



AFRICAN HISTORIES  
AND MODERNITIES

# Narrating the New African Diaspora

## 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context

Maximilian Feldner



palgrave  
macmillan

# African Histories and Modernities

Series Editors

Toyin Falola

The University of Texas at Austin

Austin, TX, USA

Matthew M. Heaton

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, VA, USA

This book series serves as a scholarly forum on African contributions to and negotiations of diverse modernities over time and space, with a particular emphasis on historical developments. Specifically, it aims to refute the hegemonic conception of a singular modernity, Western in origin, spreading out to encompass the globe over the last several decades. Indeed, rather than reinforcing conceptual boundaries or parameters, the series instead looks to receive and respond to changing perspectives on an important but inherently nebulous idea, deliberately creating a space in which multiple modernities can interact, overlap, and conflict. While privileging works that emphasize historical change over time, the series will also feature scholarship that blurs the lines between the historical and the contemporary, recognizing the ways in which our changing understandings of modernity in the present have the capacity to affect the way we think about African and global histories.

### **Editorial Board**

Akintunde Akinyemi, Literature, University of Florida, Gainesville  
Malami Buba, African Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin, South Korea  
Emmanuel Mbah, History, CUNY, College of Staten Island  
Insa Nolte, History, University of Birmingham  
Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o, International Studies, Rhodes College  
Samuel Oloruntoba, Political Science, TMALI, University of South Africa  
Bridget Teboh, History, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

More information about this series at  
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14758>

Maximilian Feldner

# Narrating the New African Diaspora

21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context

palgrave  
macmillan

Maximilian Feldner  
University of Graz  
Graz, Austria

African Histories and Modernities

ISBN 978-3-030-05742-8      ISBN 978-3-030-05743-5 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05743-5>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018966705

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: michal812 / Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Contexts: New African Diaspora, Nigerian Literature, and the Global Literary Market	13
3	Biafra and Nigerian Identity Formation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's <i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i> (2006)	37
4	City of Stories: The Lagos Imaginary in Chris Abani's <i>GraceLand</i> (2004) and Sefi Atta's <i>Swallow</i> (2010)	61
5	The Prison of 1990s Nigeria: Helon Habila's <i>Waiting for an Angel</i> (2002)	85
6	Leaving Nigeria: Ike Oguine, Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	107
7	Exploring the Limitations of Afropolitanism in Taiye Selasi's <i>Ghana Must Go</i> (2013)	127

8	Second-Generation Nigerians in England: Helen Oyeyemi's <i>The Icarus Girl</i> (2005) and the Negative Experience of Hybridity	147
9	Returning to Nigeria: Teju Cole's <i>Every Day Is for the Thief</i> (2007) and Sefi Atta's <i>Everything Good Will Come</i> (2005)	165
10	Return Migration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's <i>Americanah</i> (2013)	185
11	Conclusion	201
	Index	209



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

Over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, an impressive body of work by Nigerian novelists has emerged. The most prominent among them is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose work has found considerable success and whose novel *Americanah* (2013) created a stir in Anglo-American literary circles. At the same time, Teju Cole and Taiye Selasi published their novels, *Open City* (2012) and *Ghana Must Go* (2013), to great acclaim and attention, while Helen Oyeyemi has made a name for herself by publishing one popular novel after the other. The ground for what can be seen as a resurgence of Nigerian literature was prepared in the early 2000s, when novelists such as Helon Habila (*Waiting for an Angel*, 2002; *Measuring Time*, 2007), Chris Abani (*GraceLand*, 2004), Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*, 2005; *Swallow*, 2010; *News from Home*, 2010; *A Bit of Difference*, 2013), and Adichie (*Purple Hibiscus*, 2003; *Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2006; *The Thing Around Your Neck*, 2009) wrote a number of remarkable books.

These writers represent a generation of Nigerian novelists that has achieved “near instant canonization” (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005, 11), and with other Nigerian authors, including Ike Oguine, Chika Unigwe, Okey Ndibe, and Segun Afolabi, they have contributed to what critics Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton (2008, viii) call a “phenomenal revival of the Nigerian novel”. There are no signs that this trend of internationally visible Nigerian literature is going to abate any time soon. On the contrary,

several young Nigerian novelists have published notable novels since 2015, such as Chigozie Obioma (*The Fishermen*, 2015; shortlisted for the 2015 Booker Prize), Chinelo Okparanta (*Under the Udala Trees*, 2015), A. Igoni Barrett (*Blackass*, 2015), and Chibundu Onuzo (*Welcome to Lagos*, 2017). Together, these writers represent one of the most vital and interesting forces of contemporary literature production.

