

THE NIGERIAN NOVEL AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CITY

CLEMENT OSHOGWE MAMUDU

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SUPERVISORS:

PROFESSOR HARRY GARUBA

PROFESSOR CHRISTOPHER OUMA

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DECLARATION

I, Clement Oshogwe Mamudu, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university. I authorise the University to reproduce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical inquiry into the nature of the postcolonial African city as represented in fiction. It examines how the Nigerian novel represents the postcolonial African city and the extent to which it confirms or contests the dominant paradigms of scholarship in urban studies. In it, perspectives from urban studies are brought into conversation with literary representations of the postcolonial African city in contemporary Nigerian fiction thereby creating a nuanced synthesis of postcolonial literary studies and urban scholarship. Its provocative argument is that the postcolonial African city is both functional and legible despite its arguably squalid state and the undesirable living conditions of its subjects. Approaches that denigrate so-called Third-World cities as particularly dystopic and illegible do not present the whole picture and are therefore one-sided and misleading. The Nigerian novel, it argues, reflects the need for rethinking of the dominant templates of urban studies to take into consideration the particularities and complexities of postcolonial cities. The thesis examines representations of the postcolonial city in four recent Nigerian novels: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000), Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004), and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2006). The selected novels' analyses foreground the argument that there is no universal template for theorizing the city; hence, there is a legitimate basis for talking about the postcolonial city both in conception and fictional representation. The thesis begins with an introduction which encompasses the aim, focal question, rationale, design/structure and the definition of key terms. This is followed by Chapter One which gives an insight into the state of the research field. The

chapter reviews relevant scholarship with a view to situating modernity and the postcolonial city in Africa. In Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five, the primary texts, under various subtitles, are analyzed. The novels' representation(s) of the postcolonial (African) city, from different perspectives – like the problematic of legibility and spatial morphology, infrastructure, agency, urban governmentality, etc. – are critically examined. Chapter Six examines the place of bars and gender in determining the metropoetics of the postcolonial African city and how they are depicted in the selected novels. This is followed by the Conclusion, which summarizes the thesis by restating and highlighting its major argument and the ways in which it is elaborated upon in the fictional texts analyzed in the various chapters.

DEDICATION

TO my mother, Christiana Emomolu Mamudu for all her love and sacrifice;
IN loving memory of my Sister-in-law, Perpetua Aisatu Mamudu, who also loved and
sacrificed;
TO my friend, Alex Gomas, the 8-year old kid with a sage's wisdom.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a critical inquiry into the nature of the postcolonial city as represented in fiction. It employs Literature as a tool for interrogating and problematizing the dominant paradigms of urban thought and particularly sets out to examine the place of the Nigerian novel in the construction of urban subjects and urban boundaries.

Scholarship on so-called Third World cities has tended to present a dystopic image of decaying infrastructure, overcrowding, lack of essential services, etc. In the recent past, however, some other scholars have argued that this focus presents an inaccurate representation of the full diversity of what goes on in these cities and the ways in which postcolonial city dwellers acquire agency in the midst of debilitating living conditions.

Fiction provides significant insights into the nature of cities vis-à-vis their full spatial diversities and/or complexities and the way in which their subjects construct and navigate themselves, their boundaries and their identities. In this study, I examine representations of the postcolonial African city in four recent Nigerian novels: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000), Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004), and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* (2006). I examine the various ways in which the novels' representations of the city confirm or contest the dominant paradigms of urban scholarship.

Aim

The aim of this thesis is to examine the nature of the postcolonial city as represented and crafted in fiction and dominant paradigms. I aim through the study:

- i) To foster a proper understanding of the nature of the postcolonial African city.
- ii) To foster the formulation of templates for theorizing the postcolonial African City.
- iii) To stimulate further debates and research into the literary representation(s) of the postcolonial African city.

Focal Question

In order to determine the nature of the postcolonial African city, as well as the other aims highlighted above, the following question is fundamental: How does the Nigerian novel represent the postcolonial African city and to what extent does it confirm or contest the dominant paradigms of scholarship in urban studies?

Definition of key Terms

The following are the key terms and their definitions as used in the thesis:

- a. **Legibility** – The readability, condition, understanding, or navigability of the environment by its occupants. Urban legibility thus refers to the engagement of urban populations with the Urban Environment or the meaning that the city has for its subjects.
- b. **Postcolonial** – Literally an engagement with colonial legacies. Hence ‘Postcolonial city’ refers to the city whose subjects, construction and mapping grapple with and react to/against the legacies of colonialism. In this thesis, the postcolonial African or Nigerian city is not a specific reference to any city, but

symbolic of any Nigerian or African city which, along with its subjects, grapples with colonial legacies as aforementioned.

- c. **Metropoetics** – Literally a poetics of the city concerned mainly with the underlying creativity and principles that inform the construction of the urban environment in fiction.
- d. **Urban governmentality** – The political rationality that guides the actions of the state toward its urban population.
- e. **Subaltern** – Poor and marginalised populations
- f. **Postcolonial urban subaltern** – Urban populations especially slum dwellers or other poor, ‘low-class,’ deprived or marginalised populations
- g. **High Modernism** – The grandiose attempts at urban utopia especially the ordering of the urban environment solely through science and technology.
- h. **Urban Dystopia** – Urban disorder, decay, dysfunction, etc.
- i. **The Other** – A group constructed as different or inferior by another (usually dominant) group which considers itself the norm or standard.

Rationale

This thesis, noteworthy, is not an empirical study of ‘cities,’ but a study of fictional representations. The selected primary texts, are accordingly, situated in relation to the notion of ‘the city’ rather than Nigerian cities or so-called Third World cities. This approach of dealing with representations of ‘the city’ in fictional texts is a bid to avoid the mimetic that directly equates fictional representations to the real world. I am mindful

of the need to allow for historical and social specificities and I concede the possibility or presence of other approaches and perspectives that underscore this need. Because I am dealing with fictional representations however, as a result of which this thesis is not about actually existing cities, the question of historical specificity will not, in the work, refer directly to the real world or the time of the writing or setting of a text in its mundane specificity but in its refracted outlines. I have also chosen the postcolonial lens for this work. Noteworthy, postcolonial criticism questions universalism and hegemonic constructions of the Other. The postcolonial model offered by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin¹ - that which underscores “hybridity and syncreticity as constitutive elements of all post-colonial literatures” (14) is especially instructive in this regard. Hence, this thesis inclusive of its individual parts consistently questions and rejects universalist templates for mapping and reading cities. Postcolonial studies has, essentially, created a critical alternative archive about the ways in which postcolonial subjects write back to the centre, navigate the legacies of colonialism and empire as well as develop critical epistemologies of the layers and hybridity of postcolonial worlds which are useful in thinking through questions of space and spatiality as they manifest in postcolonial worlds. The ‘postcolonial’ category as used in the work refers to the engagement with colonial legacies. It is essentially an engagement with the postcolonial project which, itself, is the Western attempt to construct the Other. The Other is constructed as who or what it is only in accordance with Western templates or paradigms.

¹ For a detailed discourse on postcolonial categories, See Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*.

Accordingly, Western paradigms are appropriated in the conception of the postcolony. Postcolonialism is an engagement with this project. It is the engagement with the political, social, and cultural legacies of colonialism. As earlier noted, postcolonial criticism challenges universalist constructions. Hence, postcolonial subjects engage with Western constructions of the Other by subverting or undermining any attempt to construct or imagine the postcolony using universal templates or paradigms. Accordingly, the 'Postcolonial city' refers to the city – any city – whose subjects, construction and mapping grapple with and react to/against the legacies of colonialism. There is thus a legitimate basis for talking about the postcolonial city both in conception and fictional representation. In this thesis, noteworthy, the postcolonial African or Nigerian city is not a specific reference to any city, but representative of any Nigerian or African city which, along with its subjects, grapples with colonial legacies as aforementioned.

Noteworthy too, postcolonial writers have quested to be liberated from the remaining traces or vestiges of colonial experiences whether such 'colonization' be political, cultural or intellectual. There is the zeal to engage with, or as the case may be, subvert the poetics or standards of writing super-imposed by the colonizer. This is at play in the fictional representation of postcolonial cities as portrayed in the Nigerian novel and exemplified by the selected primary texts. There is thus also the rationale for selecting the primary texts. In *The Famished Road*, for instance, the 'Road' is a metaphor for modernity. The novel is a postcolonial statement on some of the theoretical positions on African urban legibility vis-à-vis the futility of anchoring African modernity on Western

or so-called global algorithms. Thus the ‘road’ to, or of, African modernity ‘built’ on colonial (Western) templates is perpetually ‘famished!’ this is in line with my argument against theorizing or reading the postcolonial city with universal or Western urban paradigms. *Arrows of Rain* is a representative novel on the postcolonial city in Africa as a location of urban governmentality as it foregrounds the State’s contribution to the squalor of its cities and citizens as a result of its concerted and oftentimes coercive efforts to mould them along so-called global templates. *GraceLand* is representative of the pervasiveness of slums in the postcolonial city and how slum dwellers and other urban populations serve as infrastructure for themselves in the face of debilitating living conditions thereby creating the kind of legibility that they need. *Everything Good will Come* is representative of the subaltern reaction to the debilitating living conditions of the city, and how the need or quest for survival galvanizes urban populations to acquire agency and achieve legibility. The selected novels thus foreground my argument that there is no universal template for the city and that there is a legitimate basis for talking about the postcolonial city both in conception and fictional representation.

Design/Structure

This thesis, besides the Introduction and Conclusion, contains six chapters and examines representations of the postcolonial city in four recent Nigerian novels: Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*, Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain*, Chris Abani’s *GraceLand* and Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*. Chapter one contains the general review of literature. Noteworthy, the literature review as well as theoretical assumptions are not

confined to the chapter as the first section of each of the other chapters – especially Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five – also incorporates an extensive discussion or review of the literature and enabling theoretical statement that is essential to its focus followed by the fictional analyses of the primary texts. Chapter Six integrates major issues that cut across the selected novels – issues that are key determinants in the construction of postcolonial metropoetics – and which play significant roles in the novels’ depiction or representation of the postcolonial city.

CHAPTER ONE

SITUATING MODERNITY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CITY IN AFRICA

Literature Review

This work is a critical investigation into the nature of the postcolonial city as represented in the Nigerian novel. As stated earlier, it particularly sets out to examine the place of the Nigerian novel in the construction of urban subjects and urban boundaries. Over time, the postcolonial city has continually been presented as a chaotic and unworkable urban space crippled by overcrowding, decaying infrastructure, absence of essential services, high crime rate, etc. Emerging urbanism, however, has seen this image as an inaccurate representation, and has proffered a reconfiguration or re-theorization, since postcolonial city dwellers have devised means of acquiring or creating agency in spite of crippling living conditions. Garth A. Myers and Martin J. Murray, for instance, posit that:

As a general rule, contemporary accounts and commentaries on cities in Africa have produced largely mechanistic (and simplistic) accounts of spatial incoherence, overcrowding, impoverishment, unemployment, decay, neglect, organized crime, everyday violence, inter-ethnic strife, civil disorder, environmental degradation, pollution, unruly behavior, and juvenile delinquency.

(1)

The foregoing paints, of the African city, a picture of dystopia – of everything bad. It depicts the African city as a site of crises, decay and disorder. Hence, the major conception of the African urban environment, as Okwui Enwezor et al. note, is that of a space that is “chaotic and disorderly, and therefore outside the category of order of modern urban planning procedures of rational spatial organization” (13). The impression that is conveyed, therefore, is that of an African urban space that is undesirable, just as the ideal or modern city is constructed as a site that is mediated by everything good and orderly. The African city is, accordingly, constructed as the Other – that of dirt and squalor. For instance, Lagos according to Koku Konu “has had the reputation of being the dirtiest capital in the world” (240). Konu also observes that “some lines, like that of the outer marina flyover, which links Lagos Island to the mainland, have the collateral effect of causing irreparable slashes in the urban fabric” (240). Accordingly, the city is conceived of as a chaotic polis. Thierry Nlandu is more direct in his description of an African city as a space unworthy of habitation – and by extension, unworthy of modernity: “Kinshasa is not only the city of the dead, but a dead city. It is a city that has fallen apart” (186). Nlandu paints a gory picture of Kinshasa as a site of chaos, dirt and death, and concludes that “people simply live here” (189). In the same manner, Leila Abouzeid describes postcolonial Casablanca as a dystopian space (Khayati 21). He describes the city as “An egg incubated by the defeated regiments of occupation only to hatch into an uncontrollable demon that grew up quickly to devour its own progenitors.” (Khayati 21)

Some scholars have acknowledged the dystopian elements of the postcolonial city, but however, have noted that the city can also be a functional and vibrant site. In this regard, the description of the postcolonial city solely as a dystopic space does not reflect the full diversity of what goes on inside it. Abdellatif Khayati, for instance notes Abouzeid's description of the city of Casablanca as a "monstrous creature," but observes the presence – in the city – of 'the rather problematic dystopian and utopian elements of space' (21). He argues that "the city, more than just a physical structure, is a living space and a cultural sign rife with many cross-cultural clashes and contradictions" (21). Other scholars including Carol Rakodi, Saskia Sassen, AbdouMaliq Simone, Onookome Okome, etc., argue that the African city is not only a disorderly, illogical, and squalid site, but is also a site that possesses spaces of order, legibility and human agency. There is therefore the essential question regarding the extent to which the postcolonial city fits into the taxonomy of the modern or global city. A convenient starting point is to examine Rene Descartes classification of cities into ancient and modern whereby the former are conceived to be products of conurbations – that of villages that have metamorphosed into big but unplanned or poorly-planned cities over time – while the latter are conceived as "those *well-ordered towns that an engineer lays out on a vacant plane* as it suits his fancy" (6). Thus the city of the planners or the well-ordered town, carefully planned and laid out on the architect's vacant canvass or plain, has become the universal paradigm by which the modern city is read and imagined. Henri Lefevbre, however, describes the city as "a *mediation* among mediations" (101). Hence, the city is accordingly conceptualized

as, and comparable to, an oeuvre that is somewhat of an artwork and one which emphasizes its social relations rather than the production of material objects.

Modernity, it must be acknowledged, is central to the city. As a modern construct, the city is conceived to be legible – spatially and temporally – and must be mediated by good infrastructure – good roads, effective health-care delivery, etc., and a navigable street morphology. The modern city is configured along the paradigms of what Larry Ford describes as “new urbanist or neo-traditional architecture and planning ideas” and predicated on scripted “codes, covenants and restrictions” (247). Ford advocates a return to Kevin Lynch’s original formulations in the seminal works: *The Image of the City*, *What Time is this Place*, and *A Theory of Good City Form* as the ideal templates for imagining the city. The standpoint is that the modern city space must be legible in terms of its mapping and reading, and should have an easily navigable morphology. Founding his argument on *The Image of the City*, Ford emphasizes “imageability” and avers that “A good place is one that can be mapped mentally – one that has an easily-remembered spatial organization”, and that “identifying with a community in any but the most abstract and general way is arguably difficult when residents do not have a good mental picture of where the community is” (254). The modern city is, accordingly, one that is spatially legible. Ford also stresses temporal legibility, as propounded in *What Time is this Place*, asserting that an ideal place “is one that not only tells us where we are (in time), but where we have been and where we are going and at what speed” since “there are clues to how things change over time at many scales” (255). Finally he considers “vitality, sense, fit, access, and control”, the five “dimensions of performance” formulated in *A Theory of*

Good City Form, crucial to the functioning of the modern city. It is stressed that the extent to which an environment effectively caters for the health needs of its subjects as well as provide them with “life-enhancing settings” determines how well it works. Thus the city must work well in order to fit into modern configurations as “The issue ... is the determination of how well the human environment fits the human body and human activities.” The question therefore is “does the place work well” (255)? The totality of the argument is that for a city to work, it must be planned along the templates of modernity, and its growth must be clearly in consonance with specifications already scripted in its plan. Thus any city that does not meet the strict specifications of modernity, mediated by legible spatial infrastructure and street morphology, is imagined as illogical and dystopic. The position of Descartes appears rather absolute; it does not envision the ever-dynamic nature of the city. The city – any city – is constantly shifting and shaped by social and physical factors. For instance, rivers, mountains, human and other natural activities are some of the factors that help to shape a city. Hence, Michel de Certeau’s description of the city as the “most immoderate of human texts” (92), and Ben Highmore’s description of it as “the most distinctive product of modernity, but also its most unruly” clearly indicate that the city is far from being a finished work of art. It is ever evolving, ever growing and limited or restricted only by geographical or physical limitations in the form of mountains, rivers, etc. His conception modernity as a continuously evolving phenomenon, created by the constant interaction of new conditions or constructs with existing traditional ones.

But is it all ancient cities that evolved from a conurbation of straggling villages? What of ancient African cities that were established following exigencies of the time? It must be noted that urban settlement is not new to Africa as the continent has a rich history of ancient civilization and urbanization. There were the cities of ancient Egypt; there were, also, those of the old kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Benin, Oyo and others in southern and eastern Africa. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch while lamenting this “sometimes forgotten” fact of African history draws attention to the existence of cities on the continent in ancient times noting that the oceans and seas surrounding it had engendered trade and facilitated urbanization on the continent (Coquery-Vidrovitch xv).

It is important to have an insight into the evolution of some of the extant cities of Africa. It can be taken for granted the general acceptability that Lagos, Cape Town, etc., were developed as major centers for trade in goods and slaves; Johannesburg was developed as a mining city following the discovery of huge gold deposits and Freetown was established for freed slaves. These cities were then constructed and developed along the templates of colonial urban modernity and ideologies. As postcolonial structures, they were – and have continued to be – spatially developed along the scales of their colonial cartographies that have proved to be grossly inadequate for urban growth. The result is a coalition of formal and informal structures, unregulated development and the emergence of what Sam Okot Opondo calls the self-help city. There is ultimately the intersection or interaction between the planned and self-help cities, between formal and informal, order and disorder, chaotic and sublime. This binary intersection is aptly captured by Rafael Marks and Marco Bezzoli in the portrayal of post-apartheid Cape Town as a vastly

inequitable and inefficient city in which the poor are marginalized from urban opportunities (262). There is, accordingly, the misleading conception of African cities as sights of developmentalist failures that are hopelessly dysfunctional and irredeemable. With this as a premise, the cities are perceived as “dangerous, chaotic and dysfunctional (Locatelli and Nugent 2) – a perception that tends to validate the claim of Okwui Enwezor, et al., that “African cities have long been understood only in a range of spectral binary oppositions and spatial and temporal distortions.” (11)

But what is the nature of the postcolonial city in the face of these overarching paradigms and the attendant codes, covenants and restrictions of modernity? The postcolonial city, represented in this study by the African city, has been put on the margin over time and configured, mapped, read and theorized as dystopic and not meeting the paradigms of modernity upon which so-called global cities are imagined and read. The evident thing as Emma Vivian O’Shaughnessy observes is the ordering of all of the world’s cities under one totalizing paradigm. One dominant theory – “produced within the discourse of the West (6) – is accordingly applied in the conception and reading of cities across the world. This has largely informed the pathologizing of the continent’s cities as chaotic, backward and dysfunctional urban spaces.

