hence “the blood red violence of home” contrasts with “the purple liberation of Nsukka” (125).

When Kambili returns from her second visit to Nsukka where she went to recuperate after being beaten unconscious by Papa for being found in possession of her cousin’s painting of Papa Nnukwu, she reacts to being back home with a sense of revulsion. She tells us: “The scent of fruits filled my nose when Adamu opened our compound gates. It was as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados. It nauseated me” (*PH* 253). These are signs of Eden gone bad. However, immediately Kambili notices that “the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom”, “the sleepy, oval-shape buds in the front yard

as they swayed in the evening breeze” (253). It is interesting to note that it is after this incident that Jaja rebels against the father’s word by not going to communion. Thus the sleepy buds of hibiscuses about to bloom are symbolic of Jaja and Kambili’s freedom that is about to bloom as “Papa’s day of reckoning [draws] near” (Cooper, *New Generation* 126). Little wonder then that in the final pages of the novel:

Everything came tumbling down after Palm Sunday. Howling winds came with an angry rain uprooting frangipani trees in the front yard. They lay on the lawn, their pink and white flowers grazing the grass, their roots waving lumpy soil in the air. (*PH* 253)

By the end of the narrative everything turns topsy-turvy in Papa’s “Edenic” compound: “the satellite dish... came crashing down and lounged on the driveway like a visiting spaceship” (253). Kambili’s wardrobe door dislodges and “Sisi broke a full set of Mama’s china” (253). The crumbling of Papa’s world coincides with the recovery of voice by other members of the household: Mama “did not lower her voice to whisper” and “she did not hide the tiny smile that drew lines at the edge of her mouth” when she spoke to Sisi to clean the floor of shattered china. As if in defiant support for her rebellious son, she does not smuggle food to his bedroom but rather openly carries the food to him “on a white tray with a matching plate” (257-8). Thus, signs of Papa’s crumbling empire seen earlier outside the house are confirmed in the inside where Jaja’s defiance is echoed in Mama’s own defiant acts. It comes as no surprise when a few pages later, Mama poisons Papa which is symbolic of the final collapse of the garden. The planting of a new garden is suggested at the close of the novel. On her way home with her mother from visiting Jaja in prison where he is locked up after claiming responsibility for Papa’s death, Kambili contemplates planting “new oranges trees” and “Jaja will plant purple hibiscuses too” (306-307) which signal their new beginning as a family after Papa’s death. The clouds hanging “like dyed cotton wool” in the sky hold the promise that “new rains will come down soon” (307) to water the new garden which is likely to take after Auntie Ifeoma’s garden of exotic plants and unusual hibiscuses. Towards the end of *Playing*

in the Light, Marion too, together with her father, anticipate planting the family garden anew. Marion plans to bring “red dahlia bulbs” and her father agrees that “it will soon be time to plant” (PL 181).

Conclusion: Journeys and New Beginnings?

Besides planting new gardens, both Marion and Kambili employ or intend to employ travel as a way of beginning anew after escaping uncanny domestic spaces. While Marion visits England and a couple of cities in Europe, Kambili contemplates visiting Aunty Ifeoma in the United States after Jaja’s release from prison. Marion is clearly unhomed in Britain despite her parents’ claim to Scottish blood. According to the narrator, in London, a place she assumed she would find familiar, Marion is not only “invaded by the virus of loneliness” but she also “experiences the world in reverse, feels the topsy-turviness of being in the wrong hemisphere” (PL 188).

It is Marion’s estranged experience in Europe that helps improve her relationship with her own country. Away from home, “the world imprints on her afresh” and “her days are rinsed in rain” (191). True to the words of the woman at Clarke’s Bookshop who recommends a couple of South African novels to Marion, reading helps Marion gain a better idea about her own country. Reading Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* and J.M. Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*, Marion “get[s] to know those dark decades when the Campbells were playing in the light” (191). The play-white girl in Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* allows Marion to reflect upon her own condition as a play-white. The girl, according to Marion, could be a version of herself or her mother and she “wonders how many versions of herself exist in the world” or “in the stories of her country” (190, 191). While finding the title of Coetzee’s novel “inspiring” and reading it “as her country having a real, live, throbbing heart”, Marion is pleased “to think of South Africa as her country” (197).

Magda's life of loneliness on a deserted farm in the Karoo in Coetzee's novel perhaps speaks to her own life of silence and loneliness in her parents' garden of whiteness. While reading gives her a new perspective on her country and herself, Marion is not sure if she could have her own story written for others to read. Reading stories about people's lives carved on flagstones in Garnethill, Marion "shudders at the thought of her life laid out in lines" (204) for the public to read. If she were to do so, she wonders "which anecdote would be selected to bear the weight of presenting her to the world" (204). The reader understands Marion's anxiety of authorship a little better when she learns upon her return to Cape Town that Brenda is writing the Campbell's family story. She brands Brenda a pretend "do-gooder" who "went back to prise more out of a lonely senile old man" (217) and rages at her to write her "own fucking story" (217). Marion feels offended by Brenda's almost voyeuristic intrusion into her family secrets, that private world which she would rather was kept a secret. Exposure of these secrets to the public through Brenda's stories brings upon Marion a feeling of anxiety in the same way her parents felt in the earlier cited incident when they forgot to draw the curtains.

Unlike Marion, Kambili only anticipates visiting her aunt in the United States after Jaja's release from jail; we never witness her departure from Nigeria. While waiting for her brother's release, Kambili makes a significant journey to Nsukka. She finds Nsukka to have significantly changed: her aunt is gone to the United States, grass lawns are overgrown and the lion statue has lost its gleam. However, she notices that Nsukka still retains its liberatory air that "smells of hills and history" (*PH* 299), a place which "could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song. As laughter" (299). That is why she says not once but twice that when Jaja is released from prison that they will take him to Nsukka first before going to visit Aunty Ifeoma in the United States.

Both Marion's journey to Europe and the letters Kambili receives from her aunt and cousins in the United States provide a glimpse of life beyond their national borders, a theme I dwell on in detail in the chapter that follows. While in England, Marion notices that "the motley crowds about her can hardly all be natives" (*PL* 188) suggesting an existing migrant community in London. In Glasgow, she meets an old man in the park who complains that the Garnethill part of Glasgow is "full of Pakis" who come "[i]n droves, with all other refugees and asylum seekers and suchlike, to Glasgow, where the council has conveniently forgotten about their own Scottish poor" (203). We get a similar glimpse of life in America in *Purple Hibiscus* through Amaka and Aunty Ifeoma who write to Kambili about the good life in America where they never experience power outages and where hot water runs from the tap. Despite such "luxuries", however, Amaka writes in one of her letters that they "don't laugh anymore ... because [they] don't have the time to laugh, because [they] don't even see one another" (*PH* 301). Aunty Ifeoma herself works two jobs at a community college and a drugstore. Like Amaka, she writes to Kambili about how cheap food is in America but she also writes about how she misses things from home. In the next chapter I focus on such elements of migrant lives as depicted in Wicomb's and Adichie's short stories.

Chapter Four

Travelling Texts: Women, Migration and Metafiction in Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* and Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*

In *The Location of Culture*, particularly in the chapter entitled “Dissemination”, Homi Bhabha discusses his experience as an immigrant, an experience that speaks to both Wicomb and Adichie as authors currently living in and writing from the ‘margins’ of foreign cultures.

Bhabha intimates:

I have lived that moment of scattering of the people that in other times and places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and *émigrés* and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half life, half light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment. Of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. (Bhabha, *Location* 199)

The above statement comes close to describing the lives of characters in the latest story collections of Wicomb and Adichie, *The One that Got Away* (2008) and *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) respectively. In these stories we encounter characters who are profoundly affected by two different contexts. Like Bhabha, both Wicomb and Adichie have experienced life (and continue to do so in so far as their current location is concerned), on the “edge of foreign cultures”, and their recent story collections attest to and explore such states of being, as these stories straddle two continents and two countries: Africa and Great Britain, or more specifically South Africa and Scotland, in the case of *The One that Got Away*; and the United States and Nigeria in the Case of *The Thing Around Your Neck*. I believe that the stories I am examining by each author may be put into conversation as both sets of stories have narratives that focus on women's experiences of relationships and marriage, on the interpenetration of political violence/trauma into the home, and on processes of reading and writing – in relation to transnational movements, to the “gatherings” of people and signs cited above. These

stories develop themes that have emerged in each writer's earlier work, while tracing the personal effects of transnational migration.

In the interview with Eva Hunter cited earlier, Wicomb speaks of her "outsidedness" in Scotland and the interesting fact that she has to write in the language of the very society in which she feels like an outsider. Her point is fleshed out in her account of what Julika Griem calls the "elliptic absence" (390) of the years that Frieda Shenton, the protagonist in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, spends in Britain. Wicomb explains:

I suppose it is a deliberate gap between the stories [in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*]. In the latter half of the book the heroine is in Britain, but I refuse to comment on it because my experience there was about being silent. I was certainly not going to give my heroine any voice in Britain. Also, since the book came out of very intense homesickness, I couldn't write about Britain. It is a problem not to have lived in South Africa for so long and not being able to write about anything else [...]. In some ways I have acculturated in Britain – I'm middle class, educated and in a sense grew up there – but in another sense I will always be an outsider. (Wicomb, Interview with Hunter 87)

Wicomb's comment above becomes interesting in the light of *The One That Got Away* where characters in Scotland are no longer silent about their experience there like Frieda is in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Evidently Wicomb also feels somewhat estranged from South African culture, having left South Africa in 1970 for Great Britain. She points out that she "couldn't possibly claim to write for [the South African] culture." Nevertheless, as she claims, she feels that she is writing "out of the South African culture" because she "certainly couldn't write out of British culture where [she is] an outsider" (86).