Living in Europe and the United States while retaining strong connections to Nigeria, these novelists are members of the new African diaspora. They can therefore be subsumed under the heading of ‘Nigerian diaspora literature’. At the heart of this literature lies the fundamental tension of living abroad while being drawn back to Nigeria. This tension is made explicit in a passage from Teju Cole’s *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2014), in which the protagonist thinks about returning from New York to Lagos. He decides against the return, only to immediately contradict himself, claiming that he needs to move to Lagos:

I decide that I love my own tranquillity too much to muck about in other people’s troubles. I am not going to move back to Lagos. No way. I don’t care if there are a million untold stories, I don’t care if that, too, is a contribution to the atmosphere of surrender. I am going to move back to Lagos. I must. (69)

In his indecision and inability to commit himself to one of the two options, the protagonist expresses a dilemma that, albeit usually not this explicitly, informs much of his peers’ work. Nigeria exerts an undeniable gravitational pull on their characters, a pull that is offset by their difficulties and struggles of actually living in the country. The resulting tension is a typical, perhaps even constitutive, feature of contemporary Nigerian literature.<sup>1</sup> The novelists of the Nigerian diaspora divide their time and storytelling attention between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria. Accordingly, it is not surprising that two dominant areas of concern in their literature are experiences of migration and diaspora, on the one hand, and representations of Nigeria, on the other.

Nigerian diaspora literature is therefore positioned in a field of tension whose outer poles can be described as transnational/transcultural hybridity and national identity. Never reaching any of these endpoints, the novels are productively placed between them. They are more or less attracted to one side or the other and together cover most of the spectrum between the poles. Pursuing an analysis along two interlinked lines of inquiry—expressions of

migratory and diasporic experiences in the literature and the varied forms of literary engagement with Nigeria—this study attempts to map the literature of the Nigerian diaspora. After placing this literature in its socio-political, historical, and discursive contexts, the study will present a literary analysis of representative novels and short stories, considering their central literary and aesthetic features as well as their narrative strategies.

The discussion of the selected texts will explore distinct positions between the two poles. It starts in Nigeria in the late 1960s, analysing the way Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) deals with the Biafran War. Then it moves on to literary representations of Lagos in the 1980s, specifically in Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004) and Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2010), before analysing the depiction of the oppressive military regimes in 1990s Nigeria in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002). Leaving Nigeria, the study looks at how the experience of immigrating to the United States is depicted in Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale* (2000) and short stories by Adichie and Sefi Atta. The following chapter on Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) examines 'Afropolitanism', ostensibly a successful form of African transnationalism. It shows that the hybridity of migrants' children can lead to fragmented and disconnected identities, an insight that is confirmed and further explored by Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005). Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) then depict the return to Nigeria. The concerns addressed in all these novels culminate in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), a novel that exemplifies the transnational shuttling between different countries, usually Nigeria, the United States, and England, that is characteristic of the diasporic and migratory movements in Nigerian diaspora literature. *Americanah* is also a typical example for this literature's engagement with Nigeria, portraying the country and contributing to its imaginary in a detailed and complex manner.

In this sense, the novelists of the Nigerian diaspora and many of their characters are representatives of what Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007, 213) calls "rooted cosmopolitanism", a cosmopolitanism that is partial and attached to narrower and more local communities. Thus, they fit into the pattern described by Akin Adesokan (2011, 179) for postcolonial African artists today. They may live in Paris or New York but are also "engaged with the 'old home', out of a sense both of personal or political moralism and of realism". Toyin Falola (2014, 11) similarly notes the influence Africa has on the members of the diaspora:

Located in other parts of the world, Africa creates a meaning for their existence as a cultural source to draw on in order to live and survive, or even as a point of reference to compare and contrast their new places of abode with their places of origins, their successes and failures, the meaning of life, and the understanding of their destinies.