There is however an emerging urbanism clamoring for a paradigm shift in the way African cities are imagined. As such, new paradigms are being crafted by urban scholars. Jennifer Robinson notes that African cities “carry a burden of exceptionality” and, “as colonial cities their dependent and divided urbanisms had marked them out from those of the colonizers whose cities, by contrast, were imagined to embody the creative energy of

modernity”. She laments that “In the contemporary moment, it is the dystopic quality of cities in Africa which is often drawn into broad analyses of urban futures” and that “to some commentators the crises and difficulties which beset many cities on the continent speak to the likely future of cities everywhere in *noir* visions of (usually) capitalist induced decline” (89). Robinson’s bid to appropriately have the African city (re)theorized is noteworthy, but her position appears rather panoptic and does not state the extent to which African cities are exceptional or the extent to which their urbanisms distinguish them from those of their colonizers. It is instructive that almost all major cities of the postcolony are constructs of the colonial, where colonial imperatives of class, race, gender, discrimination, etc. – were instrumental in mapping out the cartographies of those cities. The postcolonial city is thus largely an expansion of the colonial city. Perhaps one area of uniqueness is the prevalence of slums in the postcolony.

Clearly, the postcolonial African city is not in the purview of Lynch’s theories or Descartes’ conception of the modern city, but there is an insistence in emerging urban theory that African cities possess specific spatiotemporal legibilities and navigable morphologies. African cities do not have to conform to Western codes, covenants and restrictions in order to function as modern cities. Matthew Gandy, for instance, cites a series of historical, political social and economic factors that resulted in the infrastructure crises of Lagos and the debilitating living conditions of its dwellers. He proffers what he considers the panacea for illogicality. But does the city not work? How have its subjects navigated its spatial boundaries over time in their quest for survival and agency in spite of the crisis of infrastructure it faces? Steve Pile notes that a city is not necessarily

characterized by skyscrapers. While conceding that the skyscraper is a city feature, he argues that it is not a feature of all cities. Hence, it is the distinctive living conditions – order and disorder, chaotic and sublime, sadness and joy, affluence and poverty, comfort and want, etc., vis-à-vis the ability to deal with the tensions generated by these ‘intangible qualities’ – that give a city its true meaning. He rightly argues that “what cities are about is the attempt to deal with (or make the best of these) tensions” (5-6). Similarly, AbdouMaliq Simone’s seminal (re)conceptualization of human infrastructure against conventional conceptions that portray African cities as incomplete provides a veritable theoretical foundation for the re-assessment of the infrastructural composition of the postcolonial city. He argues, for instance, that the so-called ruins of Johannesburg “mask and constitute a highly urbanized social infrastructure” (407), in the form of the people that inhabit the urban space. This strengthens the argument that conceives the city as a space (that should be) mediated by subjects rather than objects. Thus subjects (human infrastructure) should be given prime consideration in determining how the city functions. Immiserized and marginalized as they may be, dwellers are part of the city’s infrastructure in view of the economic collaboration among them. This effectively extends the notion of infrastructure directly to people’s activities in the city. Simone foregrounds the inappropriateness of appropriating Western paradigms in mapping the postcolonial African city, an urban space which he notes is predicated on intersections or conjunctions of residents. Hence, “These conjunctions become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city. (407-408). Thus, African cities survive in spite of the burden of modernity. Does survival then amount to agency? The

point being made is that the African city is constrained to reweave its connections with the larger world “by making the most of its limited means. Still, the inner city is embedded in a larger urban region characterized by relative economic strength, an emerging pan-African service economy ...” (411). Thus an informal but robust social and cultural economy makes up for the rigid but not-so-vibrant fiscal economy. This informal economy, intersecting with the formal keeps the city functioning.

It is inferable that the African city does not have to conform to neo-traditional architecture’s codes, covenants and restrictions (Ford). This is because the flexibility and mobility of the African city have enhanced the creation of agency through the creative capacities since their “collaboration is based, not on the boys adhering to specific rules, but on their capacity to improvise” (410). Simone’s averment is fundamental as it provides a veritable theoretical basis for situating ‘human infrastructure’ within African modernity and vice versa. This conception of infrastructure addresses the critical question of “how researchers, policymakers, and urban activists can practice ways of seeing and engaging urban spaces that are characterized simultaneously by regularity and provisionality” (408). Thus informal infrastructures also play crucial roles in the mapping and reading of cities, especially the postcolonial city.

Victor O.A. Adetula’s position reinforces the validity of Simone’s conception of people as infrastructure. He notes that African cities are in crisis and examines the influence which urban associations exert on the political system and also, the coping mechanisms which these groups put in place for their members to cope with crises that emanate from unemployment, insecurity, inadequate distribution of public services, etc.

He examines how urban welfare associations in Nigeria have contributed to the process of urban change and argues that welfare associations, through collaborative efforts, challenge the monopoly of state institutions, the latter having failed to guarantee the survival of the urban subaltern. In doing this, postcolonial African city dwellers acquire agency in the face of debilitating living conditions. According to him, “these associations engage in a range of activities, including provision of social services and infrastructure, credit and loans, and religious and social events. ... in the course of their work, these organizations have deepened the content of their activities to the level of promoting the empowerment of members.” (361)

Robinson is definite that the postcolonial city cannot be dismissed as utterly dystopic, stressing that “the South African city, for example, long seen as a paradigm of divisions, can also be seen as transected by routes, shaped by encounters and resistant to finalization: a site ... open to the possibility of community, but an ethical community which is impossible to close or bound.” (91)

Rather than conceive the modern city as a straitjacket or finished work of art on an engineer’s plane, Onookome Okome presents it as a social construct – a dialectical space that shapes its subjects who in turn reshape or recreate it. Thus subalterns and their activities determine the nature of the city just as the city determines and regulates the activities of its subalterns. Accordingly, “we live in the age of the city. The city is everything to us – it consumes us, and for that reason we glorify it. We may like it or hate it, but we must live in it. Sometimes we defeat the city and reshape it to suit our whims and caprices. We invent the city and it reinvents us” (Okome 316). In determining what

constitutes the postcolonial city, Okome aligns with Jonathan Raban whose novel *Soft Cities* portrays cities as social constructs, always in a state of flux and subject to change. This finds a theoretical corroboration in Arjun Appadurai's position that cities are influenced by a number of factors which include "ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques" (Appadurai 5-6)². Cities, to Okome are works in progress: "As a work in progress, cities are constantly fashioned and refashioned out of the needs and contingencies of this flow. Cities, like their inhabitants, are always on the move, being remade all along the way" (317). This questions the propriety of theorizing or mapping the postcolonial city along western paradigms as much as it justifies and validates calls for a paradigm shift to accommodate the complexities, histories, and contingencies of postcolonial cities. Noteworthy, modernity is no longer as defined by the West. hence, its conception of modernity can no longer be appropriated for a global one. The colonial city is remade by its subjects through their interactions and engagement with, or responses to, the city's colonial legacies. It is these engagements and responses that have given rise to the postcolonial city. Okome, therefore, aptly argues that "we cannot fail to see the remaking of the colonial city. It is part subversion of the imported European modernity that gave rise to the postcolonial city. It is ... the unfulfilled needs of the postcolonial subjects that determine how the city is constituted as a crucible of new experiences. (320)

² As quoted by Okome

Carole Rakodi notes that African cities are dystopic enclaves, ruined by weak colonial urban/political structures and “land use plans that have proved unable to cope with the demands of rapid urban growth” (66). The African city now experiences disillusionment, disorder, insecurity and infrastructure collapse following bad leadership and the treachery of the ruling class. She argues that “the collapse of effective governance in states riven by conflict and warlordism is reflected in an absence of city government and often accompanied by an influx of refugees from rural insecurity” (45). Thus, order or formal establishment has failed to meet the challenges of growth and it is left to the people to fashion out their survival. In order for African cities to continue to function, informal structures, parallel to established but highly ineffective formal order are created by its subjects. The people through practices based on these informal structures are able to create agency through collaborative efforts. There is the tendency for disorder and unplanned development which “gives rise to insecurity and poor living environments” (79). Rakodi stresses the need for a better understanding of formal and informal systems and the relationship between them. He concedes that these practices are sometimes disorderly but maintains that “they are far from chaotic,” and he underscores their importance in the assertion that:

Informal practices have borrowed from formal rules systems and in some instances modified or transformed them in turn. Many aspects of informal and customary political and land development practices have wide social recognition – it is this familiarity, understanding, and legitimacy, this rootedness that helps to explain their prevalence and relative success. (79)

Okwui Enwezor *et al* contend that African cities are ‘under siege’ following an uncontrolled urban migration and its attendant overcrowding, dirt, as well as decaying and inadequate infrastructure; thus “with little coherent socioeconomic policy in place to meet the demands of skyrocketing urban populations, most cities end up creating conditions for the development of slums.” They hint that “the contemporary African city today is in crisis. Recently, African cities have experienced serious spatial entropy, a decline in infrastructure, the unraveling of traditional institutional and social networks, the erosion of state capacity to provide adequate social amenities, inequality of access to political and social capacity, etc.” (14). As a result, “postcolonial African cities have long been understood only in relation to a range of spectral binary oppositions and spatial and temporal distortions” (13). Analysts, according to them, therefore “tend to produce doomsday scenarios of urban life based on narratives of civic, systemic and institutional destabilization” (16-17). This illogicality has precipitated a ‘siege’ on the African city by an urbanism that has tended to amplify the postcolony’s dysfunction and morphological illegibility without due attention to the means or systems by which urban poor create agency in their construction and navigation of spaces, boundaries and identities. The result is a less than accurate representation of the state of affairs of the urban postcolony. As Sam Okoth Opondo would illustrate, “certain textual representations and disciplinary practices in their constitution of the African city are actively involved in the killing of the plurality of rhythms, or heterogeneity central to urban life” (59). Echoing Roland Barthes, he contends that “The City is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city where we are, simply by

living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it (59). Okome's conception of the city (as earlier cited) is again instructive.

Johanna Brewer and Paul Dourish focus on the city as a site of interaction in view of how emerging technology-based infrastructure “provide an opportunity to re-encounter urban space” (1). They see spatial information as a cultural category rather than a natural one and proffer a shift in focus from objects to processes. They argue for central planning along with local knowledge of the environment as standpoints for theorizing or determining the legibility of an environment.

Key Paradigms

All of the foregoing literature shows that there has not been a universally recognized template for theorizing or mapping the postcolonial African city. The literature may be typologized into four major paradigms:

- a) **The Cartesian paradigm** (associated with Rene Descartes) which stratifies cities into ‘traditional and ‘modern’ and which conceptualizes the modern city as a carefully crafted and finished work – an urban space mediated by everything good – while traditional cities are products of conurbations. To this school, which tends toward the ideal, belongs Kevin Lynch, Larry Ford, etc.
- b) **The ‘Lefebvorean’ paradigm** (associated with Henri Lefebvre) that imagines the city as an oeuvre – A complete, all-encompassing work to which everyone has a right; that is, an urban space that incorporates everyone and/or everything.

- c) **The dystopian paradigm** which imagines the urban environment as a site of dysfunction.
- d) **The Hybridity paradigm** which imagines the urban environment as a hybrid and an admixture of order and disorder (this paradigm leans toward Lefebvre).
- Interestingly, the Aposterioristic paradigm – that imagines the environment as a perpetual work in progress foregrounding the impossibility of spatial closure – may yet be adduced from the hybridity paradigm.

Situating the City in Africa

One of the most significant and noticeable features of Third World cities is that of overcrowding and its attendant slum-life (Patricia Yeager). Third world cities – from Mumbai, through Jakarta, across Sao Paolo, Lima, Mexico City to Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Freetown, Lusaka to Lagos and Ibadan – reveal prevalent overcrowding and slum-dwelling. Mike Davies, citing the UN-HABITAT, reveals that:

The world's highest percentages of slum-dwellers are in Ethiopia (an astonishing 99.4 percent of the urban population), Chad (also 99.4 percent), Afghanistan (98.5 percent), and Nepal (92 percent). Bombay with 10 to 12 million squatters and tenement-dwellers, is the global capital of slum dwelling, followed by Mexico City and Dhaka (9 to 10 million each), and then Lagos, Cairo, Karachi, Kinshasa-Brazzaville, Sao Paolo, Shanghai, and Delhi (6 to 8 million each). (23)

Slums in Third World cities have developed uncontrolled migration. Formal planning has been unable to cater for the needs of people who have continued to flock the cities for

economic and other reasons. Not all urban poor, to be sure, live in slums, nor are all slum dwellers poor. There has also been constant but uncontrolled rural-urban migration as a result of civil conflicts. Even natural factors compel people to flock the city. The result of this uncontrolled migration is urban density, overcrowding, conurbation and sprawling, unplanned informal settlements. As Ellen M. Brennan discloses, “throughout the developing world, rapid population growth from continuing high rates of natural increase and rapid in-migration has resulted in a high rate of consumption of urban land” (74).

How have slums impacted on African urban growth, or, what is the place or role of slum in the configuration of the postcolonial city? Edgar Pietersie offers an exciting and mind-engaging answer by positing that “almost all of the growth that will unfold in African cities take the form of slum growth” (3). He is definite that “the shanty city is the real African city,” maintaining that “In fact, informal autoconstructed, makeshift shelter responses house 62% of African urbanites” (2). To him therefore, the informal city is the real African city. He maintains, logically, that “the real African city does not correspond to our modernist biases about the physical fabric of cities” (3). Pietersie’s position strengthens the propriety of the call for the African city to be configured along its own paradigms. It must be stressed that this position does not imply a glorification of the shanty or self-help city. Rather, Pietersie brings to the fore the pervasiveness of slums in African cities as indices of deprivation and want as a result of governments’ negative attitudes toward rural-to-urban migration as well as inadequate finance for infrastructure

How then is modernity to be situated in Africa? As I have already argued, African cities cannot be categorically situated within Cartesian paradigm of traditional cities or

modern cities. It is instructive that the postcolony, in the bid to construct its own realities has tended to reconstruct modernity to suit its own complexities. Accordingly, societies have tended to craft their own modernities. Thus Arjun Appadurai conceives of an alternative modernity arising from new webs of migrations and spatial (re)constructions. However Brian Larkin examines the influence of Indian cinema on the social life of the Hausa ethnic group in northern Nigeria as well as its nativization into their world order. He considers this a ‘parallel modernity’ in contradistinction to Appadurai’s conception of it as an alternative modernity: “I use the term ‘parallel modernities’ to refer to the coexistence in space and time of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows that are always subsumed within the term ‘modernity.. (407)

It is certain that African modernity is not constructed within so-called global paradigms. Yet, it is neither an alternative modernity as used by Appadurai nor a parallel one as conceived by Larkin. Instead, what is evident is a hybrid modernity – one that encompasses the planned and the non-planned, formal and informal, visible and invisible structures fused together in a vibrant relationship and interdependence. It is these structures’ relationship and interdependence that configure and direct African modernity and metropoetics.

Fiction and the City

Cities have always been represented in fiction, over time, with Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, Jose Saramago’s *Blindness*, Jonathan Raban’s *Soft City*, being some of the notable ones I have come across. My interest, in this thesis, however, is in the

fictional representation of the postcolonial African city. Interestingly, the African city, generally, has been 'written' since colonialism, and the period immediately preceding independence. In this thesis, emphasis is on the Nigerian novel. The colonial novel – or apartheid novel in the case of South Africa – has presented the city as a violent, dysfunctional and chaotic urban space. Allan Paton's *Cry the beloved Country* portrays colonial Johannesburg as an urban space that ruins its subjects: "They go to Johannesburg, and there they are lost, and no one hears of them at all" (9). It is a violent city, in contrast to the serene, peaceful and orderly rural Ixopo. Elsewhere, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* has been quite apocalyptic as the image of the urban environment and indeed of Ghana and its cities has been that of squalor and filth – filth in everything including the future of the State. From post-apartheid South Africa has, however, emerged Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome To our Hilbrow*, and Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, among others. All of these novels present actions, characters, incidents and systems and complexes that have portrayed the nature of the African city over time.

The Nigerian Novel and the City

Nigerian writers have presented the Nigerian city in various dimensions. Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jaguar Nana* and its sequel *Jagua Nana's daughter* tell the story of Jagua Nana and her daughter, Liza Nene Papadopoulous, later nicknamed Bebe Jagua. Jagua Nana is an irresistible prostitute whose fame spreads across the country. As a naïve virgin, she lives in the city of Jos, Northern Nigeria, with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Obi.

She is however enthralled by the flamboyant and loose lifestyle of Aunty Kate and is eventually corrupted by the latter who introduces her to her boyfriend, Nick Papadopoulos, A Greek tin miner. At a night party organized by the expatriate tin miners, Jagua is deflowered by Nick. She becomes pregnant with his child and later gives birth to a baby girl. This is concealed from her parents, with the help of Aunty Kate, who secretly nurses the ambition to keep the child as her own. Meanwhile, intertribal riots, between Hausas and Ibos, break out in Jos. Many, including Jagua and her parents flee the city. When after the riots, she returns to Jos for her baby, Jagua is told by Aunty Kate that the child is dead. She leaves the city, grief-stricken. She later becomes a full-time prostitute, and is famed for her ability to manipulate men and seamlessly ease herself into their lifestyles. In the course of time, it is revealed that Jagua's child is not dead after all. Liza Nene Papadopoulos is that child. Hence, *Jagua Nana's Daughter*, a sequel to *Jagua Nana*, is based on the quest(s) by Jagua and her daughter to find each other.

Jagua Nana presents the pre- independence city as utterly dystonic, and violent and full of deceit and loose women. The city is described in the novel's blurb as an "evocation of the chaos and intensity of modern life in Lagos." The same can be said of *Jagua Nana's daughter*. It presents the city as a site of violence – a site where violence is the norm: "the more violent, the more entertaining." (86)

People of the City is Ekwensi's most explicit portrayal of the Nigerian pre-independence city. The novel tells the story of Amusa Sango, a young upright journalist in search of peace and happiness in the western Nigerian city of Lagos. But these are elusive, as pre-independence Lagos is presented as a city fit only for crooks, corrupt

politicians, prostitutes, etc. The city is described as “mad”, “overcrowded,” “chaotic,” “close” “dusty” and “irritating” (87-89) – an urban space that only hardens the innocent, rewards desperation, and punishes honesty. Amusa, for instance, is dismissed from the *West African Sensation* for his accurate reportage of the incident where Muhammad Zamil shoots and kills his sister, Suad and her lover Bayo. Dismissing him, his Editor explains:

Personally, I have nothing against you, Sango. Look, I don't often go into details in matters of this kind. But I feel I owe you an explanation for purely personal reasons. You are a good journalist – perhaps the most original in the city. All your writing invariably presents a fresh viewpoint. But in your handling of the Zamil murder case, you seem to overreach yourself. You made an issue of it and not a very satisfying one at that. (99)

Sango's offence is that he 'dares' to write on a murder incident involving an 'important' man as Muhammad Zamil. The thematic thrust of the novel is that the city is a place to be avoided. This is summed-up by Beatrice the Second: “And when we return, we'll have our own hospital in the remote interior. No city life for us!” (89) The city is never portrayed in any positive light; it is described as a site where people only “sold their souls to the devil” (55).