In an interview with Maria Blackburn, Adichie expresses sentiments similar to those of Wicomb about belonging, or rather about the lack thereof: "I will always feel like I don't belong [in the United States of America] fully. Even though I also feel I'm an observer in Nigeria" (Adichie, cited in Strehle 654). In another interview with Carl Wilkinson ironically titled "I Left Home to Find Home", Adichie reiterates that the United States "is a place that is

very convenient and I am happy there, but I don't belong" (Adichie, "I Left Home"). Then she passionately identifies with her home country: "I feel a real sense of connection with [Nigeria]. I can go back to my ancestral village and walk the same dusty path that my great grandfather probably walked on and that gives me a sense of being rooted" (Adichie, "I Left Home"). Yet, despite such sense of connection with the homeland, the many years she has spent away from Nigeria make her feel like an observer, thereby forcing her into feeling of being unhomed similar to Wicomb's. Her sense of alienation is best captured in her essay "Heart is Where the Home Was" – which dislocates the English cliché, "Home is where the heart is", rolled out by Freda's father in Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In this essay, Adichie talks about her first return home after spending five years in America and how she felt estranged from her childhood home town: Nsukka had become desolate and everything else felt distant. Her feeling as an outsider was compounded by the fact she had to see Nsukka "with Americanised eyes" (Adichie, "Home is Where the Heart"). Adichie's stories reflect both a strong sense of connection with the homeland and the unsettling feeling of alienation due to years spent abroad.

In this chapter, I explore how Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* and Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* portray mainly women's experiences of life in what Bhabha refers to as "a boundary that is at once inside and outside, the insider's outsidedness" (Bhabha, *Location* 14). Paying attention to such liminal existence, I examine how women's migrant experiences allow an alternative reading of transnational movement and "gathering". Moreover, as I have mentioned above, each story collection not only foregrounds women's experiences of migration and travel, but also processes of reading and writing.

Gendering Transnational Migration

According to Steven Vertovec, the term transnationalism may refer, among other things, to a “kind of social formation spanning borders” (Vertovec 4); “a kind of ‘diaspora consciousness’” defined by “individuals’ awareness of de-centred attachments, of being simultaneously ‘home away from home’, ‘here and there’” (6). These transnational formations have been substantially aided by “the revolution in telecommunications and travel which has compressed the spatial and temporal distances between home and abroad”, allowing people in the world today “to be people of multiple worlds and focalities perpetually translocated, physically and culturally, between several countries and continents” (Zeleva 45). This culture of cross-border interconnectivity has led to a body of creative writing that critics have christened “transnational fiction” which is a form of “literary border-crossing” (Helgesson 8). Transnational literary texts cross borders as “objects – imported across borders, circulating as texts” but also “in the way they are *written*” (Clingman 9, italics original). Such texts are usually concerned with “the grammar of identity and location; the nature of boundaries, both transitive and intransitive; and navigation as a modality of existence in, and as defining both the transitive self and transnational space” (11). Wicomb’s and Adichie’s stories depict such elements through their focus on migrant social formations and consciousness as well as cultural interpenetration.

Patricia R. Pessar observes in “Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In” that transnational migration has for a long time been regarded as exclusively for men. As such, it has usually been associated with the image of “the lone, rugged male who left his family behind in the homeland as he ventured across seas to seek his fortune, hoping to return to them after achieving his success” (Pessar 822). However, Pessar notes that despite their absence in transnational migration narratives, women have always been part of the migrating population, especially from Africa to Europe and America, either as wives and fiancées or

most recently as refugees, students and professional workers. The lives of such women are a major area of focus in both *The One That Got Away* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

Wicomb's and Adichie's concern with transnational migration in their short stories is of course foreshadowed by their other narratives discussed in preceding chapters. In *David's Story*, David travels to Scotland on ANC business where he experiences the presence of South Africa in Glasgow cityscapes in the form of, among other things, names of places and streets that are also names of places back home. As a result [i]n this foreign city, his visit had become an exercise in recognising the unknown, in remembering the familiar that cast its pall over the new" (DS 188-189). Likewise, Marion in *Playing in the Light*, (as noted in chapter three), travels to Britain to clear her head after an emotionally exhausting search for the truth about her family's coloured ancestry, and notably it is while in Britain that she reads extensively in the field of South African literature, while confined to her apartment in foul British weather. Frieda Shenton too in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* exiles herself to Britain for ten years, before returning to South Africa, where she is finally berated by her mother for writing stories about her family. This trend of transnational border crossing becomes central to stories in *The One That Got Away* which Julika Griem notes as featuring characters who are involved in "a restless circuit of transnational relations connecting Africa and Europe, Cape Town and Glasgow" (Griem 289). Virginia Richter echoes Griem's point when she calls the stories in *The One That Got Away* "tales of two cities" making the collection itself "overtly 'bipolar' and interconnected" (Richter 382).

Similarly, Adichie's literary imaginings of the Atlantic crossing(s) are foretold by certain incidents in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In *Purple Hibiscus* Aunty Ifeoma eventually leaves politically- and economically-troubled Nigeria for a teaching post in the United States. Like Aunty Ifeoma, a number of characters in Adichie's recent short stories leave (or attempt to leave) Nigeria for the United States in search of what they believe to be

better life. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the American connection is hinted upon through Ugwu who is inspired to authorship by Frederick Douglass's slave narrative. This Nigeria-America connection becomes more prominent and more overt in *The Thing Around Your Neck* described elsewhere as "diasporic fiction" (Tunca, "Of French Fries" 294) which can be read as a continued manifestation of Adichie's "exilic consciousness" (Strehle, 654) displayed in her other works.

In order to put the sets of stories into conversation, however, it is also important to remark upon the very differently- connected locations that they deal with. While in Wicomb's stories instances can be noted where characters claim ancestral ties with Scotland (for example Elsie's father in "Nothing Like The Wind"), in Adichie's such claims are not made because the close colonial connection (both in historical and genealogical terms) that exists between South Africa and Scotland does not appertain in the same direct sense between Nigeria and the United States, though of course there is an underlying connection between West Africa and the United States, namely the history of slavery, that is hinted at in Ugwu's reference to Frederick Douglass's slave narrative in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. *Olauda Equiano and the Igbo World*, a collection of essays edited by Chima J. Korieh, explores this link between West Africa and America by examining Olauda Equiano's autobiographical slave narrative entitled *An Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olauda Equiano*. Equiano was abducted and sold into slavery as an 11 year old boy from Igboland around 1756. He was taken to America and then to Caribbean Islands where he finally bought his freedom and relocated to England to devote his later life to abolitionist campaigning (Obiechina ix). In Adichie's recent stories, however, such connections are not explored overtly. Rather they are hinted at in rather covert but significant ways. The Liberty Bell and a photograph of Benjamin Franklin in the story entitled "Imitation", for instance, evoke the history behind America's independence and "freedom", yet set against a history of slavery and with the

protagonist's position in this story these symbols of freedom become somewhat disjunctive. As shall be expounded later, Adichie's deployment of such historical and cultural symbols in her stories provides a context within which experiences of her characters in America can be appreciated. We are left to judge whether America lives up to its promises of freedom for Adichie's characters that migrate from Nigeria to America.

My approach to migrancy as portrayed in Wicomb and Adichie's short stories is partly premised on Kavita Daiya's observation of how Amitav Ghosh and Nadine Gordimer in *The Circle of Reason* and "The Ultimate Safari" respectively, refuse to "celebrate the hybridity and heterogeneity born of global migrations" in opposition to such writers as Salman Rushdie who laud migration as "a metaphor for all humanity" (cited in Daiya 392). Instead, Ghosh and Gordimer, to whom I would add Wicomb and Adichie, "offer a compelling critique of nationalism and the failures of migration through the economic and political experiences of women as citizens and illegal migrants" (Daiya 392). Migrancy, as shown through the women protagonists of Wicomb and Adichie's recent short stories, is thus better understood as a "paradox of opportunity and oppression, betterment and loss" (393) than as a sure way to a better life.

For many of Wicomb's characters, the transnational becomes a space where the familiar and the unfamiliar seep into each other, creating an impression of being at home while at the same time being unhomed. As David says in *David's Story* about his experience in Glasgow, "the city began to haunt him with its history of elsewhere", turning his visit to the city into "an exercise in recognising the unknown, in remembering the familiar that cast its pall over the new" (DS 188, 189). Borrowing Susan Alice Fischer's idea of "literature of migration to the global city [which] calls for an examination not only of the representations of particular geographical places but also of the protagonists' engagement with such locations and specifically with the social spaces of work, housing, and leisure" (Fischer 107), I now

aim to pay attention to the experiences of two women in Wicomb's recent stories (before moving on to place these into conversation with Adichie's stories): Jane in "There Was a Bird That Never Flew" and Dorothy Brink in "In the Botanic Gardens" and how their experiences in Glasgow are haunted by the city's "history of elsewhere".

In "There Was a Bird That Never Flew" Jane goes to Glasgow on a honeymoon trip with her husband, Andrew Brown (known as Drew). Among the different places Jane visits in Glasgow, the Doulton Fountain stands out. We first encounter the fountain in an earlier story, "Boy in a Jute-Sack Hood", where Dr. Grant Fotheringay's decision to work in South Africa is inspired at a young age by the fountain. Visiting the fountain as a child he "could escape to far off lands via the terracotta tableaux of the colonies" (*OTGA* 11). His favourite was "the bearded man in the South African tableau with a gun by his side and at his feet a sweet, odd looking girl who would speak in a lovely sing-song voice" (11). The image of the girl "guided his hand at night under the blanket and brought wet dreams of coupling with a continent" (11). Such childhood fantasies, which Virginia Richter calls "Grant's masturbatory vision" (Richter 385), and which echo the dynamics of imperial romance (posing southern Africa as a feminized site ripe for exploitation and colonisation), culminate with Grant's moving to Cape Town to teach at the University of Cape Town.

The Doulton Fountain, according to Mariangella Palladino and John Miller, embodies "interspatiality" i.e. "the relationship between places" and "the ongoing power relations between centre and periphery" (Palladino and Miller 409). It therefore functions "as a window onto the colonial margins that also generates a perspective on the imperial centre" (411). The two critics further argue that "the fountain obliterates complicated histories by solidifying them into a static image" thereby homogenising "diversity into its bland imperialist vision" and "replacing history with a safely hegemonic vision of empire" (411). I would like to argue that Jane's "reading" of the fountain unhomes this "hegemonic vision of

empire” to reveal the complicated history of colouredness otherwise obliterated by the fountain’s “bland imperialist vision”.