The writers have left Nigeria to live abroad, and yet they remain attached to the country, often returning home permanently or for visits. Novels written abroad engage with Nigeria but, due to the authors' international experiences and transcultural perspectives, their stories avoid parochialism and aggressive patriotism. They are marked by a combination of expressing a devotion to Nigeria without unduly idealizing it and highlighting its faults and problems while explaining and contextualizing them. Like other African artists, this generation of Nigerian writers is therefore "comfortable being both local and global at the same time" (Gikandi 2014, 243).

This duality is also inscribed in the term 'Nigerian diaspora literature', which combines the aspect of this literature's Nigerianness and the tendency towards migratory, diasporic, or cosmopolitan transnationalism. One advantage of placing the focus on Nigerian diaspora literature is that it connects the relatively straightforward national frame as a selection criterion (novelists from Nigeria) with a transnational perspective. This avoids the parochialism and restrictiveness often associated with the notion of a national literature, while remaining manageable as a literary corpus for analysis. Another reason for the selection of texts discussed here is simple pragmatism. The subject of this study is the fiction of the Nigerian diaspora because it is their novels, published in Europe and the United States, that are readily available. Literature published only in Nigeria is difficult to acquire. Outside the country it can only be accessed, if at all, in special libraries such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library.

For the purposes of this study, 'Nigerian diaspora literature' includes every anglophone novelist who is or was a member of the Nigerian diaspora, that is, every novelist who was born in Nigeria and left it for a significant stretch of time. In addition, it includes novelists who were born and raised abroad by Nigerian parents but are closely connected to Nigeria. The novels selected for analysis fit Wendy Griswold's (2006, 522) very basic definition of the Nigerian novel, which is "fiction of sixty or more pages, intended for adults or near-adults, and written in English by someone born in or a permanent resident of Nigeria". But while Griswold's

definition “excludes children of Nigerians born and raised abroad”, Nigerian diaspora literature also includes novelists who were born abroad to Nigerian parents, such as Taiye Selasi and Teju Cole. Even if Nigeria is not their place of birth, it serves as an important source of meaning to them. An alternative frame for selection could be based on the texts’ thematic preoccupation with the diaspora, which would yield a very similar section of novelists. But since attempts at grouping various novelists together are invariably more or less marked by arbitrariness, the borders of what exactly constitutes Nigerian diaspora literature are necessarily fuzzy.

In temporal terms, Nigerian diaspora literature means contemporary literature, that is, novels and short stories published in the early twenty-first century. The year 2000 appears a convenient starting point for several reasons. It may be as arbitrary as any other date, but the turn of the millennium has the advantage of being an emotionally charged date signifying, as Ogaga Okuyade (2014, xxviii) suggests, a “symbolic turning point”. Politically, the new century seemed to ring in a new era in Nigeria, as, since the death of General Abacha in 1998, the country has been in the process of being turned from a military dictatorship into a democracy. In literature, the Nigerian novel has experienced unprecedented success in the first decade of the new century and reached new heights in terms of quality (see Adesanmi and Dunton 2005, 10–11; Dunton 2008, 68). The early 2000s ushered in a new generation of Nigerian literature and saw a revival of the Nigerian novel after it had supposedly been in decline throughout most of the 1990s (see Nnolim 2006, 8).<sup>2</sup> Apart from Ben Okri’s win of the Booker Prize in 1991, the 1990s in Nigeria are usually seen as a period of scarcity in terms of novelistic output. It was a period dominated by poetry during which narrative prose literature received little attention (see Adesanmi and Dunton 2005, 8). The literary revival of the last two decades is not limited to Nigeria and makes plausible Thomas Hale’s (2006, 19) optimistic claim that African literature more generally “is bursting at the seams at the beginning of the 21st century” and that the “21st century will be the century of African literature”. Most prominent among the novelists who brought about the resurgence of Nigerian literature are those writers who are the subject of this book: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Helon Habila, Chris Abani, Helen Oyeyemi, Taiye Selasi, Teju Cole, and Ike Oguine.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the prototypical representative of Nigerian diaspora literature. She is arguably the most visible, well-known, and popular Nigerian novelist in the twenty-first century, and both her