Chinua Achebe's traditional novels depict spatial order in the rural and disorder in the urban. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, for instance, present rural settings whose spatial order is threatened and shattered only by western modernity. Conversely, his post-independence urban novels – *No Longer at Ease*, *A man of the People*, and *Anthills of the*

Savannah – are mainly concerned with depicting chaos and corruption in the city and the state. The same applies to Festus Iyayi’s *Violence*, and *The Contract*. Although the portrayal of the nature of the city may not have been the major thematic focus of these novels, there is the conception of the post-independence Nigerian city as a site of violence, desperation, squalor, covetousness, helplessness, etc. *Violence*, for instance, tells the story of a young man Idemudia and his struggles for survival. Because of the chaotic nature of the city and the society generally, his honest struggles yield nothing. He and his wife, Adisa, are accordingly ‘condemned to live a squalid life. He resorts to selling his blood daily in order for them to survive. When he falls ill, there is no money to pay his medical bills. In order to save her dying husband, Adisa is left with no other option than to yield to the sexual demand of Obofun. The city does not reward honesty. It rewards only crooks like, Obofun and his wife, Queen, who stop at nothing to get what they want. The city is portrayed as a site of filth, corruption, exploitation, helplessness, and hopelessness. *The Contract* presents Ogbe city in the same manner – a site of corruption and filth: “Corruption is the great leprosy we all suffer from. We are nothing but a nation of lepers. We are the race that has diseased blood. And as long as society remains what it is, as long as the greed persists, we shall continue to have filth and the chaos and the refuse and the leprosy” (17). While these novels – and the critical works on them³ – have largely depicted postcolonial disillusionment, disorder and crime in the

³ For example, see Ernest Emenyeonu’s *Cyprian Ekwensi* (1974), John McClusky’s “The City as a Force: Three Novels by Cyprian Ekwensi” (1976), Michael Echeruo’s *Victorian Lagos* (1977), Douglas Killam’s “Cyprian Ekwensi” 1971), etc.

city, a situation facilitated by corruption and insensitivity of successive governments, how the subjects are sustained in the city and how they, in turn, sustain the city have not always been adequately captured. Thus the nature of the city, its morphological configuration, local legibility and the invisible fabrics through which the city functions have largely been left unaddressed. As Chris Dunton argues, much of the critical work produced on the African novel of urban experience⁴ has focused primarily on sociological and socioeconomic concerns. He notes that the early city novels – like Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) and *Jagua Nana* (1961) as well as Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), etc. – were more realist in orientation and seen primarily as social commentaries or chronicles of city events and lives of characters rather than the environment that produce them. Dunton however notes that “in the novels of emerging writers such as Nwosu, Adesokan, and Atta, fresh energies are foregrounded in an attempt to address the experiential realities of life in a city such as Lagos.” Indeed, increasingly critical attention is being focused on contemporary Nigerian writing (especially fiction) generally referred to as the ‘third-generation.’ This is evidenced in the recent devotion of special editions of *English in Africa* and the *Research in African Literatures* (both edited by Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton) to the Third-generation Nigerian Novel. Brenda Cooper also recently published a book entitled *A New Generation of African Writers* (2008), which incorporates some of the third-generation Nigerian writers. The Nigerian contemporary novel now tends to give ‘the good,’ ‘the

⁴ As well as Dunton (2008) see Hans Zel and Helen Silver's *A Reader's Guide to African Literature* (1972), Douglas Killam's Douglas Killam's “Cyprian Ekwensi” (1971), etc.

bad,' and 'the ugly' insights into the nature of the postcolonial city. Novels that have 'written' the city include Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, Ben Okri's trilogy (*The Famished Road*, *Song of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*), Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, Maik Nwosu's *Invisible Chapters*, Ike Oguine's *A squatter's Tale*, Helon Habila's *Waiting For an Angel*, Chimamanda Adiche's *Purple Hibiscus*, Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, Sefi Attah's *Everything Good will Come*, Teju Cole's *Every day is for the thief*, Chris Abani's *Lagos Noir*, etc. From South Africa has emerged Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome To our Hilbrow*, and Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, Niq Mhlongo's *Joburg Noir*, etc. All of these novels and collections of fiction give a sense of the city as the reader is taken through places, actions, characters, incidents and systems and complexes that portray the nature of the African city.

Is the postcolonial African city then all about ruins? This does not seem to me to be an appropriate representation of these writers' commitment, as their fiction tends to represent the full diversity of the state of the African city and its dwellers, including order and disorder, comfort and squalor, inertia and agency. Rita Nnodim, for instance, argues that the city of Lagos is heterotopic (or paradoxical space) – dystopic but attractive and fulfilling space. The city might contain dystopic or dysfunctional elements; yet it is fulfilling and attractive to its subjects because of the opportunities it generates through the plethora of ways by which its subjects "negotiate selves and identities" by way of collaborating to create agency as portrayed in the Nigerian contemporary novel. Nnodim identifies a dialectical relationship between the city and its subjects. According to her, "The novels open up multiple relationships between urban landscapes and identities. On

the one hand, urban spaces are ingrained in the bodies and identities of the people inhabiting them. On the other, it is also the very people inhabiting urban spaces, who – through their activities and itineraries – give shape and meaning to urban spaces” (322). The description of Lagos by Elvis, Abani’s chief character in *GraceLand*, as “half slum” and “half paradise is noteworthy. In this regard, Rita Nnodim’s “City, Identity and Dystopia ...” provides a basis and direction for an in-depth exploration into the nature of the postcolonial African city.

It is worthy of note that a relation exists between the novel, the paradigms (of urban scholarship) and the city. Although fiction – or literature generally – does not map the city, it does show or ‘write’ the city, presenting it as a mapped space which, in turn, remaps its subjects. In doing so, it engages with the crafted paradigms and representations. This will be explored in the next four chapters of this thesis, beginning with the problematic of urban legibility in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAGIC OF THE POSTCOLONIAL CITY: BEN OKRI AND THE DIALECTICS OF LEGIBILITY IN *THE FAMISHED ROAD*

HARGEISA IS A CITY where the streets have no names and the houses
have no numbers. But no one here is lost.

– Fiona Moola

Toward a New Poetics of Urban Legibility

This chapter examines the problematic of urban legibility. It particularly examines the diverse ways in which the concept has been theorized and how Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* represents some of the theoretical positions.

Legibility, literally, entails readability. Accordingly, a legible city should normally be one which is 'readable' (Lynch 3). Legibility in urban studies refers to the perspective from which cities are 'read' and interpreted. It thus has to do with an individual's interaction with his or her environment. It is a central issue in urban thought as cities have come to exist both as physical and mental forms (Davide Deriu 794). It is necessary, as a convenient starting-point, to examine the intellectual traditions of thought on the concept. Thus I examine the problematic of legibility from diverse or varying scholarly persuasions, and the extent to which these persuasions are represented and appropriated in *The Famished Road*.

Legibility, as an urban concept, was propounded by Kevin Lynch. Lynch considers the legibility of a city to be its visual quality in terms of the mental image (of the city) held by its citizens. He emphasises “the apparent clarity of the cityscape,” which, he avers, means “the ease with which its parts can be recognised and can be organised into a coherent pattern” (2-3). He relates the legibility of a city to a printed page, which “if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols” (3). He argues that “a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern” (3). Lynch posits that the perception of a city by its inhabitants is crucial in assessing its legibility as “moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts” (2). He maintains that legibility can only be understood in relation to the perception of the city by its inhabitants rather than the city as a construct in itself. Thus a two-way process is involved in crafting the image of the city, namely: the perception of the city by its inhabitants and their interactions with it based on how they process the perceptions.

It can be gleaned, from the foregoing, that urban cognition can be perceived differently by different inhabitants, with each inhabitant reading and interpreting the city according to preferred marks or elements and other preconceived spatial templates. For instance one may easily navigate or negotiate an environment where others have found the same environment unnavigable. In other words, an environment that appears to one as utterly chaotic may be found by another to be quite orderly. Similarly, an object or landmark which one person finds difficult to locate or identify because of its perceived

illegible location may easily be identified by another who finds its location legible. This confirms that a city is legible to its subjects depending on how each subject perceives it or interacts with it.

Lynch postulates three parameters for mapping the image of the city. These he identifies as structure, identity and meaning. He argues that an environmental image requires that an object be easily distinguishable and identifiable from other objects such that it is recognizable as a separate or distinct entity. Furthermore, the image must include the relation (spatial or pattern) of the object to the observer and to other objects. He avers finally that the object must have a meaning (practical or emotional) for the observer. He illustrates these with an image for making an exit:

Thus an image used for making an exit requires the recognition of a door as a distinct entity, of its relation to the observer, and its meaning as a hole for getting out. These are not truly separable. The visual recognition of a door is matted together with its meaning as a door. It is possible, however to analyze the door in terms of its identity of form and clarity of position considered as if they were prior to its meaning (8).

Imageability is thus emphasized as the paradigm for crafting the cartography of a city with focus on important elements of the city which must be clearly visible to the observer – elements that must include physical appurtenances like paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. The observer must be able to clearly identify, understand and navigate through, and interact with these elements. The observer must thus be familiar with all aspects of the city's physical layout including its boundaries, physical and political

demarcations, important and visible landmarks and physical structures, interesting sites as well as hotspots. It is only then that the city is accepted as visible – and thus legible – to the observer. What is gleaned from the argument above is that for a city to be legible, its cartography must be crafted along the aforementioned elements. Hence cities have often been theorized universally along Lynch's legibility or imageability templates.

There is however the need to problematize and interrogate Lynch's legibility criteria as they tend to be not without some oversights. I do not contest the accuracy of his findings in the study of three American cities, namely, Boston, Jersey City and Los Angeles, but such findings cannot be said to be the same of all cities, even in the unlikely situation that they are the same of most cities. Essentially, Lynch's theories, from his study of the three aforementioned American cities cannot be appropriated for all cities. Besides Lynch's elements of the city, it can be safely argued that people, that is, the city dwellers or subjects also constitute an important factor in the configuration of cities. The subjects of postcolonial (African) cities, essentially, are not mere "observers." They are fundamental elements in these cities' metamorphoses – their growth, development and functionality – given their crucial roles as 'human infrastructure'. This becomes a crucial consideration in view of the different histories and complexities and experiences between African or so-called Third World cities and the cities of the west. Any approach therefore that suggests the ideal environment as that created principally by planning and design without recourse to its subjects' perceptions of, or interactions with it – or what Magdalena Zmudzinska-Nowak considers "the subjective valuations and opinions of the users of space" (20) – is faulty and misleading.

Michael J. O'Neill argues that "As people move through the environment, they acquire knowledge about the spatial relationships between places and structure this information in some type of mental representation or 'cognitive map' (319). Spatial legibility is, accordingly, not dependent on a planned but complex mapping; rather, it relies more on familiarity with the environment. Thus familiarity is a major determinant in environmental representation. Hence, legibility should be theorised along spatial cognition, as spatial familiarity enhances a smooth wayfinding and spatial navigation. Simply put, "Familiarity with the environment" generally "enhances wayfinding performance" (O'Neill 325).

Thierry Ramadier and Gabriel Moser introduce a social dimension to the concept of legibility by arguing that cultural origins of city dwellers play a crucial role in their interaction with the city. Thus the legibility or spatial cognition of a city is conceived of in terms of its physical structures, effortless wayfinding or spatial navigation and also, the cultural and social origins of its dwellers.

But is the legibility of a city restricted to its physical looks, or what Lynch refers to as imageability? Indeed, the urban subaltern can create his or her own legibility. Accordingly, the legibility of an environment, includes – but is not limited to – the template of identity and imageability. Hence, Rob Ingram and Steve Benford argue that the main role of legibility in an urban environment is "the ease with which its inhabitants can develop a cognitive map over a period of time and so orientate themselves within it and navigate through it" (209). To create a legible environment, to them, is to help the users of that environment "to navigate more easily as a result of repeatedly experiencing

a world over a period of time (hence the idea of gradually building a cognitive map) (209).

Predrag Šiđanin defines legibility in the built environment discourse as those “elements whose parts can be recognized and organized in a coherent pattern or symbols.” (61). He identifies with Kevin Lynch in the postulation that “the visual quality of the urban environment ... relates to the physical quality of the environment and the mental image of its users” (Šiđanin 62) and identifies him (Lynch) as the first theorist to focus his work on the theory of urban form in terms of the “visual elements and cognitive concepts of the urban environment” (62). Šiđanin identifies other post Lynchian theories of the urban environment that have emerged from the imageability theory to include ‘operational’ theory – that which envisions the environment as “a setting for personal action and behaviour” and includes such elements as “traffic, islands, signs, entrances, etc;” the ‘responsive’ theory – that which centres on the responses of the subjects to their experiences of the urban environment; and ‘cognitive mapping,’ that which borders on the accumulation of a person’s knowledge and experience about a familiar urban environment. Cognitive mapping essentially borders on the individual’s mental image or mental mapping of the environment. As Šiđanin notes, “Cognitive maps store information about the environment, so that a person knows what to expect and what to do under various circumstances. (66). E. C. Tolman has been credited as being the first to use the term ‘cognitive mapping’ in relation to the imageability (legibility) theory. He used the term, according to Šiđanin, “to account for the behaviour of rats in a maze that escaped and ran across the top directly to the food source.” (Šiđanin 64). The inference is

that the rats found the maze 'legible' and were able to escape and run straight to the food source because they had an integrated mental understanding of its intricate passages. One of the fall-outs of cognitive mapping is therefore the individual's mental mapping of the environment, arising from the subjects' mental image of the urban environment. In other words, the amount of information stored in the subconscious of the subjects determines the legibility of the urban environment. Accordingly, the ability of an individual to navigate an urban environment depends on the individual's knowledge of the environment or the environment's information at the individual's disposal. Šiđanin affirms that there are various ways to store information and to structure people's knowledge as "the actions people take, the decisions they make, their hopes, their fears, their aspirations are all based on their conceptions, on their models of the world (66). Legibility is therefore contingent on the individual's mental image of the urban environment. J.W. Forrester, Šiđanin quotes, puts succinctly and effectively the impact people's models have on their choice and actions: "A mental image is a model. All of our decisions are taken on the basis of models. All of our laws are passed on the basis of models. All executive actions are taken on the basis of models. The question is not to use or ignore models. The question is only a choice among alternative models" (Šiđanin 66). Šiđanin identifies 'web based mapping and survey tools,' 'Design tool,' and waymaker as other models for mapping the legibility of the urban environment. My focus is however on determining the legibility of the African urban environment (City) by engaging with some of the theories that have been canvassed as well as determining the extent to which

the African city is legible, and also to determine how the African city dwellers have crafted their own models for achieving urban legibility.

The point is that the legibility or spatial cognition of an environment can be determined and/or achieved not just by the visual imageability, but by mental mapping as well. Thus it is the mental and visual construction of a city, vis-à-vis the ability of its users to physically and mentally navigate its boundaries that makes that city liveable or functional.

Johanna Brewer and Paul Dourish examine legibility from the individual (panoptic) and group perspectives. They contend that legibility as theorized by Lynch is rather at the individual level; that is, a straitjacket that focuses on a personal experience of space, time and settings. Thus, Lynch, to them, has only viewed legibility with panoptic, one-sided lens as he tends not to have concentrated on the relationship between a city and its subjects – a concern that is predicated on the latter's individual experience(s) of space and settings. Panoptic legibility leaves little or no room for shared experiences. The legibility of a city varies from individual to individual depending on the experiences and meanings derived from the city at individual levels. To determine full spatial legibility, the focus is “not on a personal experience of space or settings, but rather on how social groups can share not only an experience of a place but a meaning for it” (970). It is instructive that “legibility is a product of social and cultural encounter with the world; in turn, it structures and shapes those encounters” (970). Brewer and Dourish identify with the alternative form of legibility explored by James Scott – a form which they term “local legibility” and which I find fascinating. They consider panoptic legibility

‘a view from without’ and local legibility a ‘view from within.’ Accordingly, “Where panoptic legibility attempts to eliminate difference in order to achieve a coherent ordering of resources across different settings, local legibility focuses on the heterogeneous nature of everyday objects and actions, seeing them in terms of individual differences” (970). They argue for local legibility⁵; that is, the legibility of practice whereby the way in which the people navigate the world around them – as well as the way in which they construct their identities within this world – is reflected. Indeed, the postcolonial (African) city, which is largely predicated on indigenous cartography, community (group) or local practice, is quite legible to its subjects.

It is interesting to draw a parallel between Brewer and Dourish’s models of legibility with Gayatri Spivak’s conception of subaltern (il)legibility. By subaltern, Spivak refers to the poor, deprived and marginalised populations in the society. Her concern regarding the subaltern borders on the the politics of representation – that of the Other. She portrays the Sati⁶ practice as a site of subaltern ‘agency’ – a site where the agency is put to test – and raises the question of whether the subaltern can speak (directly) or whether she is being spoken for or represented through intellectual

⁵ Based on Scott’s analysis of the contrasting agricultural planning systems between the Western single crop and indigenous African polycrop system.

⁶ A practice in precolonial India in which widowed women were immolated alive on the pyre of their dead husbands. Such women were considered virtuous if they willingly submitted themselves for immolation.

mediation. She contends that there is no platform by which the subaltern – the poor and oppressed populations in the society can represent themselves in such a way that their action can influence society or key policies to their advantage. She analyses this position with the fate of the sati women of India and portrays them (The sati practitioners) as being caught between the construction of traditional patriarchy and imperialism. Hence: “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation destruction, the subject of the woman disappears ... into a violent shuttling” and is caught “between tradition and modernisation” (102).