Like Dr. Fotheringay, Jane is also interested in the niche for “*STH Africa*” especially its figures, an ostrich, a young woman and a bearded white man. In the tourist brochure, the ostrich is said to represent “the exotic flora and fauna that lured the Brits [to the Cape] in pursuit of pure knowledge and scientific progress” (*OTGA* 71), which glosses over British imperial motive in South Africa. The young woman is “unmistakably coloured” and sits “cool as a cucumber in the Glasgow chill” (71). Named Kaatje by Jane, she makes for interesting reading particularly against the story of colouredness (in South Africa) which Jane shares. On a farewell visit to Drew’s relatives in Cape Town before the two departed for Glasgow, Drew’s aunt, Aunt Trudie “unashamedly set about checking the hair in the nape of [Jane’s] neck for frizz” (69). The incident, which outrages Jane, recalls the idea of colouredness as shame in South Africa. As Wicomb notes in “Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa”, miscegenation in South Africa is “bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid’s strategy of the naming of a Coloured race, and recurring in the current attempts by coloureds to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame” (Wicomb, “Shame” 92). However, the discourse of imperial romance, as represented by the fountain, seems to celebrate interracial romance rather than consider it as shameful. Little wonder Jane finds it “quite unbelievable that more than hundred years ago, miscegenation was celebrated in a public work here in the ‘centre’” (*OTGA* 71).

As if in defiance of attitudes like Aunt Trudie’s, the young woman in the fountain “sits in her niche unembarrassed, demure like any woman of her time, and immune to the cold and the rain, presumably acclimatised by now” (72). Despite her presumed acclimatisation she remains “conspicuously native” and “[n]ot only are her facial features –

cheekbones, nose, full lips – distinctly Khoi, but the fullness of hair framing her face speaks unashamedly of miscegenation” (77). The statue thus could be read as fitting in with the tropes of imperial romance, bringing to mind novels such as Henry Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, in which any real instance of “miscegenation” is foreclosed upon, even as southern Africa is represented figuratively as seductive and feminized through a treasure map. Yet Jane’s “reading” of the statue unhomes imperial romance by focusing on its uncanny or repressed narrative, namely actual “miscegenation”. In fact, Jane interprets the statue as celebrating interracial romance, and notes “matter-of-fact intimacy” between the coloured woman and the Boer making the two “unmistakably a couple” (77). Besides, “Kaatje’s posture and facial expression tell that she is not a servant; she occupies her space with ease, not regally like Victoria, for she feels no need to claim space, no need to assume an imperious pose” (77). Bringing to mind the narrative of Sarah Baartman who was taken from South Africa to Britain (before she was exhibited in France), but shifting towards a restorative vision of migration, Kaatje appears to be at home: “[h]er slanted Khoisan eyes gaze out brightly at the world with neither arrogance nor humility, rather, with calm curiosity as if she knows of her transportation to the metropolis and does not mind at all” (77). Her “difference is not a burden” and “[w]hilst her descendants at the Cape have been either cringing with shame ... Kaatje has been sitting here bathed in grace for more than a century, unembarrassed” (77). Jane’s reading of the fountain stretches the meaning of the fountain beyond the one intended by imperial powers that commissioned it. As Palladino and Miller put it, “Jane initiates a previously unforeseen dialogue between the postcolonial present and the imperial past” (Palladino and Miller 415). Richter also makes an interesting connection between Jane and “Kaatje” when she notes that

The two coloured women translocated from South Africa to rainy Glasgow apparently have entered on [sic] a pact of mutual support, helping them both to escape the patriarchal and colonial power structures that determine their meaning. The story thus

seems to end on an affirmative note, celebrating the anti-essentialist anti-racist and anti-colonial achievement of the woman reader. (Richter 385)

In the story entitled “In the Botanic Gardens” Dorothy Brink encounters a different imperial site in Glasgow, namely the Botanic Gardens, which reveals the whole British imperial world as a “site of global interconnections nourishing and nourished by its colonial peripheries” (Palladino and Miller 411). Like Jane, Dorothy goes to Glasgow for a short while after her son, Arthur, a student at Glasgow University, is reported missing. Mr. MacPherson, the man who welcomes Dorothy in Glasgow, suggests a visit to the Botanic gardens to take the weight of her son’s disappearance off her mind for a while. Housed in the garden are plants from different parts of the world including Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, India, and America such that a visit to the Botanic garden feels “like travelling” across the world (*OTGA* 161) in the same way Dr. Fotheringay’s visit to the Doulton Fountain felt like an “escape to far off lands” (11).

In the passageway leading to a section where plants from South Africa are kept, a notice announces that the section *is* South Africa (169). The notice’s meaning transcends the intended labelling of the section as a place where South African flora is housed to flirt with the actual transposing of South Africa into the Glaswegian space as well as the transnational compression of space and time bringing different parts of the world within reach of each other. Dorothy’s walk through the garden becomes one quick stroll across the world: “through Australia, New Zealand, a South American jungle, the undergrowth of temperate Asia, the Canaries and the Mediterranean” and “back at the icing sugared Erica, entering South Africa again” (169). In the Papua New Guinea section, Dorothy is struck by a photograph of a black man captioned “Commissioner for Papua New Guinea” which reminds her of her missing son. Too dazed to walk, Dorothy sits down “in Papua New Guinea” and almost blends into the display such that a child visiting with his mother thinks she is a “Papoo person” (170).

Earlier, on her way to the Botanic gardens, Dorothy receives a ten pound note as change from a cab driver. The note points towards Glasgow “as one of the British ports most intimately involved in trade in slave-produced goods” with its “dark history” encoded “in its grand municipal architecture and in the imperial decorations contained in its green spaces” (Palladino and Miller 412). The ten pound note is described as follows:

On the front, where a man called David Livingstone was trapped amongst palm leaves, it claimed to be issued by Clydesdale Bank PLC. On the back – and [Dorothy] flushed with shame – a naked woman was flanked on either side by naked men, captives or slaves squatting serenely in their leg-irons under palm trees. An overdressed Arab on a camel occupied the middle ground, while in the distance a sailing boat drifted on the water. Across the picture and across the plain white strip at the edge marked simply with £10 figure, someone, the taxi-man perhaps, had written in blue pen: if dat bastard Geldof don’t git ’ere soon I goes eat dat camel. (*OTGA* 168)

While evoking Glasgow’s involvement in and benefit from slave trade, the bank note provides a summation of British imperialist benevolence as forerunners in ending slave trade. The Scottish explorer David Livingstone, touted as champion of anti-slavery campaign, symbolises such benevolence, basking in glory on the front of the note and among palm fronds, symbol of peace according to the Christian doctrine which Livingstone supposedly came to spread in Africa. Those that he risked his life for are at the back of the note, captives in chains ready to be shipped by the “overdressed Arab” across the sea. Frozen into this single note is a history of centuries of the transatlantic slave trade in which Britain in general and Glasgow in particular were complicit despite the benevolence claimed by the banknote.

The message “if dat bastard Geldof don’t git ’ere soon I goes eat dat camel” (*TOTGA* 168) scrawled on the note references contemporary charities sponsored by musician Bob Geldof, who became famous for his 1984 charity group Band Aid which performed to raise money for famine-ravaged Ethiopia. Since the message is scrawled across the picture of the three slaves, it is as if it is uttered by one of them - if Geldof does not show up to save them they will have to eat the camel or else starve to death. Dorothy, who is obviously unaware of

Bob Geldof's charities (which, like abolitionist discourse, evoke the liberal humanist language of sensibility), somewhat humorously misinterprets the text's meaning, thinking that it could be a coded message about her missing son since her son is a fatherless child (a "bastard"). Unhoming the message even further, and revealing her unhomed position, her Afrikaans reading of the name "Geldof" draws on the fact that in Afrikaans "geld" means money, which makes her wonder whether her son's disappearance had something to do with money. Dorothy and Jane's experiences in Glaswegian cityscapes attest to Jane Jacob's idea in *Edge of Empire* of "first world city" being "enmeshed in the legacies of imperialist ideologies and practices" (Jacobs 4). While unhomed in the "first world city" both Dorothy and Jane provide perspectives on imperial discourse that perform "destabilisation of imperial arrangements" (4).

As noted earlier, the complex historical and genealogical connections between South Africa and Scotland in Wicomb's stories do not appertain in exactly the same way to the relationship between the United States and Nigeria in Adichie's stories. However, America's past, which is evoked in subtle but significant ways in Adichie's stories can be read in relation to the lives of Adichie's migrant characters. Through foregrounding migrant women's intimate issues as marriages and relationships Adichie engages with the gendered aspects of migration, and uses gender to interrogate the very idea of migration as a way towards a better life, especially the idea of America as paradise as perceived mostly by would-be migrants. It is in Adichie's stories of migrant women that Daiya's idea of migrancy as "paradox of opportunity and oppression, betterment and loss" (Daiya 393) is vividly explored.

I will begin by focusing on how the experiences of Nkem in "Imitation" and Chinaza in "The Arrangers of Marriage" undercut the idea of America as paradise. Nkem's initial reason for coming to America was to give birth to her first child, a common practice among

rich Nigerian families, as suggested in the story. Such a practice takes advantage of American citizenship legislation which accords citizenship status to all children born on American soil. This seems to be the real reason why Nkem's husband, Obiora (a businessman who splits his time between Lagos and Philadelphia), insists that his children be born in America. However, when we learn later in the story that Obiora has another woman in Nigeria, we realise that sending his wife to America and his insistence that she stays there was to cover up his extramarital relationship. As the title of the story suggests, Obiora's life is an imitation of American life. This imitation is augmented by a collection of replicas of African masks in his American home. Acquiring the masks becomes Obiora's way of performing his acquired "Americanness". He is also proud that his children speak "big-big English" and that they have become "Americanah" (TAYN 38).