personal trajectory and her literary work illustrate the two major tendencies of Nigerian diaspora literature this study is structured around, namely matters of migration and representations of Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> This can, in condensed form, be seen in her short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2010), which comprises stories that are centrally occupied with these two sets of thematic concerns. Born in Enugu in Nigeria in 1977, Adichie's first two novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), deal with life in post-independence Nigeria. The Nigeria depicted in *Purple Hibiscus*, a novel that explores familial relationships in a postcolonial society, is one afflicted with military dictatorships and economic troubles, and can easily be imagined to be the Nigeria that Adichie herself grew up in and eventually left to move to the United States when she was nineteen. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is concerned with the impact of the Biafran War on the country's inhabitants, the civil war that threatened to tear Nigeria apart in the late 1960s. Adichie wrote this novel from the perspective of the Igbo, which makes this examination of Nigerian history also a more personal story of her parents' generation. Both novels, written in the United States, display her strong interest in and engagement with Nigeria, which is typical for other novelists of the Nigerian diaspora as well. Her third novel, *Americanah* (2013), explores issues of cultural exchange and migration to the United States. It thus also reflects her own life and career in the States, just as the protagonist's return to Nigeria at the end of the novel parallels Adichie's own return. Most of her biographical accounts state that "Adichie divides her time between America and Nigeria" (Adichie 2014a, b), which makes her a typical member of the Nigerian diaspora.

Sefi Atta (born 1964 in Lagos) similarly moves between Nigeria, the United States, and England. Like Adichie she is therefore attached to several countries, which is also reflected in her literature, especially her third novel, *A Bit of Difference* (2013), and her short story collection, *News from Home* (2012). Her first two novels, *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and *Swallow* (2010), engage with Nigeria in a detailed and complex manner from an inside perspective, depicting a young woman's coming of age in Nigeria in the 1990s and the struggles of another young woman in Lagos in the 1980s, respectively. After Helon Habila (1967, Kaltungo) graduated from the University of Jos in 1995, he moved to England, and later to the United States. Like Adichie and Atta, he divides his time between Nigeria and the United States, which, however, is not reflected in his novels, as all three of them, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002),

*Measuring Time* (2007), and *Oil on Water* (2011), are exclusively set in Nigeria. Although he is a member of the Nigerian diaspora, he is not concerned with matters of migration in his literature. This he largely shares with Chris Abani (1966, Afikpo), who similarly left Nigeria to live in England and the United States. His first novel, *GraceLand* (2004), an exploration of life in Lagos in the 1980s, which ends with its protagonist leaving Nigeria, is a key text of Nigerian diaspora literature and has garnered much critical attention.<sup>4</sup> With his two subsequent novels, however, *The Virgin of Flames* (2007) and *The Secret History of Las Vegas* (2014), he completely diverges from the literary patterns of his peers so that they cannot be subsumed under the heading of Nigerian diaspora literature. In the novel *A Squatter's Tale* (2000), Ike Oguine (1967), who lives in Nigeria, tells a story of migration in which a young Nigerian leaving his country has to realize that life in the United States differs from what he hoped for and expected.

Helen Oyeyemi (1984), Taiye Selasi (1979), and Teju Cole (1975) were born to Nigerian parents but grew up abroad. Oyeyemi has published five novels, a short story collection, and two plays, and is thus the most prolific among the Nigerian diaspora novelists. Her first novel, *The Icarus Girl* (2005), and Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) narrativize in fictional form the experiences of growing up between different cultures. Teju Cole's output includes his novelistic account of visiting Lagos, *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2014), the celebrated novel, *Open City* (2012), as well as numerous essays, and literary online experiments, such as a story told in tweets on Twitter. There are many other novelists whose work displays the tendencies of Nigerian diaspora literature in similar ways and would deserve in-depth discussion but can, due to limited space, only be mentioned in passing. These novelists include Segun Afolabi, A. Igoni Barrett, Diana Evans, Okey Ndibe, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Chigozie Obioma, Irenosen Okojie, Chinelo Okparanta, Yewande Omotoso, Chibundu Onuzo, E.C. Osundu, and Chika Unigwe.<sup>5</sup>