Arguably, Spivak’s ultimate position is that the subaltern’s ‘zone of speech’ is located between the claim of absolute agency on the one hand and its complete denial on the other. Hence, it is difficult for subalterns to speak. Even if they do, it is doubtful that their speech is transparently available for immediate consumption. Spivak’s contention occupies a space between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze on the one hand and Karl Marx on the other. While Marx believes that the subalterns cannot represent themselves and therefore need to be represented by intellectuals, Foucault and Deleuze believe that subalterns can indeed represent themselves and, hence, need no one to represent them. But Spivak is emphatic: “The subaltern cannot speak” (104). Her position interrogates that of Foucault and Deleuze⁷ who in their conversation hold that the “the oppressed can know and speak for themselves” (Spivak 74) and that “no theorizing intellectual can represent those who act and struggle” The implication is that intellectual representation

⁷ “Intellectuals and power: a conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.” (Cited by Spivak)

may not be fair to the subaltern. Yet, Spivak's contention appears panoptic. It amounts to what Brewer and Dourish have called 'a view from without.' It is a view that only looks at people and imagines their experiences without a first-hand knowledge of those experiences. For instance, no intellectual who 'speaks' for the Sati women can actually understand the extent of their pains from the loss of their husbands up to the point of their immolation. Such intellectual representatives of the subaltern can only imagine the pains of the sati women; otherwise they would also need to have the experience of immolation before they can fully understand the women's experiences. To conclude that the subaltern cannot speak, as Spivak has done, is panoptic. conversely, the position of Deleuze and Foucault underscores the creative energies of the urban subaltern. Accordingly, the ability of the characters in the selected novels in this thesis underscores the creative energy of the urban subaltern. It foregrounds the argument that no intellectual knower can know more than the poor and oppressed know about themselves or about their predicaments or situations – or how to construct their identities and navigate their boundaries – and none can represent them about these situations better than the subalterns themselves. This calls to questions Spivak's case of subaltern illegibility. Hence, subalterns can speak. They do 'speak' through the way they navigate their boundaries and craft their identities through collaboration and other creative energies.

Lynch on his part bases his theory of legibility on five models: Edges, paths, nodes, districts and landmarks. Instructively, these models have provided the theoretical framework for further architectural formulations (Remco Chang *et al* 29). The propriety of universalizing these models has remained questionable. Nigel Taylor concedes that

Lynch's exploration of legibility in his seminal *Image of the City* has been the pedestal on which architects, urban planners and designers have based their works. He also concedes that the five elements of legibility, namely: nodes, landmarks, edges, pathways and districts, put forward by Lynch have not been contested but instead have been the templates for urban, cartographic and architectural designs. However Taylor has argued against the adoption of the Lynchian model of 'legibility' as the urban design template. He argues that "The concept of legibility as a principle of (good) urban design, although important, is generally over-rated" and that more specifically, "legibility on its own is not necessarily a significant criterion of the perceptible quality of townscapes," and "therefore that legibility in itself is not an important consideration or 'principle' of urban design" (189).

Yeung and Savage underscore the importance of the relationship between the city and its subjects in determining the legibility of the city. They contend that it is the subjects of the city that make it legible; that is, the cognition of the subaltern makes the city what it is. Although their study is centred mainly on the 'public image' of the Orchardscap, the major street of their study, the focus is "essentially on individuals because the sum of 'personal images' forms the 'public image'" (474). They corroborate their position with K. E. Boulding's argument that it is the (combination of) personal or individual images that serve as the "basic bond of any society, culture, sub-culture or

organization”⁸ (64). Thus it is the people in the city that give life to it. It is the subjects that construct, and reconstruct, through their activities, the spatial morphologies of cities:

It is worthy of note that Amanda Williams and Paul Dourish have viewed the city as a cultural and historical construct rather than just a cartographic space. They have argued for the “freeing” (of urban) computation from the confines of the desktop” and emphasized that although urban computing is intended to facilitate legibility and/or wayfinding, it cannot be carried out without cultural considerations. The legible city is not necessarily the city of the desktop, with taxonomic and predetermined appurtenances:

Much urban computing research focuses on cities as generic settings and containers of action. However, cities can also be viewed as products of historically and culturally situated practices and flows. When we view urban areas in this context, rather than as collections of people and buildings, infrastructure and practices are closely entwined (38).

Legibility, for them, is not a strait jacket, and not just about imageability or desktop crafting. Instead of this taxonomic view, they are more concerned with the “generative” or “interpretive view” (of culture) which requires that “cities reflect and reproduce cultural values, and encounters with cities represent opportunities for cultural work.” Emphasis is thus on cultural legibility. They note, for instance, that “The taxonomic view recognizes that cities in Britain are different from those in the US, Australia, or Asia. Though it allows for categorization and classification, the taxonomic view of culture

⁸ As cited by Yeung and Savage. (474)

obscures a deeper meaning.” This position affirms AbdouMalik Simone’s earlier position of people as infrastructure. Every city works in tandem with the activities of its inhabitants as they navigate its space and (re)construct their identities:

As culturally and historically specific forms, cities reflect how we see our world. While the generative perspective of culture points to particular cities’ uniqueness, they are also connected by larger flows of people, goods, information, and capital. ... Local activities in particular cities are embedded within processes of cultural production that occur on broader spatial scales. ... Cities’ networked infrastructure enable, hinder and direct these flows, resulting in a heterogeneous and dynamic experience of the city (Simone 38). Thus, beyond nodes, landmarks, provinces, edges, etc., as crafted in Lynch’s imageability model, legible cities are informative environments that their inhabitants can read, understand and interpret in relation to their actions reactions and experiences.

Legibility and Intelligibility

The city has also been conceived of in terms of legibility and intelligibility. Christina Soares Cavaco examines the ‘Rule’ and the ‘Model’ as the templates for “reading, understanding and analyzing the urban landscaped city”⁹ (899). The tools are applied to enhance the legibility and intelligibility of the city. Cavaco’s main focus is on the “articulation and compatibleness between models and rules as a planning and governance demand. Indeed, the focus is fundamental in determining the role of the state

⁹ Based on Francois Choay’s *La Regle et le Modele* (trans: *The Rule and the Model*)

and (the focus) will be closely examined in the next chapter (of this thesis) which deals with the role of the state in urban relations, design and construction. My interest, in this chapter, lies in the ‘Rule and the ‘Model’ within the framework of ‘legibility and ‘intelligibility’ not as separate constructs, but as coalescing models.

‘Model’ tends toward utopia, an attribute whereby the city is portrayed as a project with an “aprioristic vision”, that is, a preconceived urban space that is mediated by good or tasty architecture and other infrastructure, navigable spatial morphology and a highly efficient, non-complex fiscal economy.

The ‘Rule,’ in this context, serves as a processing or operational template. Cavaco situated it as “a processor and operational like method whose foundation consists in a system of rules and principles that allows creative responses to different physical and social contexts, according to the differences of time and individuals (the city as function or a process).” (901)

Cavaco’s position is an engagement with the rule and the model as templates for crafting and imagining urban spaces. It can be construed as an engagement with the Cartesian classification that portrays modern cities as finished products, and, as urban spaces that are predicated on the rule and the model. Rather than take an aprioristic position whereby all the appurtenances and features of a city are predetermined, like a work of art on an engineer’s or surveyor’s plain, before the city is founded, Cavaco’s position is rather aposterioristic. A city’s legibility and (consequently) development is determined by, or dependent on the interaction or relationship between it and its subjects. The point is that many cities tend to have been crafted on the ‘rule’ and the ‘model’

templates, and have, over time, witnessed unanticipated infractions. This is because the templates, in the Cartesian or Lynchian tradition, did not take into account the inevitable dialectic engagement between the city and its subjects – a dialectical engagement that enables the city and its subjects to deconstruct, and as the case may be, reconstruct or recreate one another. Echoing S. Graham and S. Marvin, with regard to this line of thought, Cavaco argues:

Although one can say that the worthy insights of Kevin Lynch on the image of the city still remain up-to-date viewpoints for the theories of our days, the city landscape has changed a lot since then. Sprawl, fragmentation and discontinuity have increased. ... In fact, we became aware that the notion of *legibility* is not by itself enough concerning the functional and the conceptual complexity of contemporary cities. (902)

The interesting situation therefore is that even so-called modern cities are not necessarily anchored on the default templates or theories of Descartes and Lynch. There is – and must therefore be – the template of rationality; hence so-called modern cities, more than all else, are themselves ‘built’ on this rational template. Relying on this argument, it is instructive that African cities cannot be said to be illegible as they at least, also possess their own ‘orders of rationality.’ I cannot therefore agree less with Thomas Sieverts that: “legibility and intelligibility are the preconditions for perceiving and experiencing the city region as a space which shapes everyday life. (61). Situating this in Africa, against the backdrop of the tradition of urban thought, the postcolonial (African) city is not only legible, but also intelligible. Sieverts tends to use the terms distinctively. Cavaco

emphasizes the distinction between legibility and intelligibility, just as that between the 'Rule' and the 'Model.' She concedes that the terms are not contrasting concepts, but emphasizes, however, that they represent two different itineraries of spatial experience.

Legibility, from the foregoing, tends to tilt toward the Rule while intelligibility leans toward the Model. I argue, however, that legibility and intelligibility should not be construed as different constructs of urban imagination. Rather, they should be understood as coalescing elements in determining the functioning or otherwise of a city. One therefore should subsume the other. Hence, legibility should subsume intelligibility as far as the reading, understanding, interpreting and navigation of a city by its subject is concerned. Legibility should not be conceived of as a nebulous concept, but as a totalizing one. My argument therefore is that the frontiers of urban legibility should encompass intelligibility and functionality. The intention is not to fault the distinction that has been made by Cavaco, between legibility and intelligibility as urban constructs, but to determine the extent to which the postcolonial (African) city is legible, intelligible or functional.

Legibility and Liveability

How is legibility situated within the context of liveability? While legibility thrives on the need for easily read landmarks and other visual features in the spatial configuration of a city and has been adopted by urban designers, Liveability emphasizes "the provision of urban space for conviviality" and/or the need for the provision and availability of "flexible, small urban social spaces" (Miles 7). Malcolm Miles examines

the inadequacy of relying on legibility and liveability as sacrosanct in the production of space. He stresses the need to interrogate legibility and liveability as universal templates for mapping the urban space and posits that the city should be re-theorized using alternative approaches. He argues that “it is appropriate to reconsider legibility and liveability, and to ask if both concepts are now encapsulated in history, linked to nineteenth-century liberal reformism and twentieth-century modernism. Both may seem of little use to a world of globalized capital and communications, post-industrial cities, and post-structuralist theory” (8). In his critique of legibility, Miles notes that it is the “visual quality” of the city that tends to fascinate Lynch, as The view Lynch develops in *The Image of the City* depends on a visual perspective through which the component parts are recognized. Quoting Louis Wirth, Miles reiterates that “the urban world puts a premium on visual recognition” and laments that “this is crucial to the legacy of the Chicago school and borne out in Burgess’s¹⁰ frequently cited concentric ring diagram which universalizes a diagram of the loop in Chicago and surrounding transitional zones as an urban template” (Miles 8-9). Lynch, to him places too much emphasis on visual recognition. Instructively, Lynch’s major concern is on the perception of the city by its subject; hence he opts for “a conscious use and organization of definite sensory cues from

¹⁰ The Concentric Model is one of the earliest theories employed by Ernest Burgess to explain urban social structures as comprising the Central Business district (CBD), the residential district or inner suburbs around the CBD, the outer suburbs, the transition zone and the commuter zone (For more on this, see Miles’ essay). This, just as Lynch’s imageability model, and the Cartesian conception of the ‘modern,’ tends to be anchored on preconceived urban models.

the external environment” which he posits is “fundamental to free-flowing life” (Miles 10). Accordingly, what is evident from Lynch’s position, that “a clear image enables one to move about easily and quickly” and “A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of security ... an harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world” (Miles 10), is that a city should be beautiful, and is only partially controlled. Miles faults this position and asserts that the built environment affects human dynamics. The position is also echoed by Yixian Long, Perver K. Baran & Robim Moore in their examination of the role of Space Syntax¹¹ in spatial cognition: “humans create cities based on their activities; on the other hand, the city itself facilitates and limits our activities and behavior within it” (129-01) Similarly, human dynamics affects the direction of the built environment. Even Winston Churchill¹² is quoted to have famously stated that “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us” (1). This corroborates my earlier presentation of Onookome Okome’s portrayal of the city as a symbiotic and dialectical space. The city cannot appropriately be passed off or imagined as a finished product or a project with an aprioristic vision. As a work-in-progress, therefore, the city does not start and end with the cartographer as it continues to evolve. What is clear is that the legibility, or otherwise, of a city is not dependent on the cartographic or architectural ingenuity of its constructors, but on the activities and

¹¹ Space Syntax as an urban concept refers to the application of computer technology in the analysis of urban configuration. See Carlo Ratti (1). I have however situated it within the structure and configuration and mapping of the urban space with or without computer technology.

¹² Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1951-1955). For more on this, see Carlo Ratti (1).

experience brought upon it by those who people it. If Lynch deals with human agency, Miles questions “whether it extends to the agent’s intelligent reading of the city’s structures.” He argues further that “The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image. There tends to be a contradiction in Lynch’s view. Since he concedes that the ‘observer’ should play an active role in perceiving the world around him or her, the observer, through his or her creative role, perceives and recreates his or her world. This confirms the city as a dialectical space which (re)shapes or (re)makes its agents, and which is reshaped and remade by the agents. Thus urban legibility should not only be imagined as “a function of reception of a city’s visual landscape when elements of form which have accumulated over a period are subsumed in a unified image” but “also a means for citizens to gain emotional ownership of their city by having a mental picture of it” (10). Miles summarized the limitations of urban legibility as propounded by Kevin Lynch as: “firstly, an emphasis on form rather than on occupation; secondly, a privileging of concept over actuality; thirdly, a privileging of visibility in the use of photographs and maps, and questions which refer to sight” (14).

It is noteworthy, also, that Long *et al* have criticized Lynch for ignoring the relational characteristics that exist between the physical elements of the urban environment, but there however, remains the question of universalization of templates as they tend to appropriate their findings in few selected cities in China for all other cities of the world. This universalization can be misleading as complexities of cities studied in China, or even America, Europe, etc., are markedly different from the cities of Africa and

the rest of the world, especially the postcolonial city. Miles describes Liveability as a concept “co-opted by neo-liberalism in the new ‘urbanism’ of gated but homely, often nostalgically styled, residential compounds ... Roughly, it means the design of environments conducive to the ease of its citizens” (11). It is a concept that finds prominence in the works of Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte. They concentrate on street activities and the well-being of city dwellers and conclude that for a city to be deemed to function, it must be liveable; that is its subjects or agents must be able to navigate it without stress, with space(s) like shops, playgrounds (for children), parks (for relaxation) and other spots for leisure appropriately designated. Emphasis is on comfort and convenience. According to Miles, Whyte anchors his view on liveability on his 1970 Street Life Project in New York and observes that “There was much concern over urban crowding, but most of the research ... was done somewhere other than where it supposedly occurred. The most notable studies were of crowded animals, or of students and members of institutions responding to experimental situations - often valuable research, to be sure, but somewhat vicarious”¹³ (Whyte 10). Jacobs’ earlier observation is particularly noteworthy:

Among the superstitions of planning and housing is a fantasy about the transformation of children ... A population of children is condemned to play on the city streets. These, pale and rickety children, in their sinister moral environment, are telling each other canards about sex ... If only these

¹³ As quoted by Miles (11).

deprived children can be gotten off the streets into parks and playgrounds with equipment on which to exercise, space in which to run, grass to lift their souls! Clean and happy places, filled with the laughter of children responding to a wholesome environment. So much for the fantasy!¹⁴ (74).

Indeed, Liveability envisions a conflict-free urban space. Every city is expected to provide for the ‘independence,’ safety, comfort and pleasure of its agents.

Miles however faults the concept of liveability as a universal template for urban design. He denounces as “romanticized its reliance on the notion of the city as potentially conflict free” (14). This is in spite of the realistic view of the city by Jacobs and Whyte as a space of occupation in their denunciation of “the fantasies of functionalist planning and design” (14). Another common flaw, Miles notes, is that although Liveability’s tends to be an attractive concept, “it is also a frame of reference for criticism of dehumanizing planning and design.” It also tends to produce a universal image of the city “despite the immersion of its protagonists in street life.” Miles concludes that the difficulty of liveability as an urban construct is its universalization of middle-class, white criteria for the built environment” (15). I particularly find this instructive as it applies to the situation of African urbanity.

The forgoing discourse on Legibility in relation to intelligibility and liveability, etc., serves to reinforce this thesis’ overarching argument that there is no universal theory or poetics of the city. The legible city is simply that which is liveable and whose subjects

¹⁴ As quoted by Miles

understand or find intelligible. Hence, the postcolonial city should not be constructed simply as the Other.

The African City as a Legible Construct

The question that is then asked is: how legible is the postcolonial city in terms of the traditions of thought on legibility? It has been conceded that the African urban space is a complex hybrid that encompasses the formal and informal, order and disorder, chaotic and sublime, court and country. Patricia Yaeger notes this and proposes what she calls a new practicum for looking at city literature:

(1) the fact of overurbanization, (2) the predicament of decaying or absent infrastructures, (3) the unevenness of shelter (which, along with food, energy, health care, and water make up the mythos and ethos of the nurturing city), and (4) the importance of inventing counter-publics, or communal alternatives to the official, bureaucratized polis. My goal is to produce a brief taxonomy or metro-poetics that will enable us to rethink the urban imaginary in the light of contemporary urban crises (Yaeger 13).

And, to Onookome Okome, “it is no longer the logic of Europe’s modernity that is the deciding factor here, but the unfulfilled needs of the postcolonial subjects that determine how the city is constituted as a crucible of new experiences” (320). What is noteworthy is that the African city is not a particularly dysfunctional space. It is not different from so-called ‘modern’ or global cities in this regard and should not be selectively pathologized

as that fiercely illogical, chaotic, turbulent, decadent and disenchanting spatial enclave ‘out there,’ given that these antipodal features are apparently common to all cities.

The selective pathologizing of the African urban environment is therefore faulty. If African cities are continually imagined and mapped as ‘failures’ in terms of developmental indices, then all cities should be considered as failed and illogical spaces. Yet, like all other cities, each African city has its unique spatial diversity/complexity and historical and environmental experience(s) that have mapped, and have continued to (re)shape it. Dystopic trappings are not peculiarly African types as they are present in all cities, whether ‘ancient,’ ‘modern,’ ‘traditional’ or ‘global’. Singling out urban dystopia as an African topos is therefore confusing and misleading, bearing in mind the unending controversies regarding a universal theory of the city. The propriety of adopting Lynch’s conception of legibility (imageability), as enshrined in *The Image of the City* has been questioned by some urban theorists, with some advocating neo-liberalism, liveability, mobility, wayfinding, environmental knowing, mental mapping, cognitive mapping, intelligibility, virtual city, etc, as complements or outright alternative models (O’neil; Omer, Goldblatt & Or; Ramadier & Moser; Tolman; Šiđanin, Brewer & Dourish; etc). Larry Ford emphasizes and laments the confusion and/or irreconcilable controversies generated by imageability and the post-Lynchian theorists. Although he advocates a return to Lynch’s original formulations, his acknowledgement of the hopelessness in crafting universal templates for theorizing the city is noteworthy.