Initially, Nkem is proud that she married into "the Rich Nigerian Men who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Their Babies League" (26). She becomes even more excited by her husband's idea to buy a house in America because then she would belong to "yet another league of the Rich Nigerian Men Who Owned Houses in America" (26). She writes to her friends back in Nigeria about the lovely suburb in which she lives, and sends them her photo with Obiora near the Liberty Bell behind which she proudly scribbles "very important in American history" (24). She also sends them "glossy pamphlets featuring a balding Benjamin Franklin" (24). Nkem's encounter with these two relics of American recalls Jane's encounter with the Doulton Fountain in "There Was a Bird That Never Flew" discussed above. For Jane, the Doulton fountain becomes a site of something familiar and homely within the otherwise "unhomely" Glaswegian public space while at the same time her reading of the fountain "unhomes" its imperial meaning. For Nkem the two relics of American history are symbols of the American culture that she aspires to embrace with pride. Yet the histories of the Liberty Bell and Benjamin Franklin need to be fleshed out more in order to appreciate

their significance, not just in “Imitation” in which they appear. As I shall argue, the history that the two relics evoke also has relevance to the lives of Adichie’s characters in other stories.

Both the Liberty Bell and Benjamin Franklin are unambiguously connected to the history of America’s freedom and independence. The Bell, according to J.B. Stoudt, is “revered as the symbol of the nation’s birth” (cited in Callahan 63), considering the myth that it was first rung after the reading of the Declaration of Independence on 8th July 1776.¹¹ The Bell also became a symbol for unity and healing in the years after the American civil war (1861-1865) when it served as “an emissary of peace and unity on a number of train journeys to several parts of the United States” (69) - the Liberty Bell imaged as “traveller” thus speaks importantly to Adichie’s migrant characters. In the early 1800s the Bell also became a symbol for anti-slavery campaign. It is widely believed that the Bell (which was first known as The State House Bell) was first referred to by the name “The Liberty Bell” by the abolitionists particularly The Friends of Freedom who published a newsletter called *The Liberty Bell*. It has been observed however that the newsletter’s name was not a direct reference to the Bell but rather a metaphorical use of “*the idea of a bell or bell’s tolling “Liberty”*” (66, italics original). Paul Willis, in an essay titled “The Liberty Bell: A Mediation on Labor, Liberty, and the Cultural Mediations That Connect or Disconnect Them”, cites H.R.H Moore’s 1844 anti-slavery poem titled “The Liberty Bell” which proclaims: “Ring loud that Hallowed Bell! Ring it till the Slave be free” (Willis 225). In the same essay Willis also makes an important connection between the Bell and slavery by focusing on issues of labour that the Bell evokes. He asserts that “Labor, hidden in history, made the bell” (224).

¹¹ The myth originates from a short story by George Lippard entitled “Ring, Grandfather! Ring” (1847) in which an elderly bellman awaits outside the state house for word that Congress has declared independence so that he can ring the bell. But word does not come and while he is about to give up, his grandson, who had been eavesdropping on Congress shouts “Ring, Grandfather! Ring!” It is said that Lippard’s story captured the imagination of many a person across America and that that was the beginning of its association with the declaration of independence. See “The Liberty Bell” *United States Government*. N.d. Web. 20 September 2012.

There are several types of labour evoked by Willis here: the labour that went into the making of the bell (the foundry workers that moulded the bell), and labour that went into the creation of an independent America (including slave labour) for which the Bell has become an iconic symbol. Thus, the Bell “is physical labour” as well as “cultural production” (224) and “its dark history skin” reflects “its past of agglomerated labors” (228).

One obvious link between the Bell and the image of Benjamin Franklin is the idea of American independence. Franklin was one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, a frontrunner during the campaign for the independence of American colonies from Britain. He was also one of the signatories to the Declaration of Independence. Franklin was also known for his teaching about “public virtues and pluck” as “keys to the kingdom of worldly success” which according to his critics provided the basis for American capitalism and earned Franklin the tag “the capitalist saint” (*Anthology of American Lit.* 314). As if to augment Franklin’s label as the father of American capitalism, his face appears on America’s \$100 bill, the highest denomination in the American currency. There is thus a very interesting dialogue between the monument and banknote in Wicomb’s “There was a Bird that Never Flew” and “The Botanic Gardens”, and the Liberty Bell and image of Benjamin Franklin in Adichie’s “Imitation”. Together, the Liberty Bell and the photograph of Benjamin Franklin in “Imitation” evoke the history of slavery, abolition and capitalism and speak to racialised experiences encountered by Adichie’s characters, most of whom are initially attracted by America’s capitalist gleam.

Coming back to Nkem’s experiences in “Imitation”, the Bells’ proclamation of America as a land of freedom and independence as noted above is undercut by the fact that America becomes a place where Nkem is heartbroken following her husband’s cheating. Nkem initially embraces America with pride. Even though she misses home sometimes – “the cadence of Igbo and Yoruba and pidgin English spoken around her” and “the sun that glares

down even when it rains” (*TAYN* 37) – America has “snaked its roots under her skin” (37) such that the idea of Nigeria as home begins to fade away: “it hardly feels right [for her] to refer to the house in Lagos [...] as home” rather than their “brown house in suburban Philadelphia” (34). After learning about her husband’s cheating, however, Philadelphia does not feel like home anymore, and freedom and independence “tolling” from the Liberty Bell do not hold the same appeal as she begins to contemplate moving back to Lagos. By the end of the story, America is no longer a place of freedom and independence for Nkem as her celebration of freedom and independence are undercut by her discovery that this has only been granted to her so that her husband can be “free” to cheat on her at “home” in Lagos. Nkem’s experience after learning about her husband’s infidelity unhomes the meaning of the Liberty Bell as a symbol of freedom and independence and thus speaks to Jane’s reading of the fountain which unhomes the fountain’s meaning as a celebration of empire.

In “The Arrangers of Marriage” the protagonist Chinaza follows her husband to America, and her experiences may be compared and contrasted with those of Nkem in “Imitation”. Because of her lack of wealth (since her husband is not as rich as Nkem’s husband), Chinaza’s life in America is not as thrilling as Nkem’s. While Nkem seems to live her American dream from the day she arrives in America, Chinaza is disappointed when life in America turns out to be not the kind she had imagined. From the day she arrives in America, her life becomes illustrative of Daiya’s earlier noted paradox of migrancy as “opportunity and oppression” and “betterment and loss”. Before coming to America, when her husband talked about their home in America she had imagined the kind of houses owned by “white newlyweds in the American films” with “a smooth driveway snaking between cucumber-coloured lawns, a door leading into a hallway, walls with sedate paintings” (167). When she arrives, however, she finds that their “American house” is actually a “furniture challenged flat” (168) in a block of apartments with “a flight of brooding stairs” and “an

airless hallway with frayed carpeting” (167). In the living room of the flat, “a beige couch sat alone in the middle, slanted, as though dropped there by accident” (167).

Besides the “the furniture challenged flat”, Chinaza is struck by her husband’s “obsession with social conformism, which translates into a strict adherence to what he perceives as typically American mores” (Tunca, “Of French Fries” 297). He has changed his name from Ofodile Emeka Udenwa to Dave Bell to become “as mainstream as possible” because if you do not, “you will be left by the roadside” (*TAYN* 172).¹² What surprises Chinaza is how her husband arrived at the name Bell, which bears no resemblance to his Igbo name (unlike Americanised Igbo names like Waturu, from Waturuocha, or Chikel from Chikelugo). Ironically, the name Bell evokes the Liberty Bell whose history I have expounded above. The tendency to become Americanised as evidenced by the discarding of Igbo names for more American ones becomes reflective of racial self-hatred that was instigated by decades of slavery, which as we saw above, is ironically connoted by the image of the Liberty Bell. Dave’s racial self-hatred is also evident in the reason why he marries Chinaza: she is light-skinned, thus putting his prospective children at an advantage since “[l]ight skinned blacks fare better in America” (184). Dave’s deployment of fair skin colour in his pursuit of American happiness recalls how during slavery in America black people’s skin colour was symbolic of the inferior status of the black race, a view held by some of the influential architects of America such as Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, the man said to have been entrusted with drafting the Declaration of Independence wrote in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (in which he ironically condemns slavery) about how the inferiority of the black race is reflected by the colour of their skin. As noted in the *Norton Anthology of African-*

¹² The tendency among characters in Adichie’s short stories to change their Igbo names to American names or names that sound American speaks to the author herself who changed her pen name several times before settling for the one she currently uses. According to Daria Tunca in her essay “Of French Fries and Cookies”, Adichie once used the Americanised name “Amanda N. Adichie, before changing it to “Amanda Ngozi Adichie” and eventually reverting to the more Igbo-sounding “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” (300).

American Literature, “darkness of skin symbolised for Jefferson an absence of light within the African American, a void that made blackness the sign not merely of skin difference but also of an unknowable alien, a threatening other” (131). Thus, despite its condemnation of slavery, *Notes on the State of Virginia* “became an influential statement of early American racism because of Jefferson’s persistent association of blackness with absence” (131). Such is the history evoked by Dave’s distancing himself from his Igbo/Nigerian culture in an attempt to integrate into the American culture. The way Dave is unhomed in America first as an immigrant and then by race, recalls Jane’s encounter with the representation of her race in British imperial discourse. The difference between the two however, is that Jane does not feel unhomed by an imperial representation of her race, but rather unsettles the supposedly fixed meaning of her racial identity as represented in the Doulton fountain. As for Dave, he plays into America’s fixed categories of race, a discourse in which blackness becomes an undesirable and unhomely trait in the pursuit of the American dream. To ensure that his wife is not left behind in the pursuit of this dream, Dave advises her to change her name to Agatha Bell, and also to change her mannerisms. She is told to speak English everywhere¹³ including at home, and to call things by their “American” names: cookies for biscuits, elevator for lift and so on. Chinaza must also change her cooking both in terms of what she cooks and how she cooks. She must not cook any Nigerian food lest they be known as “people who fill the building with smells of foreign food” (*TAYN* 179). He also buys her *Good Housekeeping All American Cookbook* to make sure that she cooks like Americans who did not overcook their food. Recalling the ways in which the Campbell’s in Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light* feel compelled to “play white” even in the private space of their home, within the intimate and supposedly private space of the home Chinaza is being forced to obey her husband and to live

¹³ Noteceable here is how this obsession with English recalls Frieda’s family’s striving for correct English pronunciation in “Bowl Like Hole” in Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*.

like an American. Ironically, the history of centuries of black people's servitude in America is reincarnated in Chinaza's home.