Nigerian diaspora literature, especially the writings of Adichie, Abani, and Oyeyemi, has certainly been met with attention and interest. This is evident in the considerable number of academic articles that have been published on these writers over the last few years. Many of these articles either attempt to grasp this new literature theoretically (Adesanmi 2006; Adesokan 2012), deal with one particular novelist, such as Adichie, Abani, and Oyeyemi (Andrade 2011; Mason 2014; Ouma 2014), or focus on a specific element in the works of several writers, such as the figure of the

child (Hron 2008) and the function of the storyteller (Krishnan 2014). Several of the articles are collected in special issues of relevant journals, such as the May 2005 issue of *English in Africa*, with its focus on new Nigerian writing (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005) or the Summer 2008 issue of *Research in African Literatures*, which was dedicated to Nigeria's third generation novel (Adesanmi and Dunton 2008). The increased attention that this literature receives can also be seen in the yearly review issue of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, which, since 2008, has included a section on West African literature (Hungbo 2009). In addition, a few collections and book-length studies on one or two individual authors exist, such as Atta (Collins 2015), Adichie (Emenyonu 2017), and Adichie and Abani (Tunca 2014).

So far, however, there has been no book-length study dealing with a broad selection of current Nigerian novelists collectively under the comprehensive heading of Nigerian diaspora literature. This study therefore presents the first survey of twenty-first-century anglophone Nigerian narrative literature, focusing on the ways the writers render literary the various experiences of the Nigerian diaspora both in Nigeria and in the global North. Theirs is a literature that, being about diaspora, migration, hybridity, and transculturality, fictionalizes the increasingly connected world that we inhabit in the wake of globalization, a world in which more people than ever before have been on the move, uprooted, and living between cultures. At the same time, as a literature of and about Nigeria, the novels present detailed, complex, and multidimensional portrayals of Nigeria and thus feature voices from a part of the world that is seldom considered in discourses of the global North. In sum, Nigerian diaspora literature certainly offers a relevant and insightful perspective of Nigeria and its diaspora.

## NOTES

1. This tension is not exclusively a phenomenon in Nigerian literature but can be found in fiction from across anglophone Africa (see Sackeyfio 2017). Just to mention a few examples, in West Africa there are Ghanaian Ayesha Harruna Attah's *Harmattan Rain* (2008), Sierra Leonean Ishmael Beah's *Radiance of Tomorrow* (2014), Sierra Leonean Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* (2006) and *The Memory of Love* (2010), and Liberian Sakui Malakpa's *The Village Boy* (2002). From other regions of Africa come Cameroonian Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016), Zimbabwean NoViolet

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2014), Zimbabwean Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2010), and Ethiopian Dinaw Mengestu's *All Our Names* (2015).

2. Incidentally, the year 2000 also saw the end of the influential Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS), which considerably shaped the production and perception of Nigerian fiction. Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale* (2000), the earliest of the novels covered in my study, is the last novel published by Heinemann AWS.
3. For a comprehensive list of the many academic articles on Adichie that have been published since the publication of her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003, see the bibliography compiled by Daria Tunca (online).
4. See the bibliography on Abani compiled by Daria Tunca (online).
5. This obviously is not and cannot be an exhaustive list of anglophone novelists from Nigeria or even the Nigerian diaspora. There are many more noteworthy writers, who, for a variety of reasons, could not be included in this study, such as Akin Adesokan, Unoma Azuah, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Biyi Bandele-Thomas, Jude Dibia, Uzodinma Iweala, Dulue Mbachu, Maik Nwosu, Promise Ogochukwu Okekwe, and Tanure Ojaide. And even this list of names merely manages to scratch the surface of the novel in Nigeria today.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abani, Chris. 2004. *GraceLand*. New York: Picador.

———. 2007. *The Virgin of Flames*. New York: Penguin Books.

———. 2014. *The Secret History of Las Vegas*. New York: Penguin Books.

Adesanmi, Pius. 2006. Third Generation African Literatures and Contemporary Theorising. In *The Study of Africa. Vol I. Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters*, ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 105–116. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Adesanmi, Pius, and Chris Dunton. 2005. Nigeria's Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations. *English in Africa* 32 (1): 7–19.