There have been other post-Lynchian models, for example, the virtual city, described by Itzhak Omer, Ran Goldblatt & Udi Or as “a real-time model of an actual

city that enables the user to walk through or fly over a certain area.” They inform that virtual models have been designed, and been used for many cities including London, Barcelona, Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, Tokyo, etc. This, according to them, has been made possible “thanks to improvements in geovisualization tools (computer graphics, GIS etc)”. The models are devised to enable people, including first-time visitors, to easily identify places in these cities. Electronic map readers, for instance have become the common norm. As attractive and exciting as this model portends, Omer, Goldblatt and Or still express the worry, that current research has only concentrated on the technological dimension of the models as well as “their implementations for supporting urban planning and various decision-making processes.” Hence they lament that “little attention has been paid to the wayfinding difficulties that characterize these models and their design implications” (1).

The foregoing reinforces the earlier argument that the city is not an aprioristic project. It is an aposterioristic space (that is, a space that determines legibility through sense experience). Hence urban legibility is not to be conceived of as a straitjacket, since human elements (the people) significantly shape the city through their constant engagement with it.

Yet the African city is distinct, not in terms of legibility or spatial cognition, but in terms of the continent’s complexity, cosmology, worldview, history and experience. Commenting on the sociology of the African novel for instance, Chidi Amuta argues for an African poetics to reflect its complexity:

Once born and nurtured in a given socio-historical environment, a literary form is propelled outside its native soil onto new ground by determinate historical factors which in turn will give it a local identity which, though reminiscent of its original “genetic” properties will obey the laws of its new environment and baptize it into a new definition.” (125)

The point here is that there are no universal templates for writing an environment or determining its configuration. Drawing a metaphoric parallel from Chidi Amuta’s averment that “every historical epoch writes its own poetry” (13), I argue that every urban environment – the African city inclusive – formulates its own templates for crafting its cartography and legibility.

Sonjah Stanley Niaah lends credence to the above conception of urban legibility by showing that people’s engagement with the urban environment significantly determines the legibility of that environment. She demonstrates this by showing how the Caribbean urban dwellers have employed performance, especially the Jamaican dancehall, to construct their identity in an urban environment, imagined to be dysfunctional, and making Kingston (the capital city Jamaica), generally considered a place of dislocation and the world’s most notorious crime zone, legible and functional:

The act of dancing is done by dancers/patrons generally and has a link to creators of movement at its highest level. ... The event has a purpose onto which the power of the gathering/ group is centred. ... Everyone knows why they are there. The event takes place at a particular venue, which has its own geography, land use,

spatiality and geopolitics, and its own relationship to class structure/ boundaries and community (xvii).

The postcolonial city is therefore accurately represented only when it is theorized, imagined or mapped along its own templates as will be revealed in my textual analysis of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*.

Ben Okri¹⁵

Okri's fiction is famed specifically for its postcolonial trappings. The bulk of his works have portrayed (post)colonial disenchantment, bringing to the fore, the turbulence and disillusionment visited on the (post)colony by the colonial masters and their black collaborators. Okri captures the grim realities of the postcolony in a narrative style that smacks of the traditional story-telling art of the African society. Accordingly, Charles Nnolim lists him among the writers "whose works catapult us into a topsy-turvy world of the surreal, the fantastic and the absurd, with the dislocation and fragmentation of reality" (173). Okri has employed most of his works as means of 'writing back.' Hence, Jeremy Tregolwan, Chairman of the 1991 Booker Prize panel of judges pays glowing tribute to him for bringing "a distinctively black African way of writing and seeing things into the

¹⁵ Born in Nigeria on 15 March, 1959, Ben Okri Okri has attracted global critical attention with major works that include *Flowers and Shadow* (1980), *The Landscapes Within* (1981), *Incidents at the Shrine* (1986), *Stars of the new Curfew* (1988), *The Famished Road* (1991), *An African Elegy* (1992), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993), *Astonishing the Gods* (1995), *Birds of Heaven* (1996), *Infinite Riches* (1998), *In Arcadia*, etc. He has won several literary prizes, including the *Paris Review* Aghan Khan Prize for fiction in 1987, and the 1991 Booker Prize with *The Famished Road*.

mainstream of European fiction.” This tribute is fundamental in portraying how Okri uses a unique African traditional story-telling art to reassess and retell the society, long pathologized as eternally dislocated, chaotic and dysfunctional. My primary interest, however, is mainly how the writer has represented the city in the novel.

Although *The Famished Road* is the primary text in this regard, it is necessary to have insights into Okri’s presentation and/or assessment of the city. One of the stories in *Incidents at the Shrine* will suffice. “Incidents at the Shrine,” the title story in the collection” tells the story of Anderson, a young man who is disillusioned with life in the city, having been sacked from his job without any reason. When, later, he goes to the market to buy some food items, there is a stampede as the market is engulfed in fire. Anderson is wounded in the process. This predicates a protracted illness, and in the course of his treatment, “most of the money he had saved in all the years of humiliation and sweat went into the hands of the quack chemists of the area” (55). In frustration, he decides to return to his village. On the dirty pathway that leads to his village, Anderson is attacked by three forms (who are not human beings). In fright, he breaks into a run, hotly pursued by his assailants who keep shouting his name. His box flies open, spilling all he has brought from the city. Anderson is too concerned with saving his life to wait, even for a moment, to pick up his things. Consequently, he arrives in the village empty-handed. While in the village, he undergoes an elaborate ritual and is reinitiated into the village’s traditional and spiritual heritage. He is sent back to the city after he has been traditionally and spiritually fortified to deal with – and to effortlessly overcome – all hazards associated with life in the city:

ANDERSON! OFUEGBU! YOU ARE A SMALL MAN. YOU CANNOT RUN FROM YOUR FUTURE. GOVERNMENTS CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT YOU. ALL THE DISASTERS OF THE WORLD REST ON YOU AND HAVE YOUR NAME. THIS IS YOUR POWER (65).

Anderson is revealed to be powerless because of the impurities he carries in his body:

Then the image maker proceeded with the extraction of impurities from his body. ... He bit into the flesh and pulled out a rusted little padlock which he spat into an enamel bowl. ... he bit into Anderson's shoulder again and pulled out a crooked needle. He continued like this till he had pulled out a piece of broken glass, a twisted nail, a cowry and a small key (63).

'Impurities,' in the quote above, is a metaphoric reference to 'obstacles.' Thus, the extraction of these impurities from Anderson's body symbolizes the 'extraction' of 'obstacles' that have made the city illegible or unnavigable for him. The 'impurities' signify challenges of the city, which he must confront in order to survive. Hence, he is sent back to the city to resist and 'conquer' the challenges he may face. His experiences on his way to the village suggest that rural environment might not be safer than the city after all. His future is in the city; hence, he is enjoined to return. This is a call to resistance, and, for the creation of agency. It is a call that admonishes Anderson to return to the city and endeavour to construct a legible space for himself.

Stars of the new Curfew, a collection of short stories, also smacks of an attempt to (re)write the African urban space. Told in a 'village voice,' "What the tapster saw," one of the stories, in the collection, marks the attempt to reimagine the African urban space. It

tells of an excellent palm-wine tapster who dreams that he falls off a palm tree and dies while tapping for wine. Disturbed by the dream, he rushes to the shrine of a traditional healer for spiritual assistance. He is asked to return the next day with some items for sacrifice. He does not return to the healer as he has forgotten about the dream. Indeed, he falls off a palm tree the next day and dies. Characteristic of the African order of reality, as represented by Okri, the dead tapster continues to live and experience events in (an)other realm of existence – the realm of the dead. Underscoring the notion that there is (an)other reality, the spirit beings tell the dead tapster that “Everything in your world has endless counterparts in other worlds” (188):

He saw that the wars were yet over. ... Some of those who lived as if the original war was over were blown up while they struggled with poverty. ... he saw the mouth of the Roads lined with human skeletons. Victims of mindless accidents. ... The tapster saw people being shot in coups. In secret executions. In armed robberies. (188-189)

The space being navigated is an African cultural space, where there is a strong link between the ‘real’ world and the ‘spirit’ world. As Ato Quayson puts it:

“What the Tapster saw,” like most of Okri’s other stories smacks of a narrative perspective that shifts constantly between two worlds. He notes that “sense of unreality grows steadily upon the central characters until the esoteric realm invades the real world and recedes only to leave the real world no longer the same in the eyes of both the characters and the readers (603).

Quayson describes “What the Tapster saw” as “the most radically experimental story as it recalls the folklore resources of Amos Tutuola and other traditional story-tellers” (604). This is apt in Okri’s later novels, especially the trilogy of *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*.

Okri is, however, not without some unsympathetic critics, even though his style of problematizing the conception of Africa and its space has attracted a robust critical attention. Hakim Bello expresses a disappointment with *The Famished Road* and argues that the novel is a descent into an anachronistic and tired style and that that Okri’s earlier writings were more positive than *The Famished Road* – a novel he argues degenerates the author “back to the 1960s sort of patronization of African literature”¹⁶ (Moh 16). Bello has been criticized and accused (harshly, perhaps) of “misreading” *The Famished Road* or “reading the novel upside down” (Mamudu 79-80), but the point is that Okri’s style is an original and deliberate (but figurative) one in writing the Nigerian environment from an African oral perspective. Hence, Solomon Iyasere argues that “The modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind.” (50)

The Famished Road

The first in a trilogy of novels that includes *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*, *The Famished Road* is arguably Ben Okri’s most successful novel. The novel is based on the myth of reincarnation in traditional societies of Africa where children are

¹⁶ As quoted by Felicia Okah Moh, *Ben Okri: an Introduction to His Early Fiction*, 2001.

born to die only to be reborn. Such children known as 'Abiku' in the Yoruba society of Nigeria keep coming into the world and going away from it in a cyclical chain of death and rebirth. Azaro the narrator and protagonist of the novel is one of such children. He is born to his current parents and is expected to die after living on earth for a short period of time. He is expected to return to his spirit companions with whom he has an eternal covenant never to remain permanently in the world of mortals. This is so as the spirit children (or the abikus) see the physical world as too complex and chaotic to live in:

There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifference of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see (3).

In spite of his harsh experiences, when he is born into the physical world, Azaro does not return to his spirit companions as he chooses to live permanently in the physical world. He makes it clear, though, that his resolve to stay in the world is not as a result of inducement or sacrifices, or even the fear of being recognized, but for the fact that the birth-death-rebirth cyclical act has become rather monotonous for him. This is in addition to his remorse over the pain he has inflicted on the world (especially his mother to whom he has been born many times) and the resolve to make a positive contribution to the world. The resolve to remain in the world is however unacceptable to his spirit companions. The conflict is thus set as they resolve to torment him, for his insolence,

until he is forced to return to their idyllic world. Azaro is undaunted. He calls their bluff and resolves to stay in the mortal world no matter the odds and the troubles from his companions:

How many times have I come and gone through the dreaded gateway? How many times had I been born and died young? How many often to the same parents? I had no idea. So much of the dust of living was in me. But this time, somewhere in the interspace between the spirit world and the living, I chose to stay. This meant breaking my pact and outwitting my companions. (5)

Charles Angmor argues that the spirit-child is used figuratively “as the person-observer of the society, and secondly, as a personification of the society” (67). He argues that by the device, “the audience is given insights into the day-to-day happenings in the life of the common people, individually and collectively” (67).

That Azaro chooses to remain in the flawed world of the living is symbolic of the resolve of the subaltern to remain and construct his/her identity in a seemingly, never-ending, dystopic postcolonial urban space. Although the future may appear bleak, survival is assured. This is captured in the prophecy of Ade, Azaro’s fellow Abiku and friend:

There will be changes. Coups. Soldiers everywhere. Ugliness. Blindness. And then when people least expect it, a great transformation is going to take place in the world. Suffering people will know justice and beauty. A wonderful change is coming from far away and people will realise the great meaning of struggle and hope. There will be peace and people will forget. Then it will start again, getting

worse, getting better. ... Our country is an abiku country. Like the spirit-child, it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain. (478)

The above tends to give validity to Angmor's position that "all this is a symbolic projection of the fate of many nations in the African world" (67). It also concurs with Harry Garuba that "Despite the background of myth and magic, *The Famished Road* is not a fable set in a never, never, ending world of fantastic trivia, but a grim socio-economic tale of poverty and politics of a neo-colonial state" (23). Hence, Quayson posits that "the radicalization of the narrative form is a means of rendering the acute sense of bewilderment at the incoherence of the socio-political domain." (156)

The Famished Road and the Postcolonial City

How, then, does *The Famished Road* represent the postcolonial city? Sara Upstone emphasises Okri's depiction of the city as harsh and oppressive, thereby according its subjects a dystopic spatial reality. She argues that "Throughout Okri's *Famished Road* trilogy it is clear that natural landscape, city, village, and home, among other spaces, present multiple dangers and griefs (sic) for their inhabitants, a reflection of Nigeria's troubled history displaced into an unnamed geographical locale."

Written in what has come to be regarded as the magic realist or 'marvelous realist' tradition, howbeit, one with an African story-telling flavour, the novel is Okri's attempt at rewriting the postcolony. Beyond its magic realist trappings, therefore, *the Famished Road* engages with preconceived notions of the country and its space, in what Upstone aptly identifies as spatial re-visioning:

The focus of discussions of the Famished Road trilogy has tended to be on Azaro's "physical and sensory engagement with his immediate surroundings" rather than on his sense of alienation within space. A focus on the spatial aspects of Okri's text is an opportunity to redress this imbalance, to explore how, in relation to the post-colonial theory of a positive chaos ..., the magical elements of Okri's narrative may, in fact, be part of political discourse rather than an escape from it (148).

Thus, Okri foregrounds African modernity, and by implication the city, in *The Famished Road* trilogy – a modernity that especially recognizes and occupies the natural, supernatural and/or supra-natural spaces. As Michel de Certeau aptly avers, and echoed by Upstone, space is not a straitjacket (by or in itself) but a practiced place (de Certeau 117, Upstone 140). It can therefore be argued that the functionality of space is predicated on the practices, constructions and actions of the people who inhabit it. Upstone notes that the city epitomises the construction of space. She cites Jane M. Jacobs's argument that "It was in the name of the ideal city that many of the most comprehensive colonial territorialisations and displacements occurred" (Jacobs 20, Upstone 145).

The Famished Road thus presents the living conditions of ordinary Nigerian city dwellers. It shows the Nigerian city as it actually is: half paradise and half slum, just as it is also described in *GraceLand*, another primary text that will be analysed in this thesis. Indeed, the novel harps on the prevalence of slum and squalor:

There was no electricity in our area. The lamps, held above the heads, illuminated the strange-eyed moths, casting such a special glow over the disembodied faces....

Deep in the night it started to rain and it poured down steadily while the ghetto dwellers raged. The rain didn't last long but it turned the tracks into mud (10).

It tends to depict the debilitating situation that informs the second item of Yaeger's proposed "new practicum," that draws attention to decaying or absent infrastructure. Although the concept of infrastructure has been expanded by Simone to include people and their creative energies, basic physical infrastructure is virtually non-existent in the part of the city that Azaro and his parents live. However, the manner people come to Mum's aid, when she is sick, is arguably a fictional representation of Simone's concept of people as infrastructure: "Early in the evening the compound women came to see how Mum was doing. She sat up and received them. They prayed for recovery. They left and Madame Koto came in with a bowl of food and another of pepper soup. Mum didn't want to eat, she was so weak but we pressed her" (58). On another occasion, Azaro narrates the squalid state in which he and his parents live:

Suddenly a rat began chewing away at something beneath the cupboard. A big fly started up, as if it had just woken from a long sleep, and buzzed about the room. A moth rose from Dad's boots and circled the candle flame in a descending spiral. Dad smoked meditatively. The noise of the rat increased and other rats joined in the chewing. Mum's face twitched (70).

The postcolonial trappings of the African city, as portrayed in *The Famished Road*, lies in its spatial ghettoization, its hybridity vis-à-vis its (re)creation as a trialectic space that encompass order and disorder, formal and informal, as well the chaotic and sublime:

One road led to a thousand others, which in turn fed into paths, which fed into dirt tracks which became streets, which ended in avenues and cul-de-sacs. All around, a new world was being created amidst the old. Skyscrapers stood high and inscrutable beside huts and zinc abodes. Bridges were being built; flyovers, half-finished, were like passageways into the air (113)

What immediately comes to mind, from the foregoing, is a chaotic or apocalyptic conception of the city; but what is noteworthy is not necessarily the illogicality of the old order but the creation of a new one to subvert it or coexist with it. Hence Azaro tells us that “a new world was being created amidst the old” (113). Okri presents a magical city that has its complexities, where Azaro, in spite of all his travails, survives. Like Azaro, the African city which Okri presents does not die. It is a ‘new’ city that springs out of the old and coexists with it. It is presented as one that exists in multiple spaces.

I concede that it is a picture of chaos that Okri seems to paint in *The Famished Road*. It is a novel that seems to be replete with chaotic characters and incidents, and even descriptions. But chaos, notes Upstone, while echoing Wilson Harris is not an endless anarchy but a possibility of new meanings outside tired and stagnant dominant frames of which the colonial space is a perfect example (Upstone 147). Hence Harris writes in his novel *Jonestown*¹⁷ that “Chaos is misconceived as an anarchic phenomenon. Whereas it may be visualized as portraying an "open" universe. Continuities running out of the mystery of the past into the unknown future yield proportions of the genuinely

¹⁷ As quoted by Upstone.

new” (*Jonestown* 6); thus the kind of “chaos” that ensues is that which opens up a “womb of space” beyond the confines of “one-track realism” (Harris 233). Upstone argues that “While the city may contain an inherent chaos, a kind of mythical post-modern instability, the confusion of the cityscape for its inhabitants is also seen to be increasingly suggestive of a harsh political reality” (149). She affirms that the vision of the city that we receive from *The Famished Road* circle:

is not only a result of Azaro's unique sight but is also tied to a quite explicit post-colonial critique. For Azaro and those around him, the city is the wider world, an unnamed archetype of all conquered places, a space in which the issues of colonialism are played out, mirrored, often without an awareness on the part of the city's inhabitants that this is their cause, or that they hold this wider significance (149).

The novel reveals a majority of the city dwellers living in abject squalor:

I was frightened that there was no escape from the hard things of this world. Everywhere, there was the crudity of wounds, the stark huts, the rusted zinc abodes, the rubbish in the streets, children in rags, the little girls naked on the sand playing with crushed tin-cans, the little boys jumping about uncircumcised, making machine-gun noises, the air vibrating with poisonous heat and evaporating water from the filthy gutters. The sun bared the reality of our lives and everything was so harsh it was a mystery that we could understand and care for one another or for anything at all (161).