While Chinaza experiences effects of America's racism in her domestic space, Akunna in "The Thing Around Your Neck" becomes a public spectacle when she falls in love with a white man. The way the American public reacts to the biracial couple gestures towards America's history of slavery noted above. In this story Adichie illustrates how the American public remains deeply scarred by racism which has its roots in slavery. Akunna's experience in America plays into both the image of America as a place of freedom and independence and also into the idea of migrancy as a paradox of opportunity and oppression. Her uncle's advice when she first arrives in America that America is all about "give-and-take", that "[y]ou gave up a lot but you gained a lot too" (*TAYN* 116) gestures towards the idea of America as a liberal place where one's freedom and independence could flourish. However, his sexual advances on Akunna (after which she decides to move out of his house) remind the reader of Daiya's earlier noted idea of migrant existence as a "paradox of opportunity and oppression" (*Daiya* 393) as does the attitude of the public towards her relationship with a white man. Migrant existence is also a moment of both "betterment and loss" for Akunna. Migrating to America is considered her way to better life economically as evidenced by her relatives' expectations when she won the American visa lottery: "In a month you will have a big car. Soon, a big house" (*TAYN* 115). However, her migration is also a moment of loss of family and community which have always been an important part of her life. Such a loss is manifested through moments when she feels homesick like the one noted by the narrator below:

Sometimes you sat on the lumpy mattress of your twin bed and thought about home—your aunts who hawked dried fish and plantains, cajoling customers to buy and then shouting insults when they didn't; your uncles who drank local gin and crammed their families and lives into single rooms; your friends who had come to say goodbye

before you left, to rejoice because you won the American visa lottery, to confess their envy; your parents who often hold hands as they walked on Sunday morning, the neighbours from the next room laughing and teasing them; your father who brought back his boss's old newspapers and made your brothers read them; your mother whose salary was barely enough to pay your brothers' school fees at the secondary school where teachers gave an A when someone slipped them a brown envelope. (117 – 118)

Reflected above is vibrant community life thriving more on social intimacy than on material well-being. The social connectedness of various individuals from family members and neighbours to traders and their customers contrasts with Akunna's feeling of rejection in America, especially when she begins to date a white man.

Akunna's experience of America's subtle racism during her early days in America is similar to Adichie's own, and also to the experience of Dorothy in Wicomb's "In the Botanic Gardens", who becomes a curious "object" at the botanic garden where she gets mistaken by a child for "a Papoo person". In "The Danger of a Single Story" Adichie mentions how she experienced her racialised identity as a black woman from Nigeria for the first time when she came to America to attend university. Her roommate was surprised at how well she spoke English, and that she too listened to Mariah Carey instead of 'tribal music'. Like Adichie's roommate, Akunna's American friends are also surprised at how well she speaks English. They are also curious about her hair wondering "Does it stand up or fall down when you take out the braids?" (TAYN 116). They also wonder and want to know whether people in Africa have real houses or whether they own cars. Besides gesturing towards the indelible mark that racism, and a history of slavery, etched onto the American psyche, Akunna's subjection to such racist gaze and stereotyping also undermines America's often-touted liberalism.

Akunna feels othered the most by the public's reaction to her relationship with her white boyfriend. The first time Akunna meets the man who later becomes her lover, she expects to hear the usual white American patronising talk about donations made towards the

fight against AIDS in Africa or their love for elephants and their wish to go on safari. She is surprised however, that instead he is interested to know whether she is Yoruba or Igbo, and instead of “donations” and “elephants” he talks about his love for Okot p’Bitek’s poetry and Amos Tutuola’s novels, that he had read “a lot about sub-Saharan African countries, their histories, their complexities” (120). Still, Akunna remains sceptical because for her “white people who liked Africans too much and those who liked Africans too little were the same – condescending” (120). She disapproves of his intended tourist trip to Nigeria because she does not want her country to become just another addition “to the list of countries where he went to gawk at the lives of poor people who could never gawk back at his life” (124-5). Akunna’s attitude towards her homeland contrasts with that of other migrants, especially men like Dave in “The Arrangers of Marriage”, who feel ashamed of being Nigerian and strive to become American.

America’s subtle racism is clearly reflected in the way the American public responds to Akunna’s love affair. The narrator reports:

You knew by people’s reactions that you two were abnormal – the way the nasty ones were too nasty and the nice ones too nice. The old white men and women who muttered and glared at him; the black men who shook their heads at you, the black women whose pitying eyes bemoaned your lack of self esteem, your self-loathing. Or the black women who smiled swift solidarity smiles; the black men who tried too hard to forgive you, saying a too-obvious hi to him; the white men and women who said “what a good looking pair” too brightly, too loudly as if though to prove their own open mindedness to themselves. (TAYN 125)

Reflected above is an American public which, in the words of Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith in “Racial Orders in American Political Development”, “has been pervasively constituted by systems of racial hierarchy since its inception” (King and Smith 75). White people’s reaction to the relationship is both disapproving and conservative (in the case of the old white men and women) and exaggerated admiration in the case of what appears to be a younger generation of white men and women. Their exaggerated admiration of the biracial

couple undercuts their supposedly liberal attitude towards race relations in America. Joel Kovel's idea of "aversive racism" could be useful in describing such an attitude. According to Shawn Utsey *et al*, by "aversive racism" Kovel refers to a kind of racism which involves the display of racial tolerance in public while inwardly adhering to the ideas of racial superiority. The result is "public advocacy for racial equality while privately harbouring discomfort and fear of people of colour" (Utsey et al 342). Voicing their admiration of the biracial couple rather "too brightly, too loudly" seems to betray privately held prejudices.

Black people's reaction to the biracial couple can also be linked to the history of slavery and how it continues to influence public opinion. To them, Akunna's relationship with the white man seems to bring unhomey memories of the violation and degradation of black people in general and black women in particular during slavery. Calvin C. Hernton observes in *Sex and Racism* how during slavery in America, black women suffered degradation both mentally and physically at the hands of their white owners. Besides working as slaves in the fields or in the master's house, notes Hernton, black women were used "as breeding animals for more slaves" and also "served as [sex] toys for their white masters" (Hernton 109). This resulted in the perception of a black woman as "sex toy" always available to be had "by any white man who desired her" (112, 113) which, after slavery, metamorphosed into the "Jezebel myth that black women are hypersexual and promiscuous" (Henry 52). It seems that for black onlookers, by dating a member of the oppressing race, Akunna does not only degrade herself, but also betrays the oppressed race to which she belongs and therefore becomes complicit in black people's continued degradation and oppression. Despite being accepted by her boyfriend's parents who do not examine her "like an exotic trophy" or "an ivory tusk" (TAYN 126), Akunna feels rejected as a white man's lover both by her fellow black people and by the white population. For those who approve of

the relationship, their approval is compromised by their over-performed liberal attitude and public admiration of the biracial relationship.

We have seen here that through women's perspectives on migrant life, Adichie's stories throw light and shade on the idea of America as an idealised destination for migration. As we saw with Wicomb's characters, Adichie's female characters are not simply unhomed by their migrant status. Rather, their experience in turn exposes America's acclaimed liberalism - in the way Wicomb's characters exposes imperialist discourses - by revealing America's continuing racial anxieties which have their roots in slavery. Slavery itself is cleverly and subtly evoked through references to monumental relics of America's political and cultural history.

Political Violence, the Domestic and Migration

The reasons (discussed above) for migration in both sets of recently published stories by Wicomb and Adichie are tourism and travel, and a search for better life economically. In this section of the chapter I would now like to turn to Wicomb's and Adichie's concern with politics or political violence invading the home, and how such invasions may lead to (attempted) migration. While politically-motivated migrations are featured in a couple of stories (for instance in Wicomb's "Neighbours" and "Nothing Like the Wind", and Adichie's "Ghosts") I have chosen to focus primarily on two stories, Wicomb's "Another Story" and Adichie's "The American Embassy" because of their focus on women's experiences of homes rendered unhomey by political intrusion. Again, I will draw on Bhabha's theorising about "the home and the world", especially how the boundary between the two spheres is destabilised, making "the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha, "The World" 141).

“Another Story” focuses on Deborah Kleinhans’s homecoming journey from Scotland to a politically tense Cape Town after being invited by Sarah who claims to be her niece. However, the reader does not immediately notice political tension in the city despite being aware from the beginning of the story that it is set during apartheid. The first reference made to political tension in Cape Town is by Dollie, Deborah’s friend in Scotland who advises her against making the trip because “Cape Town is full of troubles with people throwing stones and getting shot” (*OTGA* 174). It is only when Sarah is suddenly arrested by police one morning that the full significance of the political environment of apartheid appears in the story. Following Sarah’s arrest allegedly for her political activities, we begin to make links between Sarah’s arrest and the general protests that Dollie was referring to. That Sarah is a critic of apartheid’s racism is implied in her attempt to refute the story of colouredness as told by Sarah Gertrude Millin whose caricatured idea of coloured identity in *God’s Step Children* became appropriated by the apartheid regime in devising its segregationist laws. In fact, the whole purpose why Sarah invites her aunt over is because she wants to find out from her about the story of their family with the aim of challenging Millin’s negative portrayal of colouredness. Thus, Sarah’s critique of Millin’s construction of colouredness as tragedy can be read as part of her criticism of apartheid’s racial politics. The meeting she plans to attend on the day she is arrested is most likely one of her political meetings. Sarah’s political involvement is also suggested by the leader of the police search team who tells Deborah “she should have kept an eye on the girl” (189). The calmness with which Sarah writes a note in front of the police to her neighbours (asking them to take her aunt out on her behalf), suggests that she is not surprised by the arrest, that it is something she expected. Sarah’s arrest turns what was supposed to be Deborah’s “homecoming” trip to Cape Town unhomey and she has to return to Scotland unaware of where her niece has been taken to or what will happen to her. In her own form of unhomey resistance against political authority’s invasion of the

home, Deborah defiantly refuses to serve agents of oppression when she offers to make coffee for the police officers only to pour the coffee down the kitchen sink, recalling Olanna's defiant gesture of throwing rice away after it has been tainted by soldiers in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (HYS 424). Unlike Jane and Dorothy in "There Was a Bird That Never Flew" and "In the Botanic Garden" respectively, who are unhomed precisely by being away from the familiar terrain of home, Deborah is unhomed by re-entering the terrain called home.