———. 2008. Introduction: Everything Good Is Raining: Provisional Notes on the Nigerian Novel of the Third Generation. *Research in African Literatures* 39 (2): vii–xii.

Adesokan, Akin. 2011. *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

———. 2012. New African Writing and the Question of Audience. *Research in African Literatures* 43 (3): 1–20.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2003. *Purple Hibiscus*. New York: Anchor.

———. 2009a. *Half of a Yellow Sun* [2006]. London: Harper Perennial.

———. 2009b. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. London: Fourth Estate.

———. 2014a. *Americanah* [2013]. London: Fourth Estate.

———. 2014b. *We Should All Be Feminists*. London: Fourth Estate.

Andrade, Susan. 2011. Adichie's Genealogies: National and Feminine Novels. *Research in African Literatures* 42 (2): 91–101.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2007. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Atta, Sefi. 2008. *Everything Good Will Come* [2005]. Northampton: Interlink Publishing.

———. 2010a. *News from Home*. Northampton: Interlink Books.

———. 2010b. *Swallow*. Northampton: Interlink Books.

———. 2015. *A Bit of Difference* [2013]. London: Fourth Estate.

Attah, Ayesha Harruna. 2008. *Harmattan Rain*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.

Barrett, A. Igoni. 2016. *Blackass* [2015]. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.

Beah, Ishmael. 2014. *Radiance of Tomorrow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Bulawayo, NoViolet. 2014. *We Need New Names*. London: Vintage.

Chikwava, Brian. 2010. *Harare North*. London: Vintage Books.

Cole, Teju. 2012. *Open City*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.

———. 2014. *Every Day Is for the Thief* [2007]. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.

Collins, Walter, ed. 2015. *Writing Contemporary Nigeria. How Sefi Atta Illuminates African Culture and Tradition*. Amherst: Cambria Press.

Dunton, Chris. 2008. Entropy and Energy: Lagos as City of Words. *Research in African Literatures* 39 (2): 68–78.

Emenyonu, Ernest N., ed. 2017. *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. Woodbridge: James Currey.

Falola, Toyin. 2014. *African Diaspora. Slavery, Modernity and Globalization*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Forna, Aminatta. 2006. *Ancestor Stones*. London: Bloomsbury.

———. 2010. *The Memory of Love*. London: Bloomsbury.

Gikandi, Simon. 2014. Afterword: Outside the Black Atlantic. *Research in African Literatures* 45 (3): 241–244.

Griswold, Wendy. 2006. Nigeria, 1950–2000. In *The Novel. Volume 1. History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti, 521–530. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Habila, Helon. 2004. *Waiting for an Angel* [2002]. New York/London: Norton.

———. 2007. *Measuring Time*. New York: Norton.

———. 2011. *Oil on Water*. London: Penguin Books.

Hale, Thomas A. 2006. Bursting at the Seams: New Dimensions for African Literature in the 21st Century. In *New Directions in African Literature*, ed. Ernest Emenyonu, 10–19. Oxford/Trenton/Ibadan: James Currey/Africa World Press/Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria).

Hron, Madelaine. 2008. "Ora Na-Azu Nwa": The Figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels. *Research in African Literatures* 39 (2): 27–48.

Hungbo, Jendele. 2009. West Africa – A Personal Overview. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 44 (4): 239–243.

Krishnan, Madhu. 2014. The Storyteller Function in Contemporary Nigerian Narrative. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 49 (1): 29–45.

Malapka, Sakui. 2002. *The Village Boy*. Northridge: New World African Press.

Mason, Lauren. 2014. Leaving Lagos: Intertextuality and Images in Chris Abani's *GraceLand*. *Research in African Literatures* 45 (3): 206–226.

Mbue, Imbolo. 2016. *Behold the Dreamers*. New York: Random House.

Mengestu, Dinaw. 2015. *All Our Names*. London: Sceptre.

Nnolim, Charles E. 2006. African Literature in the 21st Century: Challenges for Writers and Critics. In *New Directions in African Literature*, ed. Ernest Emenyonu, 1–9. Oxford/Trenton/Ibadan: James Currey/Africa World Press/Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria).

Obioma, Chigozie. 2015. *The Fishermen*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Oguine, Ike. 2000. *A Squatter's Tale*. Oxford: Heinemann.