That the majority of the people live in abject squalor however does not presuppose that the African city is completely chaotic and dysfunctional. Poverty is not necessarily synonymous with chaos and dysfunction. The city is a ‘practiced’ space, as Upstone has rightly observed. What is therefore important is to recognize the diverse ways in which urban dwellers are able to cope with their harsh experiences in (or of) the environment, and yet, achieve legibility.

Apart from the presence of decipherable and easily recognisable spatial landmarks and appurtenances as can be gleaned from Lynch’s ideas, legibility, as has been argued by O’Neil, is achievable through familiarity with the environment. The characters in *The Famished Road* have no problem in adapting to their environment. For instance Azaro demonstrates his familiarity with the environment as well as familiarity with the events throughout the novel. This is the same of most of the other characters in the novel as they are able to navigate the environment freely. Madame Koto especially demonstrates her “knowledge” of the environment and her ability to deploy this knowledge to construct her space and identity. Hence, she is able to open multiple bars, shops and supermarkets where she sells assorted varieties of goods. Different people say different things about her. While some write her off as not being rich as she has too many people to cater for, others believe that she is so rich that she could feed everyone in the community for five years. But she is able to effectively devote time to each and all of her business outlets because of her knowledge of the environment and her deployment of same to her advantage. This is why she is more prosperous than everyone else in the ghetto in spite of whatever people say about her.

The Famished Road thus confirms my conception of legibility as intelligibility. Also, that Madame Koto prospers, and is able to open another bar in the city confirms the city as liveable for her. To this extent, the novel confirms legibility as liveability. Besides familiarity with the environment, the novel shows the characters' ability to interact with the environment in spite of the odds. Dad has no job, but is able to get along with life, doing odd jobs (like carrying loads) for a fee, in addition to engaging in boxing as a means of earning an extra 'income.' Subjects 'swarm' to public places and bars for spectacle, either for a drink or to watch boxing bouts. Even the blind old man, in the novel, demonstrates his mental mapping of the environment, his understanding of the terrain and his understanding of the event that is taking place around him, such that he even acts as commentator in a social gathering. The novel thus strengthens the notion of legibility as mental mapping of the environment.

Postcolonial city dwellers, through collaborative activities, are able to read and comprehend and navigate their cities. By so doing, they are able to remap their cities and (re)create their spaces within these cities. The city then becomes dynamic; hence its legibility is substantially dependent on the activities of its dwellers, as against Lynch's imageability model that is primarily anchored on static paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks and/or other predetermined appurtenances.

The Famished Road thus shows that people, somewhat, are able to devise means of constructing their space, as well as keep themselves happy in spite of the hardship they have to endure. In this way, they are able to create or construct a legible urban space through their interaction with the environment.

It is discernible from the novel that a city might be legible for some of its subjects while others may find it not legible. Since familiarity with the environment characterises legibility, those who are not familiar with it may yet find it ‘illegible.’ It is especially discernable that while the novel tends to confirm the hybridity paradigm, it contests the dystopian paradigm as everything thing about the postcolonial urban space is not about dysfunction and subaltern illegibility but the ability to survive and subvert the damning odds, associated with these, with a view to achieving or creating spatial legibility. This foregrounds my argument that there is no universal template for the city and that there is a legitimate basis for talking about the postcolonial city whether in conception or in fictional representation.

Occasions abound in the primary texts where some parts of the city are considered illegible by authorities. In such situations, authorities in their effort to ensure an ‘orderly’ environment embark on actions that ultimately compromise the subaltern navigation of the urban environment. This usually results in subaltern dislocation or disconnection from the urban environment. The role of the state in this resultant dislocation is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

OKEY NDIBE'S *ARROWS OF RAIN* AND THE TREASON OF THE STATE¹⁸

From a Panopticon: The Postcolonial City and the Location of Governmentality¹⁹

This chapter focuses on the postcolonial city as a location of governmentality. It examines the ways in which the state regulates the activities of its urban population with a view to creating a social order. It primarily examines the extent and impact of the state's relationship with its urban population and (urban) environment. This is necessary to determine the extent to which the state has contributed, often through its agents and privies, to the squalor of its cities and citizens and how *Arrows of Rain* represents the various scholarly positions on the subject.

I have, in the previous chapter, corroborated Patricia Yaeger's affirmation of the presence of poverty, squalor and crime in postcolonial (African) cities largely due to overpopulation (and have also argued that this does not necessarily presuppose urban illegibility). Edgar Pietersie notes Africa as the region with the fastest rate of urbanisation compared to all others. Attention is also drawn to the United Nations projections that the region will double its present urban population of 400 million to 750 million by 2030, a

¹⁸ "Treason of the State" is couched from Mike Davis's use of the term in his *Planet of Slums*. 'Treason' is sometimes used interchangeably with treachery in this chapter. Also, the state, as used in this chapter, refers to governments or their agents.

¹⁹ A Foucauldian concept that literally translates as 'the conduct of conduct,' governmentality is situated in this chapter within the political rationality that guides the actions of the state toward its urban population.

figure that is expected to triple to 1.2 billion by 2050. The implication of this is the escalation of the already squalid livid conditions of the region's urban dwellers partly due to state neglect, administrative ineptitude, inequitable economic development patterns and bad planning policies all of which are emblematic of the "tangible legacies of the savage colonial experiments we have been subjected to for most of the Enlightenment. (Pietersie 1). Accordingly, a great majority of African urban dwellers now live in slums. This is because the city developed with colonial templates did not envisage their presence. Hence, these subjects have no place in the city space – a situation that underscores the impropriety of imagining and mapping the city as per the Cartesian model that envisions it as a finished work of art on a painter's canvass. Consequently, the grossly inadequate facilities are overstretched, and postcolonial urban dwellers are left to resort to self-help.

The first direct result and easily noticeable feature of such self-help is the prevalence of slums in so-called Third world cities, as shacks and shanties fill up every available space.

These slum dwellers live a life of poverty and survival. The slum space accordingly becomes a site of violence, fraud, prostitution and drugs. The subjects become willing agents in the hands of desperate patrons. Slum life and its survival is not the focus of this chapter, as it will be extensively examined in the next chapter. The organized or formal sector – especially the state and its agencies – considers the slum space undesirable; hence various terms are used to refer to its dwellers including such terms as 'social miscreants,' 'thugs,' 'layabouts,' 'homeless,' 'undesirable elements,' etc.

The state, in response to the challenges of governmentality often initiates actions aimed at reconstructing or “cleaning up” its cities. This is often done in the blind bid to ‘reclaim’ the city, namely, to restore it to its ‘original’ plan and structure, or to achieve ‘legibility’, ‘modernity’ and ‘globalization.’ However, the focus, in this chapter is neither on slums nor on the survival and/or agency of its dwellers; it is, instead, on the fictional portrayal of the role and place of the state and its organs – or the ‘formal’ sector, properly so called – in the decay and/or dysfunction that may be associated with the postcolonial urban space. While the state has often embarked on exercises in urban governmentality, with the ‘intention’ of ‘enthroning’ order on the city, some scholars have maintained that the actions of the state – to the extent that such actions rob people of their right to interact freely with their environment – amount to “treason” (Davis 50). Others have averred that the state’s conception of the city, and indeed its environment generally, is flawed, panoptic and ineffectual. In this regard, Mike Davies emphasizes the position of Allan Gilbert and Peter Ward (254) that “If unmitigated capitalism has a mainly unacceptable face, a corrupt state acting on behalf of the rich is still worse. In such circumstances, little is to be gained by even trying to improve the system” (Davies 50). Hence, as James C. Scot also avers, “certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.” This is because the state continues to appropriate Western templates for assessing the African city without regard for different complexities of urban spaces – a situation that has often proved to be counter-productive.

The chapter also focuses on the city as a site or location of urban governmentality. The question arises: how does the state address the challenges of slums and the

debilitating living conditions of subalterns in the postcolonial African city? To ensure an orderly urban environment as Thomas Lemke observes, the concept of governmentality provides that the state engages (or rationalizes with) its population. On the strength of this engagement, it executes its plans, to the general good of its population and their environment. In this regard, governmentality thrives on “the close link between power relations and processes of subjectification” (Lemke 191). But Foucault notes that the state, in the bid to exercise governmentality, often acts from a panoptic perspective and, also, as a schoolmaster over the environment and its people. The state thus oversees or governs its environment and subjects from what Foucault calls hierarchical surveillance – a panoptic viewpoint whereby the state exercises surveillance over the environment from an all-knowing, all seeing, but often ignorant, myopic and ineffectual position.

Accordingly, the state assumes absolute knowledge and control of the urban environment and psyche. It accordingly formulates and effects plans that are aimed at shaping and reshaping the urban environment and, also, disciplining its subjects from an ‘all-seeing’ position in order to make the environment legible, readable and governable. But this position is only panoptic as the state only ‘views’ the environment from a distance and so, does not actually ‘see’ or take into consideration nor understand the full diversity of what goes on in its urban environments. Supervision, based on the panopticon, is thus bound to fail. H. Giroux, as cited by Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy (285) underscores the weakness or limitation of the hierarchical surveillance (panopticon) by examining its impact when used as a surveillance tool on youth behaviour:

The supervision of the minutiae of human behaviour and the hierarchical surveillance, which Foucault associates with bourgeois society, humanism, and the modern era have been breaking down drastically for some decades now. ... these controls over students' behaviour have all but disappeared – paradoxically so, given the plethora of “school safety officers” and security officers that jam the lobbies and corridors (Giroux 10).

Thus, if hierarchical control or surveillance of students and the school environment fails or “breaks down” with all the school safety and security officers as well as other apparatuses in place, as Giroux argues, then panoptic surveillance and control of the urban environment amounts to “felony” (Davies). Hence its continuous application by the state as a legibility model is part of what I have termed in this thesis as the “Treason of the State.”

The state commits ‘treason’ or treachery against its urban subjects, as it has shown (by, or, in its actions) that it is not always altruistic in its dealings with the people. Some African governments apply western assumptions aimed at crafting or constructing cities along preconceived urban cartographic patterns. Actions based on such assumptions ultimately become counter-productive as they are not suited to the people. The Maroko slum clearance in Lagos is a case study. According to R.A. Olu Sule, “the demolition of residents' houses at Maroko in Lagos was carried out without such necessary and fundamental information or data ... It was a planning disaster” (86). Accordingly, the environment that materializes from such assumptions becomes illegible to the people. The state fails to understand the people’s inability to adjust to the situation; this leads to

further actions that result in frustration and grief, and sometimes death for the urban dwellers. Sule contends that neither the slumlords (landlords) nor the planning authorities cared about the welfare of its victims. He frowns at what he calls the “The continued application of Western assumptions in urban development (whereas they have since been modified in those countries)” (90). I argue that even if the assumptions have not been modified in such countries, it is still counter-productive to appropriate as universal templates.

The states’ action portrays an act of treachery against the slum dwellers. According to Sule, it acted on behalf of the rich as portions of the site were later to be auctioned out to officers, contractors, politicians, friends of Government as well as other individuals and organizations with the means to pay the amounts for which the portions of the site were sold. Thus the primary intention of the state, from the outset, was not merely to make Maroko a functional urban space, but to make it so for the rich. In the end, this is not achieved. What then result are destruction, homelessness, frustration and desperation in the bid to survive. Expectedly, there is an escalation of crime – drugs, prostitution, theft, robbery, rape, general violence, etc. – as the people resort to every means possible in their bid to survive. Ironically, the state does not hesitate to use its security apparatus on the people. It resorts to using force to quell the confusion which its ineffectual plans and actions have brought about in the first case. As a result, people whose homes had been destroyed by the state are further terrorized. The agents of the state, as portrayed in *Arrows of Rain*, commit the same horrible crimes against the people they are ‘policing.’ The state, through its agents, in this way, robs the urban environment

of its people's engagement with it. Tunde Agbola and A.M. Jinadu note that "forced eviction represents a dimension of urban violence" (272). This corroborates the argument of Thayer Scudder and Elizabeth Colson that "forced resettlement is about the worst thing you can do to a people - next to killing them" (273).

Although, the state often predicates its actions on the need to foster legibility, as well as the aesthetic and ecological balance of the urban environment, its actions indicate that it acts as an eroding agent. For instance, the entire Isale-Eko was once cleared, with most of the people rendered homeless simply because the then Federal government wanted to give the visiting Queen of England a pleasing view of the area (Agbola and Jinadu). The action underscores the hypocrisy of the state in its dealings with its non-privileged urban dwellers.

Sule portrays the state as demonstrating a lack of foresight; hence its inability to take into consideration how the urban environment functions for its inhabitants. He highlights the vibrant social and economic activities that take place in the slum of Maroko, especially at night, for instance. Although he describes the bulk of these activities as prostitution, petty trade, etc., what is clear is that the people of Maroko engaged in productive activities, in spite of their poverty, before their forced clearance from the environment. Because the state envisions – and wishes to create – a 'global' city, it fails to take into consideration the vibrant interaction between Maroko and its dwellers. It fails to recognize that the Maroko dwellers are able to navigate its space and construct their individual and collective identities in it, since they understand its spatial

morphology. Part of the treachery is that although Maroko was cleared, conscious efforts were not taken by the state to resettle the people.

The state often demonstrates a lack the foresight to understand the relationship of the subjects with the city. This has often resulted in the state carrying out plans and actions that erode the legibility that exists in its urban environment regardless of the latter's spatial morphology. This is comparable to what Franz Fanon has noted in his examination of "The Trials and Tribulations of National consciousness" (67) as lack of practical ties between the bourgeoisie – the state in this regard – and the masses as the main cause of the wretched state of affairs in the postcolony. Accordingly, there is the lack of practical ties between the state and the masses of its urban environment – a situation that has resulted in the masses being often regarded as undesirable urban elements, without understanding their relationship with the (urban) environment. A fundamental element of the urban environment is thereby destroyed via the state's actions, as such are based on inadequate knowledge of the environment or the vibrant relationship between the so-called undesirable elements and their urban space, be it slum, ghetto, informal location, downtown, township, etc., vis-à-vis the interdependence of these elements and their environment with the formal sector. There is the need to clarify that I do not imply that slums are good because the inhabitants understand their environment. The argument, however, is that the state does not 'know' the slum environment enough to assume it so undesirable that the only option is to clear it of its dwellers. There is a vibrant relationship between the inhabitants and the environment which the state has not taken note of. It is this vibrant relationship that makes the

environment legible for the inhabitants despite its squalid conditions – a legibility that the state does not seem to notice. Any action that compromises this relationship can only result in dislocation as well as compromise whatever legibility is left of an already squalid environment, as *Arrows of Rain* has shown.

The state has also contributed largely to the so-called chaotic and illegible nature of its cities as well as the squalid life of its urban subjects through deliberate neglect. As Pietersie has noted earlier, the state, bent on discouraging rural-to-urban migration decides not to put in place basic facilities for its subject who inhabit areas it considers outside of the city's original plan. This deliberate act of neglecting its people and leaving them to their fate results in a culture of survival of the fittest among the people – an act that amounts to 'treason of the state' against its own people (Davis). Accordingly, the people resort to self-help and desperate survival strategies. It is only logical that the attendant crime, violence, prostitution and all forms of self-help which the people resort to, in their bid for survival and relevance, are largely predicated on the irresponsibility of the state and/or the ineptitude of its agents.

More worrisome is the double standard that is often employed by the state in its urban governmentality exercise; that is, its so-called bid to sanitize the city's spatial morphology. As portrayed in *Arrows of Rain* and other primary texts, analyzed in this thesis, agents of the postcolonial state often take part in – and are often perpetrators of – so-called chaos, crime and grime pervasive in its cities. The state, usually via its agents, has been portrayed in the primary texts as being responsible for the chaos and crime that

it often purports to eradicate. James Scott offers elaborate insights into the futility of this state-driven act of governmentality.

Scott, High Modernism and Metis²⁰

Interestingly, Scott's stance, in his seminal work, on the failure of state-structured legibility is similar to an earlier one taken by Idris S. Kikula, in the latter's examination of the villagization scheme in Tanzania, which, he (Kikula) argues, was a complete disruption of "well adapted local system of resource use and management" and was thus counter-productive (Rogers 612). Rogers²¹ concurs that the pre-villagization period witnessed "a high rate of population growth and a low level of environmental degradation. He acknowledges that villagization "produced a vicious circle which threatens the subsistence base of the community" (612). The failure of the villagization scheme is thus ascribed to the state's lack of local knowledge of the environment. Hence, Rogers emphasizes, local knowledge and local participation must be central elements of any development process, "especially those with a resettlement component." Like Kikula and Rogers, Scot presents the Tanzanian villagization and other such programmes (like the Collectivization programme in Russia) as failed projects. He regards them as products

²⁰ In classical mythology, Metis is the goddess of wisdom, considered as all-wise, all-knowing and all-seeing. In modern discourse, the term refers to local knowledge or understanding. Thus, any urban (re)structuring without recourse to Métis is either panoptic or self-seeking. Scott emphasizes that the states' grandiose mapping of the urban environment lacks a great deal of métis or local knowledge.

²¹ This similarity with James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* is captured by Peter Rogers in his review of Idris S. Kikula's *Policy Implications on Environment: the case of villagization in Tanzania*.

of high modernism which erodes the local legibility of the environment. He thus emphasized the failure of the Tanzanian compulsory villagization programme to stress the fundamental role of local knowledge for environmental governmentality to be successful. Kikula examines in detail the environmental and social change in five villages of the Mufindi District, Iringa Region, over a period of thirty-six years, from 1948 to 1984 (Rogers 612). Echoing Kikula, Rogers argues: “The key turning point came in 1974 when the people of Mufindi were 'villagized' by the Tanzanian state. At a stroke, this overturned the previous pattern of dispersed settlement and concentrated the area's inhabitants in a pattern of 'mono-nucleated multipartite villages’” (612). Thus, villagization changed the social patterns and the way the people lived. It impacted negatively on their lifestyles, their mapping of the environment, as well as the ways they had, hitherto, constructed their identities and navigated their spatial boundaries. Kikula's contention is that the pre-villagization urban environment was quite legible to its inhabitants. He concedes that there were clusters of houses, but nevertheless, argues that these clusters “indicated a grouping of people belonging to patrilocal descent groups,” and that “it suggests an ecological adaptation to resource use” (56). Thus, any environmental (re)structuring without recourse to *Métis* is either panoptic or self-seeking. To Kikula, the state's knowledge or understanding of the situation before villagization only amounts to a knowledge or an understanding from without. Hence, the state's understanding of the environment is only from “the outsider's perspective.” Hence, also, Scot rejects what he calls high modernism because it is not predicated on local knowledge. Human condition – legibility in this context – cannot be improved as the state

is only an ‘outsider’ to the people and their world. ‘High modernism’ is accordingly predicated on “the outsider’s perspective, and accordingly, as far as Scot is concerned, has failed.