In Adichie's "The American Embassy", which may be put into conversation with Wicomb's story, police invade the home of an investigative journalist in an even more violent way than they do in "Another Story". The unnamed journalist and male head of the household brings tragedy upon his family when Abacha's military junta whose shady deals he keeps exposing, comes after him. Tipped off by an anonymous well-wisher about his impending arrest the journalist sneaks into neighbouring Benin en route to America with the plan that his wife and four year old son, Ugonna, will follow him later. The state of helpless fear to which the journalist is reduced by news of his impending arrest and his abandonment of his family undercut his public image as a fearless patriot. The messianic image his journalism earns him among Abacha's critics becomes ironic when he has to be smuggled to safety in the boot of his car.

As I pointed out above, I am mainly interested here in the invasion of the domestic space by political violence during which their four year old son is killed by one of the hit men and how it affects the mother. Her husband's journalism, revered as some kind of messianic work by the public, leads to this woman's loss of family and home as her private space is invaded by political forces coming after her husband. From the woman's perspective, her husband's stature in public as a brave and courageous man, as a "voice for the voiceless" deserving of a Human Rights Award, is compromised by the senseless and brutal death he

brings upon his son. To her, what her husband has done is “simply an exaggerated selfishness” (*TAYN* 136). She had once told him that “You are not the only one who hates the government” (136) when he had to miss his cousin’s wedding to follow a story about an arrested journalist in Kaduna. Ironically, she had to give up her own journalism career when she fell pregnant so that she could raise a family. All these issues come to her mind as she stands in the queue outside the American Embassy in Lagos where she wants to apply for an asylum visa to America. The sight of a soldier whipping a civilian man across the street from where she is standing in the queue reminds her of how her home was invaded and her son tragically shot: the soldier’s “swagger was as flamboyant as that of the men who, four nights ago, broke her back door open and barged in” (137). The incident in the street becomes a public version of what took place in her home.

Adichie’s story highlights how asylum seekers sometimes get dehumanised and humiliated by immigration bureaucracy when trying to obtain visas. In this particular story, dehumanisation starts outside the embassy with people arriving at dawn and being “herded back and forth” by the soldiers to form a queue (*TAYN* 130). One man in the queue wonders “if the American embassy people look out of their window and enjoy watching the soldiers flogging people” (131). Conmen too seem to have taken advantage of the people’s desperation for the American visa. A woman in the queue claims that there is “a special church service called the American Visa Miracle Ministry” (133) which recalls Adichie’s concern as noted earlier in chapter three about how religion today has become a tool for exploiting the poor. Not everybody in the queue is interviewed and for those who get that chance, the process is as dehumanising and humiliating as was the queuing outside. A man is shouted at by the interviewer, for allegedly lying about reason for his visa application. Understandably, Adichie’s protagonist finds it inappropriate to reveal the intimate details of her son’s murder before the interviewer. Witnessing the humiliation of a fellow interviewee

at the next window “leaning close to the screen, reverently, as though praying to the visa interviewer behind” (139), she realised she could not hawk her son “for a visa to safety” (139) and decides to walk out even before her interview is completed. In fact, she decides that “she would die gladly at the hands of [her son’s killers] before she said a word about [her son] to this interviewer, or to anybody at the American Embassy” (139).

Wicomb and Adichie’s Recent Stories as Transnational Metafiction

In the discussion above, especially in relation to Wicomb’s stories, instances were noted of characters involved in moments of reading. We encounter Jane in “There Was a Bird That Never Flew” “reading” the Doulton fountain; so too does Dorothy perform acts of “reading” in “In The Botanic Garden” when she visits the botanic garden and also when she examines the £10 banknote. In Adichie’s work too metafictional moments of reading appear. Yet examining the sets of stories as metafiction also involves looking at instances of writing, where the text stages the act of authorship. As I shall demonstrate in this section, Judith Raiskin’s reading of Wicomb’s “Another Story” as re-writing the story of colouredness could be useful in reading Wicomb’s “The One That Got Away” and Adichie’s “The Head Strong Historian” as well. In both stories protagonists are engaged in moments of writing or re-writing history. Perhaps even more significantly, however, Wicomb’s “Trompe l’oeil” and Adichie’s “Jumping Monkey Hill” may be put into direct conversation as both stories focus on travel and writers’ retreats/workshops, staging reflecting upon processes and dilemmas of authorship, and the tension between truth and fiction. In each story examined in this section, travelling is an integral part of the protagonist’s act of (re)writing.

Raiskin has observed in *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women’s Writing and Creole Subjectivity* that Wicomb’s “Another Story” is both “a sly and satisfying attack” on *God’s Stepchildren* and “a contemporary rewriting of Millin’s ‘coloured’ characters by a ‘coloured’

author” (Raiskin 207, 208). The reader is once again reminded of Wicomb’s confessed interest in Millin’s novel as mentioned earlier in chapter one. Notable in “Another Story”, as pointed out by Raiskin, are interesting intertexts between Wicomb’s story and Millin’s novel: the character aptly named Sarah, resists the views of another Sarah, namely Sarah Gertrude Millin; and Wicomb’s protagonist Deborah Kleinhans shares her name with the Hottentot woman in Millin’s novel who raises a coloured family with Hans Kleinhans, the white missionary. When Sarah recites a description of a farm in Millin’s novel (described as “nothing but an untidiness on God’s earth [...] a mixture of degenerate brown people, rotten with sickness, an affront against nature” [*OTGA* 184]), Deborah thinks that she is referring to Brakvlei the farm on which she grew up. Her response to Sarah’s reference to Millin’s novel is critical of Millin’s book especially its purpose “to construct miscegenation as tragedy” (Gurnah 269). According to Deborah “Brakvlei was not rotten” but rather “the cleanest of farmyards, the stony veld swept for hundreds of yards and even the fowls knew not to shit near the house” (*OTGA* 184). Asked if she knew of a white woman who spoke to her mother and brothers and then wrote a story about the family, Deborah refutes the existence of such a story and its author:

No, I don’t believe it. What nonsense. Of course there was no such woman, no such thing. A book for all to read with our dirty Kleinhans washing spread out on snow white pages? Ag, no man, don’t worry; it wouldn’t be our story; it’s everyone’s story. All coloured people have the same story. Not worth writing a book about. (187)

Deborah thus denies not just the existence of the author and her story but also the truth of that story. Her version of the farm is a different story from one told by Millin, hers is “another story”. As such Deborah, like Jane in “There Was a Bird That Never Flew” rewrites the story of colouredness as shame, providing an alternative perspective.

In “The One That Got Away” Drew attempts, through an interesting subversion, to write an alternative version to the history of South Africa as represented in British colonial

history. Drew's idea to tamper with South Africa's story as told from the imperial centre is triggered by a book titled "The One That Got Away" by a Scottish author named Helen McCloy. The book, which he stumbles upon in a Cape Town library, belongs to the Dennistoun Public Library in Glasgow. Drew comes across the book while doing research on the history of mining in South Africa for an art project with his friend "Stan-the-man", and immediately perceives it as an object for art: "it was the object and its history rather than the text that interested him" (*OTGA* 45). This book is an apt example of a "travelling text" (Helgesson 8) especially in the sense of books as transnational objects involved in literal border crossing. In fact for Gurnah "[t]he book is imaged as traveller, forced into experience and encounter, and transformed to unavoidable degree" (263). Later on Drew travels to Scotland (on honeymoon) to return the book, but before he does so, he tampers with its cover and title. He inserts new titles - first, "GOLD MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA" on the book's cover and then "Gold Mining on the Rand: 1886-1899" on the book's flyleaf - which represent "the scars of its journey, the markings of travel and adventure" (*OTGA* 46). I would like to read Drew's alterations of the book as a (re)writing of the history introduced above. Drew's inscription of new titles on the book is his attempt to alter history, especially the history of British imperialism in South Africa. Altering the title of a British book, which we are told is a mystery with "excursions into Scottish history and traditions" (45), becomes Drew's symbolic attempt to insert certain facts of South African history. Drew's revolt against an imperial history of South Africa began in high school during one of Mr Gavin Wilton's history classes, where students were meant to read the "Fowler & Smit" history textbook which is described as South African history "reduced to half the history" (38). We are told that Drew felt unease in those classes and that Mr. Wilton's "ventriloquising Fowler & Smit brought an irrepressible urge to run" (37).

In one of these lessons Drew defies his teacher's authority and challenges the history he taught. Preparing his class for examinations, Mr. Wilton instructs the pupils to underline passages in their "Fowler and Smit" textbooks to be memorised for the examinations. The underlining has to be in pencil because, according to Mr. Wilton, "pencil being erasable, did not deface" and that "marks made in a book in ink was vandalism" (38). Drew defies Mr. Wilton's instructions and goes ahead to use not just one but a range of colours of ink:

Drew used five colours of ballpoint pen and an HB pencil, leaving none of the text unmarked, and as his ruler slid into angles and verticals, the pages turned into dazzling works, every one of them different. In the first row, almost under Mr. Wilton's nose, he bent industriously over his book, the project of turning every page of Fowler & Smit into something new, was all the more exciting for being a secret act performed so publicly. (38)

Drew's drawing of lines throughout the text and not underlining what Wilton noted as facts of history to be memorised is an act of resistance against both Wilton's authority as a teacher and against the history he taught. Drew's defacing of books becomes symbolic of his intention to insert historical facts that have been omitted from the books (38).

The incident above foretells what Drew does with McCloy's book later in the story. Before returning McCloy's book, Drew vandalises and defaces it the way he did with the "Fowler & Smit" textbook. He erases the original title of the book from the front cover and paints it red. The red paint makes the original title of the book on the spine "less clearly incised, barely readable" (*OTGA* 41-42). His insertion of an alternative title: GOLD MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA" (42) draws attention to a significant fact in the history of the British in South Africa conveniently omitted from the story of British imperialism as represented by McCloy's book, from the "Fowler & Smit" textbook, and also in the Doulton Fountain in "There Was a Bird that Never Flew". In fact the contraction of the name South Africa in the Doulton fountain into "*STH Africa*" seems to speak in an interesting way to how South Africa's history is reduced to half in the "Fowler & Smit" textbook. McCloy's book becomes

a “renewed” book (Coetzee 568), the renewal which has come as a result of its travels and travails to and from South Africa. Drew attributes the “new book” to his former high school history teacher Mr. Wilton in what passes for Drew’s continued defiance and mockery of Mr. Wilton’s authority both as a teacher and historian.