Okparanta, Chinelo. 2015. *Under the Udala Trees*. London: Granta Books.

Okuyade, Ogaga. 2014. Introduction: Familiar Realities, Continuity, and Shifts of Trajectory in the New African Novel. *Matatu* 45: ix–xxxii.

Onuzo, Chibundu. 2017. *Welcome to Lagos*. London: Faber & Faber.

Ouma, Christopher. 2014. Reading the Diasporic Abiku in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*. *Research in African Literatures* 45 (3): 188–205.

Oyeyemi, Helen. 2005. *The Icarus Girl*. London: Bloomsbury.

Sackeyfio, Rose. 2017. Revisiting Double Consciousness & Relocating the Self in *Americanah*. In *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, ed. Ernest N. Emenyonu, 213–227. Woodbridge: James Currey.

Selasi, Taiye. 2013. *Ghana Must Go*. London: Viking.

Tunca, Daria. 2014. *Stylistic Approaches to Nigerian Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

———. Bibliography. The Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Website. <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnasecond.html>. 14 May 2018.

———. Secondary Sources. The Chris Abani Bibliography. <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/abani/casecond.html>. 14 May 2018.



## CHAPTER 2

---

# Contexts: New African Diaspora, Nigerian Literature, and the Global Literary Market

Nigerian diaspora literature's twofold focus on experiences of migration and representations of Nigeria is not surprising if one takes into account three contexts that considerably shape its concerns. First, the novelists are members of the new Nigerian diaspora, and their fiction is informed by and reflects the various historical, political, and economic push-and-pull factors that lead to Nigerian emigration. Secondly, as Nigerian writers, they inscribe themselves into the country's literary traditions, particularly the almost seventy-year history of anglophone narrative literature, which started with Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). Clearly influenced by their predecessors, much of the writers' work is distinctly political, as they "understand themselves to be bearing witness to Nigerian social experience" and "are among the most persistent chroniclers of the contemporary political, economic, and moral problems" (Griswold 2000, 3; 11). Thirdly, if they want to get published and find an international audience, the writers need to position themselves on the global literary market. This involves being marketed as 'African literature' and thus being obliged to meet certain requirements, such as marginality, cultural difference, mobility, and political engagement.

## THE NEW AFRICAN DIASPORA

‘Diaspora’ typically refers to a collective living outside its homeland, a displaced population. This is also what the etymological meaning of the term indicates, which consists of the prefix *dia-* (‘through’, ‘over’) and the verb *sperein* (‘sow’, ‘scatter’). Usually, there are cultural (and religious) connections among the exiled and dispersed groups, which are linked to a homeland via a diasporic network. Over the past few decades, the use of ‘diaspora’ as a term and critical concept has drastically increased. Originally mostly associated with the dispersion of Jewish communities across the globe, ‘diaspora’ is now routinely used to refer to many different groups that are located outside the territories they are originally identified with. As a result, it is possible to talk of a large number of different diasporas, such as the African, Armenian, Indian, Chinese, Caribbean, Irish, Ukrainian, Italian, Russian, German, and Kurd diasporas. With many of these it is possible and sometimes appropriate to differentiate further. Regarding the ‘African diaspora’, for example, there are not only differences depending on which African countries the migrants come from but also where the diasporic group is located, be it in the United States, the Caribbean or China.

This multiplicity has resulted in a dazzling array of different possible meanings of the term, a proliferation that Rogers Brubaker (2005, 1) calls the “‘diaspora’ diaspora”, referring to the “dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space”.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the term’s semantic expansion, ‘diaspora’ is often conflated with a range of related words, such as ‘migration’, ‘exile’, ‘transnationalism’, minority or refugee status, and racial and ethnic difference (Edwards 2007, 82), or used in completely incongruous contexts.<sup>2</sup> According to diaspora theorists such as Robin Cohen, James Clifford, William Safran, and Rogers Brubaker, it makes sense to speak of a diaspora if most of the following features apply: a history of dispersal from an original homeland, collective memories, myths, and idealization of this homeland, as well as a collective commitment and desire to return to it, which can also be the result of a troubled relationship with the host society.<sup>3</sup> This framework of features can be used to describe a great variety of diasporic formations, which indicates that diasporas should not be seen as something stable and fixed, but as processes, constantly shifting and adjusting their components, and being “formed by a series of often contradictory convergences of peoples, ideas, and even cultural orientations” (Quayson 2013, 631).<sup>4</sup>