Rogers agrees with Kikula that the sudden and drastic change in settlement patterns is the fundamental cause of the various sorts of environmental degradation observed by local community from 1974 to 1984. He argues that there was order and local understanding of the area before the people were compulsorily ‘villagized.’ According to him, “The pre-1974 dispersed settlement pattern was part of a larger system of environmental adaptation developed over time by the Wahehe people of the area” (612).

Scott considers the purported effort by the state to ‘sanitize’ its cities as grandiose and self-seeking – an effort that further worsens the situation of the city dwellers. He notes that the state usually attempts to create so-called orderly environments for its urban spaces, using templates with preconceived appurtenances and/or tendencies. Scott shows how the Julius Nyerere’s²² government in Tanzania employed this ‘grandiose’ effort in its forced villagization programme, whereby people were compulsorily resettled into designated villages. This, according to the government was to make the environment more easily navigable by the citizens and legible to the state.

The contention is that the State lacks *métis*, which, according to Scott, is broadly understood to represent “a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in

²²Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) was elected Prime Minister of Tangayika in 1961. He became President of the confederated state of Tanzania in 1985, after Tangayika had merged with Zanzibar.

responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment” (313). Thus, since the state does not understand the full diversity of what goes on among the city dwellers, and as such, cannot model them, its actions in the name of exercising environmental governmentality are bound to fail. He notes that for the state to foist its own style of legibility on the urban environment, it needs to have a practical knowledge of the local environment itself. He argues, for instance, that:

Much of early modern European statecraft seemed similarly devoted to a rationalizing and standardizing what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format. The social simplifications thus introduced not only permitted a more finely tuned system of taxation and conscription but also greatly enhanced state capacity. They made possible quite discriminating interventions of every kind, such as public health measures, political surveillance, and relief for the poor. (Scott 3)

As earlier noted, the state only views the city from a panoptic position. It views the city only from without – a lopsided view that only caters for the physical structures of the city without recourse to the welfare or even the activities of its dwellers. The state does not have a clear view or understanding of the city, and as such, is incapable of exercising governmentality in a way that can enhance the legibility of the city or improve the spatial identities that the dwellers have constructed. Accordingly, Scott posits that “Certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.” It can therefore be inferred from the foregoing that attempts to remake societies, and cities in particular, based on the thinking of the state are inappropriate and are bound to fail.

As a consequence, the societies (cities) become worse than they have initially been, prior to the inappropriate exercise of (urban) governmentality. Scott rejects “High Modernism,” which is informed by the state’s grandiose attempts at utopia – an attempt that imagines the city as a finished product, and conceives it as a highly sophisticated, aprioristic structure. He calls for an environment that is anchored on local knowledge – a simple, but clear knowledge of the environment, which takes into account the latter’s relationship or engagement with its dwellers. It is these activities, rather than the grandiose or high modernist structuring, that enable the city to work. Emphasis is therefore not necessarily on the city of physical structures, but on the city of human structures.

Erik Bahre considers the phenomenon of development to be “puzzling, contradictory and complex” (79). In his examination of the impact of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in South Africa, which was embarked upon by the state to make life more “meaningful” to the people of Indawo Yoxolo, he examined critically Scott’s dismissal of state-driven development projects as grandiose and high-modernist, and stops short of accusing him of being guilty of the same lack of metis. To Bahre, schemes to improve human condition are not a straitjacket, and cannot be dismissed in one sweeping statement as having failed. This, according to him, is particularly apparent when one examines the way in which state-driven development transformed the area of Indawo Yoxolo in Cape Town” (79). Bahre stresses the need to look beyond legibility – that is, consider every aspect, and have complete knowledge and understanding – in the assessment of state development programmes. He stresses that “in

order to understand the relative success or failure of development, one needs to go beyond legibility and examine development as an arena of contestation over scarce resources, ideological justifications, as well as political security” (81). He argues further that “If one wishes to examine how successful or dramatic a development project is, one cannot avoid the question: ‘according to whom?’ He avers, to buttress his position, that state development programmes do, indeed, work, and that such programmes do, indeed, enhance legibility. He argues “Surely, in some respects, development in Indawo Yoxolo has been successful; there are demarcated plots, sewage systems, electricity, schools, taxi ranks, and recently, a shipping container has been placed to house the local police station” (97). He, accordingly, faults Scot’s position on his analysis of development (that is, Scot’s notion of how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed). He concedes that Scot’s “analysis of development is extremely valuable,” but avers that, yet, “It fails to capture how conflict and violence is at the heart of development. The focus on planning, policy development, language, and conceptual frameworks underlying development, conveys that violence and human suffering is taking place elsewhere, somewhere outside of the realm of development practices” (99)

Although Bahre fault’s Scot’s position on the analysis of development, the result of his (Bahre’s) study confirms otherwise. His result confirms the failure of state driven development programmes, for according to him, “The case study of Indawo Yoxolo reveals that, instead of the establishment of more or less hegemonic power of the state over its citizens, state development led to fierce and violent conflicts in which mafia-style leaders, rivaling political factions, as well as protesting residents, tried to take charge of

the development project” (81). This portends the state-driven programme as counter-productive, thereby eroding the environment of the legibility which it (the state) purports to create or ensure. By Bahre’s admission of the findings of his study of Reconstruction and Development Programme in South Africa, especially in Indawo Yoxolo, in Cape Town (his case study), “there is much dissatisfaction as these development resources were frequently distributed through corruption, while violence and intimidation were at the core of the development process” (97). Thus, just as Olu Sule reveals in his study of Maroko resettlement programme in Lagos, that the state’s bid to foist legibility on the people and their environment was a planning disaster, Bahre concludes, in his study of the state’s Reconstruction and Development Programme in IndawoYoxolo, in Cape Town that “Development failed to reach its explicit objective to increase empowerment and democracy on a grassroots level and build a secure community” (97). His findings that the programme failed to achieve certain set objectives are indicative of the state’s failure to grapple with the reality of the people and their environment, and a further confirmation of Scot’s position on the failure and undesirability of “high modernism.” Sule’s conclusion is especially noteworthy with regard to why several state-driven programmes fail in their bid to make postcolonial environments ‘legible’: “Western assumptions under limited resources and in an environment completely alien to them is partially responsible. ...” (Sule 81).

In his review of Scott’s *Seeing like a State*, Michael Briggs, like Bahre, emphasizes the inappropriateness of universalizing a rational (urban) plan and the need to investigate “the other side.” Presenting Scott’s position metaphorically, he avers that the

point “is not merely that the cure for social ills has proven inadequate – but that the disease inhered in the diagnosis, and that failure will continue so long as the doctors prevail” (852). He contends that “liberal economies are not so prone to pathological dysfunction, because firms are constrained by the need to attract free labor and to make profits,” or generally because of state-driven ‘high modernist’ programmes as Scot has argued. He concedes, however that “True, as Scott observes, the state often favors inefficient large enterprises (like plantations) because they are easily taxed; they also wield sufficient influence to obtain protection.” (853).

Thus, there is always something wrong in state-orchestrated ‘legibility’ programmes as rightly contended by Scott. Michael Adas offers a sense in which Scot has used the term: “Legibility, as Scott employs the term in demonstrating the commonalities among these processes, includes standardization, simplification, codification, abstraction, and the valorization of procedures deemed to be scientific (that is objective, precise, and universally valid) at the expense of local knowledge” (959). He notes that Scott authoritatively demonstrates “the dehumanization, destruction, and environmental degradation that have very often been the main products of these grand schemes to remake the world according to high modernist ideals” and modernizing projects that have “invariably resulted in widespread bureaucratic bullying and state violence against its citizens, the destruction of viable communities and patterns of livelihood, and environmental devastation” (Adas 960). Adas comments on the three instances in which high modernism thrives:

First, civil society is leveled by severe traumatic shocks, such as defeat in war, state collapse and revolution. In its prostrate condition, the society is vulnerable to the seizure of power by political factions determined to build an authoritarian regime. Finally, the ideologues of the extreme factions are committed to some version of high modernism as a grand blueprint for societal transformation. (960)

Adas notes, however, that Tanzania did not experience any of the three instances highlighted above to warrant the villagisation scheme. He agrees with Scot that state-driven social engineering projects are mere “exercises in bureaucratic hubris.” Specifically, he regards Tanzania’s villagization under Julius Nyerere as grossly misconceived:

The society in which Nyerere's planned village experiments were conducted had known neither war nor revolution. It may well have been the poorer for decades of British and German colonial rule, but its disparate ethnic (sic) groups and local communities were hardly prostrate when villagization began – a point Scott convincingly demonstrates (961).

Adas further notes that the bureaucratic hubris occasioned by villagization was fueled with large donations from international agencies which had their selfish reasons for such assistance. The consequence is that villagization, and such other exercises, emboldened and strengthened by external aid, have indeed decimated the people and eroded whatever spatial legibilities they had. He laments “the external aid that international lending agencies poured into Tanzania in support of Nyerere's misconceived experiment in modernization,” and avers that “In fact, this outside assistance may well have played a

role in buffering the impact of the Tanzanian villagization. As Scott shows there was plenty of bureaucratic idiocy, arrogance and even incidents of brutal coercion in Tanzania” (961). He argues that apart from the Tanzania’s villagization, Russia’s collectivization and Germany’s cadastral landscaping schemes that Scot analyses in *Seeing Like a State*, trappings of high modernism and “similar outcomes have also occurred in China and Cambodia in recent decades” (960).

Although, Adas agrees with Scot in the latter’s portrayal and condemnation of high modernism and such other ‘exercises in bureaucratic hubris,’ he argues that Scot does not provide a viable alternative; besides, Scot contradicts his own position by his admission of state driven industrial modes of production in some areas. Noteworthy, that Scott’s concession of the success high modernism in temperate areas is contrast with his condemnation of the states’ extension of the same high modernist techniques “to much of the post-colonial tropical and subtropical world (963). He notes, also, that “Jane Jacobs, whose philosophy of urban planning Scott explores with sensitivity and to good effect, rejected not the high modernist city that New York had become long before the 1960s when she wrote, but the arrogant and community-hostile vision of planners like Le Corbusier and Robert Moses²³ as to how that modernism ought to be extended and enhanced.” (962).

²³ Le Corbursier is reputable for employing modern high design as a way of providing better living conditions for the residents of crowded cities. Robert Moses, regarded by many as the “Shaper of Modern city,” is reputed for favouring highways over public transit, a decision that is largely linked to the emergence of modern suburbia. See Michael Adas’s “Review Essay: *Seeing Like a State*” for more.

Adas concedes, however, that although Scott has been variously criticized for his anti ‘high-modernism’ position, vis-à-vis his seeming failure to provide viable alternatives, he (Scott) mitigates the critiques by “a spirited defense of local communities as repositories of what Scott characterized as *metis*, or knowledge/practice worked out over centuries, sometimes millennia, of trial and error” (963). Accordingly, state driven social engineering projects, aimed at enforcing Spatial ‘legibility’ have been largely counter-productive. As Adas concludes, “one can only hope that Scott's well-founded and thoughtful reflections on these questions of vital relevance to planetary survival will be given the attention they deserve in a period when high modernism reigns in its liberal market-capitalist variant and its rivals appear to have been consigned to another sort of dust bin of history” (963).

But Scott does provide an alternative. In the recourse to *métis*, he emphasizes the need for local knowledge in crafting spatial legibility. He emphasizes that the environment is best understood by the locals, that is, the community. His position is that the community can be best mapped and managed by its people – those who have the local knowledge of its spatial, temporal and intelligible boundaries. Thus, to Scott, the community serves as a veritable alternative to the state in terms of schemes to improve its legibility (human conditions). Thus, environmental legibility can be enhanced if grandiose schemes are not forced on the people, and if members of the community with full local knowledge (*métis*) determine what schemes are good for it, and if these schemes are formulated and executed by the people.

Peter Geschiere notes that a major problem with Scott is that “despite all his insistence that he was not romanticizing – he might have accepted ‘the’ community too easily as some sort of independent alternative to the state,” and emphasizes that “In practice, state and community are historically often closely intertwined and in many contexts the community seems to be a product of state formation itself, rather than an alternative outside of it” (130). Geschiere questions the veracity of Scott’s dismissal of high modernist schemes. He questions the propriety of discarding such schemes, and emphasizes that practical realities adjusted the schemes to suite the community. He argues that “For Africa in particular, there are good reasons to emphasize that, on the one hand, the modernist pretensions of the colonial state certainly had their own impact but, on the other, were constantly corrected by practical circumstances” (129). He further questions the propriety and currency of Scott’s high modernist claims in Africa: “At least on paper, development in most parts of Africa is no longer dominated by high modernist schemes, but rather by a determined attempt to encourage initiative by local communities and thus relate to regional variations (*metis*’ knowledge?).” (130) In his conclusion, Geschiere concedes that “The emphasis on high modernist schemes by the state may have its problems” He maintains, however, that it (the emphasis) “clearly does raise interesting debates) and insists that “it is certainly as important to be critical of the notion of ‘the’ community that has come to play such a central role in neo-liberal development” (132). He alludes to Bahre’s examination of the impact of the Government’s driven Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in Indawo Yoxolo in Cape Town which reveals that the community is not a viable alternative – as Scott tends to propose –

due to the often violent rivalries arising from Indawo Yoxolo local Mafia gangs over contracts and perks of the programme.

But Scott's position cannot be faulted on the strength of the emergence of local gangs and the attendant violence in Indawo Yoxolo. What both Bahre and Geschiere do not seem to take into consideration is that the RDP was a state-driven scheme which did not originate from the community. If anything, the attendant gangsterism and other forms of corruption that attended the RDP in Indawo Yoxolo is a further confirmation of Scott's position that such schemes are counter-productive.

Deepika Bahri draws attention to the significance of native intelligence, in the scheme of things, while examining the role of aesthetics in postcolonial writing. She foregrounds the fundamental role of native intelligence in aestheticizing literature. There is an interesting parallel (in Bahri's native intelligence) with the positions canvassed by both Kikula and Scott. In aestheticising the urban space, and in the quest for modernity and legibility, 'native intelligence,' anchored on the knowledge and understanding of the environment, plays a fundamental role.

The argument is that the postcolonial city, despite all the odds, continues to function if the state defers to the complicated social realities of the people and their environment and if it refrains from its panoptic social (re)engineering. The thrust of the matter therefore is that, in spite of visible odds, each postcolonial city functions – in its unique way – and that, it is the state, through its actions that has tended to compromise subaltern relationship with the city. Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* represents this argument as evident from the novel's analysis below.

Okey Ndibe and the Arrows of Rain²⁴

Told in the first person by three different narrators, Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* is a story of violence, corruption, hypocrisy, anger, love and betrayal. The novel is set in the Republic of Madia – a fictive reference to Nigeria. It begins with the discovery of the body of a prostitute who is gang-raped by soldiers who are members of the Vice Squad, a taskforce set up to rid the country of Madia of prostitutes in order to make it attractive to tourists. The prostitute, like several others before her, is seized on the street of Langa, a fictive reference to Lagos. She is, like several others before her bundled into a military truck and driven to the B Beach, which is also a fictive reference to the Bar Beach in Lagos, and gang-raped in an ordeal that lasts four hours. The soldiers abandon her in the beach and drive away. Bukuru, a mad man in the beach witnesses everything. He approaches the victim in order to comfort her and render whatever help is possible. The victim mistakes him for one of her assailants, or perhaps another sex predator and takes to her heels. As she runs to towards the Atlantic Ocean, Bukuru goes after her, intent on saving her life. She runs farther into the sea. Lanky, a lifeguard, dives into the ocean, also with a view to saving her, but she plunges herself into the sea and is drowned. Soon after,

²⁴ Born in Yola, North-Eastern Nigeria, Okey Ndibe's contributions have appeared in several publications, including *Hartford Courant*, *The Fabian Society Journal*, *Black Issues Book Review*, BBC Online, etc. His poetry is published in *New West African Poets*, edited by Tijan Sallah. He is the author of the novel, *Arrows of Rain*. His essay, "My Biafran Eyes," about his childhood experience of war, is published in the *Dzanc Best of the Web 2008*. Ndibe is co-editor (with the Zimbabwean writer, Chenjerai Hove) of a collection of essays, entitled *Writers, Writing on Conflicts and Wars in Africa*.

policemen, led by Lieutenant Lati arrive for investigation. Lanky excitedly tells and retells the story of the prostitute's death with gusto and exaggerated details. Interesting as Lanky's story is, the Police get nothing as all his (Lanky's) accounts dwell on the prostitute's death and how he had tried to save her. He revels in telling his tale to the enjoyment of people around, especially a drunk group of white men and a woman that have just arrived at the beach. There is no lead with regard to the cause of death in his lengthy account. Bukuru's opinion is sought, and he tells them the truth: the prostitute is a rape victim – raped by soldiers, who, as members of the Vice Squad are agents of the Government of Madia. The police would have none of this and promptly warn Bukuru of the consequences of making 'false' allegations against dutiful and loyal agents of the government of Madia led by the life President, Isa Pallat Bello. Bukuru insists on his story. He tells the policemen that prostitutes have repeatedly been brought by soldiers to B Beach and raped. He tells the policemen that rape and murder are favourite practices among some of the soldiers connected with the Madian government. He informs the policemen that even the Madian Life President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces, General Isa Pallat Bello is a rapist. He informs them that the President, when he was a Major repeatedly raped a prostitute, named Iyese, and killed her afterwards.

In his review of *Arrows of Rain*, Wumi Raji identifies “mega-narration, main-narration and sub-narration” (144) as the three levels of analysis in the novel. He concentrates on the novel's preoccupation with the political and economic identities of the country and describes it as a narrative of prostitution. He approaches the novel from the point of view of symbolism in which he likens the story of the three major characters

in the novel to the story of Nigeria (Mafia) – namely, that the country is a product of prostitution:

First we must ask ourselves, what is the identity of this space called Mafia [Nigeria²⁵]? Why does our present bear no marks of our past? What is the meaning of our history? These questions can only lead us to one truth, namely that we live in a bastard nation. Then we must decide what to do with this illegitimate offspring. (Ndibe 123-124).