Adichie’s “The Headstrong Historian” features a similar though more serious and academic attempt to re-write history, but by a female character, Grace, an academic at University College in Ibadan who publishes a book on the history of Southern Nigeria. Notably, Grace’s book is aimed at reclaiming the history of tribes of Southern Nigeria otherwise (mis)represented in colonial history books. Grace’s first step towards the reclamation of her people’s stories is to “change her degree from chemistry to history” (TAYN 216). Her decision to switch academic fields is prompted by Mr. Gboyega “a chocolate-skinned Nigerian, educated in London, distinguished expert on the history of the British empire” who “resigned in disgust when the West African Examination Council began talking of adding African history to the curriculum, because he was appalled that African history would even be considered a subject” (216). It is Mr. Gboyega’s opinion that Grace seeks to disprove by changing her field of specialisation and subsequently undertaking research on the history of Southern Nigeria. Out of this research, Grace publishes a book entitled *Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria* which rewrites a history chapter she read in secondary school entitled “The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Southern Nigeria” by a British colonial administrator. Commenting on the first manuscript the book, her fiancé felt “she was misguided to write about primitive culture instead of a worthwhile topic like African Alliances in the American-Soviet Tension” (217). Grace is irked by her fiancé’s Eurocentric attitude which recalls Mr Gboyega’s opinion above. Incidentally, the fiancé is a “stylish graduate of Kings College, Lagos; [...] wearer of three-piece suits; expert ballroom dancer who often said that a grammar school without Latin was like a cup of tea

without sugar” (217). Grace divorces him after a few years of marriage because “she woke up one day and realised that she would strangle him to death if she had to listen to one more rapturous monologue about his Cambridge days” (217).

Elleke Boehmer points out in “Achebe and His Influence in some Contemporary African Writing” that Adichie’s fiction makes “numerous filiative gestures towards Achebe” (Boehmer, “Achebe” 148). Adichie’s reference to “The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Southern Nigeria” in “The Head Strong Historian” story is one of such gestures and the title of Grace’s book could be read as a revision of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. If Grace’s book is a re-writing of the colonial history of tribes of Southern Nigeria, then Adichie’s story is a re-writing of both colonial history and its fictional representation in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Notably, Adichie’s foregrounding of women’s stories is a re-writing of Achebe’s masculine imagining of the Igbo world in *Things Fall Apart* itself a re-writing of white colonial histories of Nigeria.

Clearly, Grace takes after Nwamgba, her grandmother, who in her youth was known to be a “sharp-tongued, headstrong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground” (TAYN 199). As a young woman, Nwamgba stood her ground to marry Obierika, a man from a family considered cursed because women in that family often miscarried or lost their children in infancy. When her husband died, Nwamgba had to protect herself and her only son, Anikwenwa, from her husband’s cousins who were after their inheritance. One way to do this was to send her only son to a white man’s school. Like Nwoye in Achebe’s *Arrow of God* who is sent to the white mission school to be his father’s “eyes and ears” but ends up an avid believer who turns against his own culture, Anikwenwa becomes a staunch Christian and besides protecting his mother and their land from his father’s cousins by way of an order from the white man’s court, he begins to despise Igbo cultural ways as heathen. Losing her only child to the white man, Nwamgba yearns for the return of her husband’s spirit through

grandchildren: “she prayed and sacrificed for Mgbeke [Anikwenwa’s wife] to have a boy, because it would be Obierika come back and would bring a semblance of sense back into her world” (213-214). However, when the grandson is born, he is without the spark of Obierika’s spirit. Instead it is through a granddaughter that Obierika’s spirit comes back into Nwamgba’s world. The granddaughter is baptised as Grace by the white missionaries but Nwamgba calls her Afamefuna, “My Name Will Return” (214). Notably, the name expresses her grandmother’s hope in her granddaughter to carry on the women’s legacy in this particular culture, but also evokes the return of the repressed history that Grace will uncover/write. We are told that from a young age Grace shows “solemn interest” in Nwamgba’s “poetry and her stories” (215). The book she later publishes about the tribes of Southern Nigeria is in part aimed at recovering her grandmother’s poetry and stories. The book grows out of research that Grace undertakes in London, Paris and Onitsha, “sifting through moldy files in archives, reimagining the lives and smells of her grandmother’s world” (217).

Grace’s change of name towards the end of the story from Grace to Afamefuna is also symbolic of the above-noted attempt to recover her people’s names, traditions and customs lost through colonialism. Among other things, the change of name is induced by Grace’s feeling of “rootlessness” amidst all her academic achievements (218). Her “reimagining the lives and smells of her grandmother’s world” (216) points to the fact that the names and stories that she attempts to recover are mainly those of her fellow women. She aims to overcome her rootlessness by (re)rooting herself in a female genealogy as she reconstructs (through reimagining) her grandmother’s world. This idea links Adichie’s story to the idea of national daughters discussed in chapter two.

The importance of women’s genealogy in the (re)writing process – daughters, mothers and grandmothers – speaks to the centrality of women’s experiences in understanding the past anew, not just in Adichie’s fiction but in Wicomb’s as well. In the texts analysed in this

study, Adichie and Wicomb have shown the recuperative potential of women's genealogies. For example: Aunty Ifeoma is central to Kambili's finding her voice in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*; Elsie's "running-water laugh" in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* helps Marion face her family's past; and Mrs. Shenton in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* gives Frieda a sense of rootedness she lacked before. Finally, like Drew in "The One That Got Away", Grace in "The Head Strong Historian" inserts a new title (as in a new book) among the numerous titles, historical and fictional, about colonial history of Southern Nigeria.

In "Trompe l'oeil" and "Jumping Monkey Hill" Wicomb and Adichie seem to draw on their experiences as writers during writing workshops. Both stories are about writers' retreats: at the Study Centre in Italy in Wicomb's story, and at Jumping Monkey Hill resort in Cape Town in Adichie's. In a *mise-en-abyme* fashion, both stories reflect on travel, displacement, and the idea of literary production as autobiographical. In Wicomb's story, Roddy, a Scottish writer with a South African mother, attends a writers' retreat at the Study Centre in Italy. Roddy is the son we read about earlier in "Neighbours" who left his mother's house to become a writer because he could not live with her past. While at the study centre, he eavesdrops on Gavin and Bev, a white South African couple, and turns their conversation into a story. In "Jumping Monkey Hill" Ujunwa, a young Nigerian writer, is invited to a British Council-sponsored African Writers' Workshop in Cape Town where she meets other participants from Senegal, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. Like Wicomb's story, "Jumping Monkey Hill" also features a story within a story as in a piece of writing presented at the workshop, Ujunwa fictionalises her own experience as a jobless graduate struggling to get employment in Lagos. In her story, Chioma, a university graduate, struggles to get a job until her estranged father helps her secure a marketing job in a bank. To make her appointment permanent, Chioma is required to bring 10 million naira worth of new accounts. On her first assignment, Chioma realises that to get new accounts, especially from

rich business people, requires that she prostitute herself which makes her quit on her first day at work.

My reading of these two highly metafictional stories focuses mainly on their portrayal of writing as a transnational activity and on responses that Roddy's and Ujunwa's stories attract from their fellow writers that reflect upon the object and function of fiction. Writing in "Trompe l'oeil" and "Jumping Monkey Hill" is portrayed as a transnational activity through the stories' focus on writing retreats which are transnational in nature. Different writers (and academics in the case of "Trompe l'oeil") travel from different parts of the world (or continent) to a predetermined location where they write and share their work in progress. In this way, writing workshops make what is usually considered a solitary and lonely activity of writing, a more inclusive and interactive one. The fact that these writers must travel to a certain location makes travel an essential part of their writing workshops. The writers become seasonal migrants of sorts as they travel from time to time to different places to attend such workshops. Interesting also is the cosmopolitan composition of participants in such workshops. Roddy interacts with, among other people, Gavin, a white historian from South Africa and his wife Bev, and also a Czech historian. The composition of participants in the workshop Ujunwa attends in "Jumping Monkey Hill" is more 'Afropolitan' since all the participants are from African countries, and the gathering of these African writers also critiques the often homogenised idea of 'Africa' or 'African'. The stereotypes they throw at each other and joke about (that "Kenyans are too submissive"; that "Nigerians are too aggressive"; "Tanzanians have no fashion sense" and that "the Senegalese are too brainwashed by the French" [TAYN 102]) illustrate self-reflexively about how they may be perceived at the same time as such stereotypes are shown to be stereotypes. Equally significant in both stories is how Roddy's and Ujunwa's stories are received by fellow participants at the workshops. I would like to compare Gavin's response to Roddy's story as

well as his general take on fiction to how Edward responds not just to Ujunwa's story but also other stories by other participants. Incidentally, both Gavin and Edward are academics associated with the University of Cape Town. Gavin in "Trompe l'oeil" is currently the Chair of the History Department at the university while Edward in "Jumping Monkey Hill" once taught at the university. The first problem that Gavin has with fiction in general is that it is less engaging intellectually both in its methods and subject matter than non-fiction and that as such its creation "cannot be compared with the thinking required for historical and philosophical research" (*OTGA* 127). Therefore he considers "shameful, wasteful [...] the sheer amount of pulp produced, tossed into a benighted world" (127) – an opinion challenged by Roddy who thinks that "[i]n the larger scheme of things where men join armies and go out to shoot people they don't know, the harmless, solitary pleasures of reading and writing could hardly be called shameful. In fact they should be encouraged" (127).