Many contemporary Nigerian novelists are members of the new African diaspora, which has formed as a result of recent African migration to the United States and Europe. Since the 1950s and 1960s the term ‘African diaspora’ (or ‘black diaspora’) has been used to designate the dispersion of Africans across the Americas and Europe in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism as well as the histories and experiences associated with centuries of slavery. Having largely replaced ‘pan-Africanism’ as a term to refer to a collective African experience abroad, ‘African diaspora’ describes a diverse and complex phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> With more than thirty million Africans living outside their homelands, the importance and magnitude of the African diaspora can be seen in the fact that it was declared the ‘sixth region’ of the continent by the African Union in 2005 (Quayson 2013, 629). If the African diaspora is a consequence of the violent mass enslavement, over the last decade the term ‘new African diaspora’ has been established to designate the comparatively voluntary emigration from Africa in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the 1980s onwards. The new African diaspora is a product of the recent African migration movements, which, albeit often caused by constrained circumstances, is largely voluntary, as many Africans leave their homes to seek work and better opportunities elsewhere, particularly in the United States and Europe (Falola 2014, 255).

There have been three waves of African migration to the global North (Arthur et al. 2012, 2–4; Osirim 2012, 225). From the mid-to-late 1950s to the 1970s, African governments sponsored young Africans to get their educations abroad, who were then supposed to return and fill the positions of civil servants and skilled workers in the public and private sectors. This first wave is therefore characterized by temporary migration for the postcolonial task of nation building. It included also notable African writers from that generation such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ayi Kwei Armah. The second wave started in the mid-1970s, when it became clear that the aims and ideals of the era of independence had failed and many African states had become entangled in political and economic conflicts. For many Africans the purpose of their migration was an attempt to escape the political situation as well as the poverty and lack of opportunities at home. The third and largest wave commenced shortly after the turn of the twenty-first century, with skilled and unskilled migrants attempting to improve their economic lot and to “share in global economic prosperity, something that has remained elusive for generations of Africans” (Arthur et al. 2012, 4).

Several push-and-pull factors help to explain the current wave of African migration. Among the main causes for migration are the manifold political, economic, and social problems and crises. Political conflicts, civil wars and the repression of human rights have created a climate of insecurity and instability that cause many to seek better conditions and political freedoms abroad. In addition, in economies in decline people have to cope with high underemployment, low levels of income, and rampant corruption, as well as limited professional opportunities and education facilities. This is compounded by poor social services, such as intermittent provision of electricity, problems with water supply, and overburdened, underdeveloped, and underfunded transportation and health services (Kaba 2009, 116–119). Although many of these problems are homemade and due to internal conflicts, they are, importantly, also a result of the destabilization of African countries through the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions (International Monetary Fund and World Bank). As a condition for financial loans, the SAPs required the implementation of austerity measures and the opening up of the national markets to international trade and caused what Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2009, 36) refers to as “the ‘lost decades’ of structural adjustment programs”.

As for the pull factors, many Africans are attracted by the promises of better living conditions, the availability of jobs, educational opportunities, and the possibility of social advancement in the United States and Europe (Takyi 2009, 237). The United States has been especially attractive, not only because of the common and popular myths about America as a place where everyone can make it, but also because legal changes, such as the Immigration Act, have increased immigration opportunities for Africans and people from other regions of the global South. More generally, the processes and forces that are commonly referred to as globalization have crucially contributed to contemporary migration movements. However, while globalization has facilitated migration for some, borders have largely remained closed or have become even more impenetrable for most people, especially compared to the relatively unrestricted financial flows and movements of material goods.

What distinguishes the new African diaspora is the possibility of return. In contrast to other diasporic formations, where the old homeland is usually an unfamiliar but mythologized place impossible to return to, the new African diaspora is well connected with their homeland. Modern forms of communication and fast and affordable means of transport enable stable connections, visits, and even permanent returns. Members of the new African diaspora, especially those with long-term visas or even citizenships