When Gavin reads Roddy's story published in *South African Mail & Guardian* two years after the retreat, his initial reaction reiterates his opinion about fiction. He deplores "fiction that claims to say something about the real world" and he would rather fiction writers stuck to "stories, events and characters, rather than rummage through stale stereotypes and imagine that something new has been forged" (*OTGA* 118). He recognises the setting of Roddy's story as the Study Centre in Italy which to him only confirms Roddy's lack of imagination and fiction's inability illuminate the human mind about reality. He finds such realistic forms of writing as lacking as photography which "as far as he can gather, no-one has yet satisfactorily explained how such documentation succeeds in illuminating the human condition" (121). He calls Roddy's story "the ravings of a limited mind" and he scorns Roddy's style especially the use of letters of the alphabet instead of real names for his characters as "cowardice [that] passes for postmodern ingenuity" (130). What clearly enrages Gavin however, is the fact that Roddy's story is actually about Gavin and his wife portrayed

as Y and Z respectively and about an argument they had in their room which Roddy overheard since their room was adjacent to his at the study centre. To Roddy the incident revealed that Gavin and Bev, whom he had admired as “[a] good advertisement for marriage” (128), were in fact not always the untroubled couple they were in public as well as that Gavin is clearly a bully. Gavin, who is clearly held up for ridicule in the story, thinks that Roddy’s deliberate “misrepresentation” of their marriage is because he hates them because they are “white South Africans [...] the ready-made pariah” (132). The short-listing of the story for the Guardian Competition is to Gavin “an act of positive discrimination” which South Africa “ever the colonial mimic” has copied from Britain (132). In this story, which recalls Frieda’s mother’s outrage at her daughter turning her family’s stories into fiction in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, Wicomb slyly tests fiction’s claim to be fiction, the criticism of fiction as irrelevant to the world, and the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, suggesting that all writing may be autobiographical to some extent.

Edward’s take on Ujunwa’s story (and on stories by other participants) in “Jumping Monkey Hill” is as patronising as Gavin’s. He dismisses the Zimbabwean’s story precisely because she chose to write about a childless couple who believed they were bewitched by their neighbours rather than about “the terrible Mugabe” (TAYN 107). As for the story about a lesbian couple by the Senegalese participant, Edward finds it lacking because “homosexual stories of this sort weren’t reflective of Africa, really” (108). On a metafictional level, his comment here, which is clearly held up for critique, pre-empts any commentary on the lesbian/bisexual attraction explored in many of Adichie’s stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* (such as “The Shivering” and “On Monday Last Week”). When he pronounces on Ujunwa’s story, Edward disagrees with the other participants who found it a “strong”, “believable” and “realistic portrayal of what women were going through in Nigeria” (113). According to him “[w]omen are never victims in that sort of crude way and certainly not in

Nigeria” (114). He therefore finds Ujunwa’s story “implausible”, and says that it is “agenda writing” and not “a real story of real people” (114). He is stunned, of course, when an angry Ujunwa reveals that the story actually happened to her in Nigeria. The kind of story that Edward approves of as great fiction is one that focuses on the killings in Congo written by the Tanzanian. Edward finds the story “urgent and relevant” (109). Stories that focus on the mundane of everyday lives of ordinary people are not great literature for Edward whose wish for stories about grand and spectacular problems in Africa is almost voyeuristic.

As noted earlier, travel or travelling is an important part of the act of (re)writing in the four stories discussed above. In “The One That Got Away” Drew has to travel to the former imperial centre from where the history of South Africa he attempts to re-write was written for him to carry out his task of “inserting” omitted elements in that history. Grace in “The Headstrong Historian” also travels to London and Paris as part of her search for tales of her grandmother’s world which she later publishes as a book aimed at reclaiming her people’s history. Roddy and Ujunwa in “Trompe l’oeil” and “Jumping Monkey Hill” respectively could be described as migrating writers in the sense of being writers from different parts of the world travelling to attend writers’ workshops elsewhere where they write and share their work in progress, revealing writing to be a cosmopolitan or transnational activity, but one that brings into play all the problems of a national field and national stereotypes.

Conclusion

The discussion above focuses on Wicomb’s and Adichie’s continued concern with stories of women as earlier discussed in the context of national histories in Chapter Two. This time however, their focus is on women who are negotiating the transnational space. Both sets of stories provide perspectives on migrant life by foregrounding women’s experiences that are often subsumed in heroic tales of transnational adventures by men. Wicomb’s stories provide

an insightful reading of the South African-Scottish historical connection. Adichie's stories too evoke in subtle but significant ways the slave past connecting America and West Africa. Her stories explore how racial prejudice as a legacy of slavery still remains potent in an otherwise 21st century liberal and democratic America and how it influences relationships between migrants and American and sometimes among migrants themselves. An alternative reading of the colonial history of Southern Nigeria is also given in stories like "The Headstrong Historian" which also provides an alternative reading of the culture of Igbo society as portrayed in texts like *Things Fall Apart*. The complex historical connection between South Africa and Scotland in Wicomb's stories further complicates the issue of home which is not fixed but oscillates between South Africa and Scotland. In Adichie's stories, almost all characters identify Nigeria as their home but some of them try to make America their new home. Thus while some characters claim, assert and defend their Nigerianness, others distance themselves from being Nigerian. Also noted in this chapter is Wicomb's and Adichie's continued concern with metafiction. In both sets of stories, moments of reading evoke or are juxtaposed with moments of (re)writing particular histories, as we saw in "The One That Got Away" and "The Headstrong Historian". The two authors also explore the complicated ways in which writing has become a transnational activity as shown in "Trompe l'oeil" and "Jumping Monkey Hill" which both focus, in a metafictional fashion, on writers' workshops.

Conclusion

Conversations about Marginality

When I first began this project of putting the fiction of Wicomb and Adichie into conversation around ideas of marginality, I sensed that these writers were doing some important things in their fiction that somehow resonated with or spoke to each other's work. I had no idea at the early time of planning and drafting my first proposal, however, how similar would be the themes, concerns and imagery that emerged out of their fiction. Possibilities of dialogue between the themes and subject matter explored by each writer unfolded as the proposal went through many drafts and then as the study progressed. Apart from their evident concern with the stories of marginal or minority ethnic groups, which is complicated by each writer's suspicion of ethnic nationalism, both writers, I discovered, have shared interest in staging scenes of authorship that trouble nationalist history, in the inextricability of race, class and gender, in women's stories that question the divide between private and public life (between domestic and political life), in unhomely homes, and last but not least, in how all of these are played out in scenarios of transnational migration.

As I have demonstrated in the study, Wicomb and Adichie both invest authorship in the margins. As we have seen, the act of writing is prominent in all of Wicomb's texts and not just in *David's Story*. *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is about authorship as Frieda strives to achieve a better understanding of herself and her people through narrative. We also realise towards the end of *Playing in the Light* that the story about Marion's family could be written by Brenda, Marion's employee, who has been talking to Marion's father and writing a story about his family's past. Authorship also features in *The One That Got Away*, especially in the title story and in "Trompe l'oeil". Similarly, Adichie also foregrounds authorship, not only in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In "The Headstrong Historian" Adichie deploys authorship to

engage with colonial history as Grace rewrites the history of Southern Nigeria, foregrounding women who are marginalised in stories like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. We also saw how in "Jumping Monkey Hill" Adichie portrays the process of writing fiction by focusing, like Wicomb's "Trompe l'oeil", on a writers' retreat.

With reference to *David's Story* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, chapter one of the study established that through metafictional devices the two novels draw the reader into witnessing moments of writing history that reveal the constructed nature of history and that complicate notions of truth. Wicomb's focus on the process of writing David's story affords her the opportunity to address such traumatic issues as gender violence by not commenting on them directly but rather by focussing on the problems which both the amanuensis and David must overcome in order to represent such subjects as Dulcie within the narrative. In the same way, Adichie's dramatisation of the authorship of the Biafra story and the reader's confusion about who is writing "the book" places the reader's gaze on the problems of writing the narrative of the Biafran war.

With its focus on women during historical periods of oppression and/or war, chapter two analysed African women's experiences at times when they are usually portrayed as voiceless victims. In *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* Frieda stands out as a critical voice against her father's perception of apartheid and her people's complicity in apartheid's racial politics. A self-made rebel and exile, Frieda escapes not only the shackles of racial politics but also her father's definitions of herself. By scripting the stories of her people, Frieda adds her own voice to a history that is male-dominated. Similarly, Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow a Sun* redefine their roles in Igbo society and critique the views of a society that views women's bodies as objects of potential value for men. Also suggested in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* is how inequalities between women mean that different women experienced oppressive or war-time contexts differently.

Parent-child relationships have been an important theme for both Wicomb and Adichie. These were examined further in chapter three, though this time in relation to homes invaded by oppressive histories. Freudian theory of “the uncanny” and Bhabha’s postcolonial readings of that theory were used here to analyse how desire for racial purity in *Playing in the Light* and the desire for religious purity in *Purple Hibiscus* create unhomely domestic spaces in the two novels. As noted in the study, the ways in which the two families cultivate their identities as play whites in *Playing in the Light* and as Christians in *Purple Hibiscus* is similar to the ways in which they grow their family gardens. In both novels the return of the repressed – and the protagonist’s liberation from silence and secrecy - is linked to female family members who share the characteristic of laughter, which in the discussion was explicated with reference to Bakhtin’s theories of how laughter purifies the individual from dogma and defies authority.

The study also found out that - like issues of authorship, race class and gender - narratives of travel or migration permeate both Wicomb’s and Adichie’s fiction, though for both authors, transnational migration is explored more prominently in their recently published short story collections. Both short story collections, strangely enough, share an interest in the significance of monuments – the Doulton fountain in the case of Wicomb, and the Liberty Bell in the case of Adichie – and both recent short story collections also feature a metafictional story about travel and writers’ workshops. Transnational migration in both sets of stories, to borrow Adichie’s own words, “involves layers of losses and gains” (Adichie, “Irritation”). As demonstrated in the final chapter, for Wicomb’s characters “unhomed” by travel, Scotland becomes a place that is subjected to unhomely readings. For Adichie’s characters, America is a place of contradiction where claims for liberty and prosperity are undermined by the woman migrant’s personal situation and by America’s past of racism, oppression and segregation which continues to influence American public life. Wicomb’s and

Adichie's continued concern with unhomely homes and authorship was also seen to manifest in their recent short story collections. The metafictional theme of witnessing authorship takes on a transnational aspect in two stories "Trompe l'oeil" and "Jumping Monkey Hill" by Wicomb and Adichie respectively, which focus on writers' retreats. Like Wicomb's and Adichie's protagonists in these two stories, I submit my writing for evaluation. I hope that this study has cleared space for further comparative work, and that resonances between the fiction of other contemporary African-born writers who have acquired cosmopolitan status will be traced in future studies.

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