Raji argues that novel's concern is on Ndibe's articulation that Nigeria, as constituted, is a misnomer – a web of prostitution involving the three major ethnic groups: Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo with the minority ethnic groups. He argues that He argues that Ogunua's story in the novel is a portrayal of, and synonymous with, the Nigeria story:

Arrows of Rain is the narrative of a postcolonial nation, one that is the product of prostitution.... Iyese is a prostitute and belongs to a minority ethnic group. She is raped by Isa Palat Bello. ... Bello is the son of an Emir and obviously a member of a majority ethnic group, the Hausa /Fulani. But Iyese also goes to bed with Ogunua who is from the Igbo, another majority ethnic group, precisely a day before the raping. (Raji 144-145)

His position on the novel being an examination of the political/demographic structure of the country is shared by Obi Nwakanma who sees the novel as “a coming to terms with

²⁵ This is Raji's emphasis as 'Nigeria' is not mentioned in the novel. It is however a general opinion among scholars.

the factors of history in resolving the fundamental distortions of the nation as a shared community.” (11)

Although Raji does not emphasise the novel’s portrayal of urban governmentality which is the main concern of this chapter, he does suggest that the focus of its narration is the incompatibility of Madia’s (Nigerian’s) federating units that has necessitated the “Political incompetence, lack of commitment, corruption, waste, mismanagement and self-deception” that have continued to immiserise the land and its people.

What Raji sees as an inconsistency in the novel’s presentation is indeed my interest. For instance, he sees as inconsistent the novel’s call for a mutually agreeable union from which either of the parties could opt out, and in which new parties are welcome to join, after dismissing the union as an inappropriate one between incompatible parties:

At some point Ndibe appears unsure of the image he wants to project of Nigeria; whether that of bastardy or of prostitution. Ndibe argues for a clause in an envisaged constitution that will allow any part of the country that so wishes to break away, and any new part that so desires to join. Here the clarity of the author's intention is unclear. Practically, a bastard cannot chop off any aspect of its complex identity; he can only seek to understand it and work out terms of accommodating and relating with the different parts. With a prostitute, on the other hand, it is possible to enter, and pull out, at will. (147)

However the case being made in the novel is that of change resulting from subaltern engagement with the environment. Rita Nnodim argues that “Pa Ata, the father of the Honourable Minister Reuben Ata in Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain*, “envisions a concept of

nationhood that is open to change and reconfigurations of space.” (Nnodim 330). This supports my earlier argument that the city, as portrayed by the novel is a dialectical space which shapes its subjects, and is, in turn, reshaped by the subjects in a continuous process.

Irony, Paradox and Symbolism in *Arrows of Rain*

Arrows of Rain is a novel of ironies and paradoxes. It tends to emphasise the notion of the abnormal as the norm. I examine the employment of irony as well as paradox and symbolism from the novel’s portrayal of characters and incidents. The issue of madness is a convenient reference point – as in the case when Ogugua resolves to go ‘mad’ Bukuru in order to escape persecution from General Isa Palat Bello. It is an irony that Bukuru, the supposedly mad man in the novel turns out to be a representation of sanity. Similarly, the psychiatrist who is appointed by the government to examine ‘mad’ Bukuru and determine his mental state is the one who is eventually ‘examined’ by Bukuru, and who is portrayed as less sane than the latter.

Although he is supposed to be a mad man, Bukuru is promptly arrested as a serial rapist, and for the death of the prostitute at B Beach as well as the death of several others. The high-profile murder case is so celebrated, that it attracts interest, not just from the Madian Press, but also from other international media agencies, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). He is charged to court where more drama is to follow. First, he rejects the free offer of legal representation and opted to defend himself. He is reminded by the judge of the implication of his rejection of the legal representation freely

offered him. But Bukuru, the mad man proves to be saner than his prosecutors. He especially proves in court to be saner than Dr. Mara, the reputable psychiatrist appointed by the Government of Madia to determine his (Bukuru's) mental state. Thus, what is expected to be a one-way matter between the Prosecutors and a 'mad' and defenseless Bukuru turns out to be complex, as he thoroughly outwits his prosecutors and their witnesses. He is apparently bent on proving his innocence; hence he makes his prosecutors and the witnesses they have brought against him to look mad as he deftly cross-examines them. Even the Judge is amazed by the professional manner in which the madman cross examines the witnesses who are considered experts in his court. This underscores the paradox in the novel

Bukuru again informs the court that the prostitute had been raped and murdered by a gang of soldiers who are members of the Vice Squad. The Judge who is apparently out to serve the interest of the Government would hear none of that. He warns Bukuru of the consequences of accusing loyal and efficient officers of the Madian Government. Bukuru informs the court that the leader of the Madian Government, His Excellency the Life President of the Federal Republic of Madia, General Isa Palat Bello is himself a rapist and murderer. The judge is alarmed and enraged. He promptly slams a "Contempt of Court verdict on Bukuru and orders him to be reminded in prison custody where another certified psychiatrist would be required to ascertain his sanity. He also bans the media from reporting the day's court proceedings.

Sensing rightly that the Madian Government of Isa Palat Bello plans to get rid of him, Bukuru sends for Femi Adero, the young journalist that has dared to write about the

proceedings of his trial. He tells Femi to be his voice since he (Bukuru) has lost his, by helping him to publicize his life story, especially his ordeals in the phantom murder trial. From his memoir, which he sends later to Femi, Bukuru reveals his real name to be Ogugua. On how he ends up being a 'madman,' Bukuru, now Ogugua, reveals that he opts to state-manage his madness in order to escape the wrath of General Isa Palat Bello. He reveals that he had shared a girlfriend, Iyese with Palat Bello in the past.

Iyese, a prostitute, had been the mistress of General Palat Bello, the son of an influential Emir, and who was then a Major in the Madian army. Palat Bello had forced the relationship on the prostitute. Calling himself Major Penis, the randy Major had repeatedly raped Iyese.

On discovering the relationship between her and Ogugua, Palat Bello threatens to deal with her. He returns that same day to stab her vagina with a knife, and then, rape her afterwards. Ogugua returns to Iyese's apartment, meeting her in a pool of her blood. He and Iyese's friend, Violet, take her to the hospital. Fearing for his life, Ogugua abandons Iyese in the hospital and never returns to see her. Iyese writes several letters to him but he never replies any of them. In one of such letters, Iyese informs him that she is pregnant with his child. Palat Bello, believing that he is the father of the child, makes peace with Iyese and showers her with gifts. He has desperately longed for a male child. Meanwhile, on the day he finally visits her apartment, after Iyese has given birth to a male child, Ogugua finds Iyese murdered and her child stabbed on the right foot and deeply wounded. For fear of being linked with the murder, he sneaks out of the apartment. Violet brings the news of Iyese's death to Ogugua in his office. She informs him that Major Isa

Palat Bello has murdered Iyese. The child, deeply wounded by Palat Bello, is taken to the Child Welfare. The reason for Bello's action, Violet informs Ogugua, is that Emilia (Iyese) had denied him paternity of her male child. Iyese had informed Palat Bello that Ogugua is the child's father, and had planned the naming ceremony of the child for the same Saturday that she is eventually murdered. She had planned to name the child "Ogugua" after his father. From then onward, Ogugua lives in fear and guilt. These, are however, abated with time. Several years later, the corrupt civilian government in Madia is toppled, and Major Palat Bello now a General assumes office as Life President and Commander-in-Chief of the Madian Armed Forces. With the development, Ogugua's fear for his life returns. He abandons his job and runs away from his house. He resolves to live in B Beach, as a madman, as the only way to escape death in the hands of General Palat Bello. Since then, he has come to be known and identified as Bukuru the madman.

The resort to silence by Ogugua, a journalist, rather than report the story and experiences of Iyese which he had offered to publish for the latter, is another ironic twist in the novel. He resorts to silence in order to have peace of mind; but the opposite is the case, as his silence proves fatal, and would hunt him for the rest of his life. Hence, he laments in the end: "I am here because many years ago I fooled myself that the counterfeit coin of silence was good enough to buy peace of mind. I forgot my grandmother's wisdom, that the mouth owes stories the debt of speech" (245). Thus, Bukuru's life as Nwakanma notes, "replicates the fragmentation and alienation of the conscientized, following their experience of the new nation, a withdrawal from reality,

and thus an abdication of the moral capacity that is capable of reconstituting the nation.”
(Nwakanma 11-12)

There are startling discoveries in Bukuru’s memoirs to Adero. Bukuru’s claim in court that the General Isa Palat Bello, the Life president and Commander-in-Chief of Madia’s Armed Forces, is a murderer and rapist is not a lie, after all. Indeed, following his startling revelations in Court, the Government decides to kill him. In a dramatic twist, circumstances tend to reveal Adero to be the ‘unfortunate’ child, and Iyese, Adero’s mother. Adero confronts Bukuru with the development. Although, there is no tacit acknowledgement from the latter, it is clear that Adero is the ill-fated child, while Bukuru is his father, and Iyese, his mother. Bukuru later commits suicide. In his suicide note left for Adero, he is overcome with guilt and grief over the death of Iyese and his failure to act responsibly in the events surrounding her death, vis-à-vis the shameful manner he had abandoned her and her fatally wounded child.

The name ‘Madia,’ which is a fictional reference to Nigeria, is indeed symbolic of the actions of the state toward its people. Seri Luangphinit cites *Arrows of Rain* among the other African novel that “portray how ‘psychological’ disorders serve as mirrors of the chaotic and brutal consequence of occupation” (59). I argue that the action of the Madian authorities in *Arrows of Rain* is symbolic of how agents of the postcolonial state constitute an army of occupation against its people and their urban environment. The name ‘Madia’ is symbolic of country in a state of madness. The state’s (or its agents’) exercise in urban governmentality breeds nothing but ‘madness.’ This accounts for why

Ogugua resolves to go mad as he sees madness as his only means of achieving peace and surviving persecution from Isa Palat Bello.

Palat Bello, from whom Ogugua seeks an escape by deliberately turning into the mad Bukuru, is portrayed as mad. His repeated violent treatment of Iyese and his flippant utterances are not characteristic of a sane person.

Arrows of Rain and the Treachery of the State

How does the novel underscore the treachery of the state against its citizens?

Nnodim notes that “*Arrows of Rain* is a novel of the city and the political abuse of power” (325). Tactics that threaten subaltern existence are usually employed by the state in the latter’s exercise of urban governmentality: “While the rapes and killings of prostitutes in Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain* are symbols of the ruthless power of political authorities” (Nnodim 328).

The novel reveals the Madian urban space as a site of violence as a result of the state’s constant intervention in it. It opens with an account of the death of a prostitute in Lagos, who would later be revealed to be Iyese:

The young woman lay on the sands, her mouth in a frozen smile as if nothing in the whole world surpassed the sweetness of death. Her face was hardy, but death made it seem older and sadder than twenty. Her eyes bulged glassy, like a grasshopper’s. Her bright blue shirt and skimpy flamingo skirt hung loosely about her, rent. A large copper earring dangled from her left ear. Patterned into the circle

was the image of an eagle in the attitude of flight. Her right ear was bare, bloody.

(Ndibe 3)

It is clear from the above description that the young woman has been a victim of violent abuse and rape from agents of the Madian state. Bukuru recalls the events leading to her death: “That night, screams pierced the air again, a single woman’s shriek, long and steady. There were male voices, too: barking at her, taunting her, hooting, gloating, laughing lecherously” (219). Bukuru recounts several incidents of violence and rape against women even before that of the prostitute that leads to his arrest:

One after the other, the figures cast off their clothes, then dropped to the ground.

At first, I thought there was only one woman. Then I heard another piercing gasp, the sound a woman makes when the flesh of her sex is torn. A third woman joined in. Perhaps, she was younger than the first two, or else more broken by the tearing of her tissue. ... Two hours later, finally sated, the men put their clothes back on and made off in a military truck. (214)

It is noteworthy that it is not only prostitutes that are the target of violence from these armed agents of the Madian government under Palat Bello as revealed in the novel: “One of the girls kept shouting that she is not a prostitute. The commander of the troops slapped her until she collapsed. Then he stood over her. Smiling, he said, “if you are not a prostitute, that means you are fresh meat. That’s the kind I like. I will make you a prostitute tonight”” (Ndibe 216). From the foregoing, it is evident that the serial rapes and murder of prostitutes in the novel, some of them innocent women, is a deliberate and meticulous act by the agents of the state. The irony is that these serial rapists and

murderers are the same agents that are charged with the responsibility of clearing the city of prostitutes. It is also ironic that that Palat Bello who orders the city to be cleared of prostitutes has, himself, been a patron of prostitutes. Thus a state-driven social engineering act of clearing the city of prostitutes becomes counterproductive, as the same agents of an intended moral governmentality have turned the city into a site of violence. Essentially, this is a scheme which fits into James Scott's concept of high modernism (a scheme that he considers a failure), to the extent that the Madian government under General Palat Bello seeks to enthrone 'legibility' on Langa, a city whose spatial structure it does not understand. The decision to clear the city of prostitutes is done from a panoptic standpoint, as portrayed in Bukuru's cross-examination of Lieutenant Lati:

'The Head of State created the Vice task force, I believe in September or October of last year. Do you remember what their mandate was?'

'Yes, to rid the city of prostitution. It's part of the effort to attract foreign tourists to the city.'

'Oh,' Bukuru said. 'I used to think prostitution helped tourism, that many tourists actively seek a bit of exotic native sex. Thanks to you, I now know differently.'

(35)

The decision to 'rid the city of prostitution' suffers from a lack of the understanding that prostitution is actually one of a city's tourist attractions. This exercise of 'moral' governmentality is without regard to the possibility that prostitution can indeed attract foreign tourists to the city. Thus, 'ridding' the city of prostitution tends to deprive it of a major source of tourist attraction. An institution that has local knowledge of its spatial

structure does not forcefully clear or ‘rid’ the city of its prostitutes if its intention, as claimed by Lieutenant Lati is “to attract foreign tourists to the city.” The brazen display of the state’s lack of understanding, as portrayed in the novel, rather than enhance urban governmentality tends to erode the postcolonial city of whatever social order is left of it:

‘When he set up the task force, I believe His Excellency told the soldiers it was a declaration of war on prostitutes. Do people get wounded in a war?’

‘Yes.’

The Madian government does not take into consideration the implications of forcefully clearing the city of prostitutes. It is an act that has caused severe hardship and death to some of the prostitutes, including innocent women. It is an act that gives credibility to Scott’s position that state-driven social engineering projects are counter-productive, and are therefore, bound to fail. *Arrows of Rain* shows that the Madian government’s decision to clear the city of prostitutes is ill-informed and catastrophic, resulting in a plethora of rapes and murders of prostitutes and innocent women. What is worse is that members of the Vice squad entrusted with the responsibility of enforcing the ill-fated policy see it as an opportunity to gratify their whims. They see it as an opportunity for free sex, and this becomes their primary motive. Most of the prostitutes and other women raped were killed and dumped by the beach. Thus, what the Government imagines as an exercise in moral governmentality ultimately results in mass killings, gang-rapes, deprivation and other forms of social dislocation. It thus amounts to treason of the state against its own people. The argument here is that any state-driven social engineering project that is aimed at, or results in mass rapes, murder, and terror is a

failure and amounts to treason against the people (Davis, Kikula, Scott). *Arrows of Rain* is a stark portrayal of the treachery of the state against its people. Events in the novel show that the state cannot determine urban legibility. As argued in the previous chapter, legibility is not an aprioristic construct; hence it is determined by the people who possess the knowledge and understanding of their spatial morphology and have, or devise, their various means or methods of navigating the space. ‘High modernism,’ on the other hand, compromises the social order of the environment. This finds an apt expression in *Arrows of Rain* as the actions of the agents of the Madian government completely disregard the people’s relationship with their environment. If the environment is functional for its inhabitants, howbeit in various ways, the state is not in a position to determine that it is not. As earlier argued, every subject of an environment determines the extent to which the environment is functional for him or her. It is thus the subjects of the environment, rather than the state that possess the required local knowledge in the determination of environmental governmentality. What ‘high modernism’ does, as portrayed in *Arrows of Rain*, is that it creates an abnormal situation out of what is normal and makes what is abnormal the norm. This paradox is captured in the courtroom as Bukuru the mad man cross-examines Dr. Mara:

‘Did this madman appear during the funeral – forgive the phrase – suffer a relapse into insanity?’ there was suppressed laughter in the courtroom.

‘He seemed to have a reprieve from his condition, yes,’ answered the psychiatrist, removing his glasses and wiping, with the back of his hands, the sides of his eyes.

‘How long did the funeral last?’

‘Six days – that is the tradition.’

‘What happened after the funeral?’

‘He resumed his abnormal behavior.’

‘You mean his normal behaviour.’

(27)

The foregoing is a classic representation of how the state’s structure often bases certain actions on wrong assumptions. Bukuru’s drilling of Dr. Mara the psychiatrist continues:

‘You have no problem with killing an ant that has stung you?’

‘No, I have no problem with that.’

‘Nor do you have a problem with killing an innocent ant – one that hasn’t stung you?’

‘I don’t think of ants as guilty or innocent,’ answered the psychiatrist.

‘But apparently your village madman was concerned with that principle?’

‘Apparently.’

‘If you saw a man who went about killing every dog in sight simply because one dog had bitten him, would you consider his action sane?’

‘No.’ Dr. Mara wiped a trickle of sweat off his face, like one wiping tears. (29)

The mad man’s sense of justice in insisting on knowing which of two ants had stung him is portrayed to be better than a situation where supposedly sane government agents and high court judges arrive at conclusions without recourse to facts or evidence.

All of these point to the paradoxes and ironies in the urban environment. For instance, Bukuru appears to everyone to be mad, when indeed, he is not. This is symbolic

of the notion that a city may generally be regarded as dysfunctional when it, indeed, functions. Just as there is, after all, elements of sanity Bukuru generally regarded as mad, there are, in the same vein, elements of orderliness and vibrancy in a city generally imagined as dystopic – a pointer to Pietersie’s notion of the abnormal as the norm.

From the series of events in the novel it becomes clear that it is the space that is envisioned by the state – the Madian government, in the case of the novel – that is ‘mad’. For instance, Bukuru proves to be saner, more realistic, and more humane than even the psychiatrist that has previously certified him mad. This also applies to the incident of the other mad man Dr. Mara refers to under cross-examination by the ‘mad’ Bukuru. The latter proves, through his deft cross-examination of Dr. Mara that this other man, certified to be mad by the psychiatrist is also normal and humane. Thus, the state as represented by the psychiatrist, demonstrates its lack of understanding of the environment and its people.

It is noteworthy that brutal actions of members of the Vice squad are not questioned. Justice Kayode, for instance, concludes that agents of the state can do no wrong. Even when it is clear that General Isa Palat Bello, the life President of the Madian government is both a rapist and a murderer in the logical claims of Bukuru, Kayode does not order an investigation. Instead, he declares Bukuru’s revelation a contempt of court. All of these portray the danger in dismissing the postcolonial city as an urban space that does not work.

Arrows of Rain essentially portrays the senselessness in the state’s bid to regulate the urban environment and its subjects by means of its hierarchical surveillance, and acting as schoolmaster over the environment and its people. As portrayed in the novel,

the state's attempt at governmentality results in its people's untold suffering and death. The result is chaos and illogicality – and as rightly been portrayed in earlier arguments of Williams and Dourish, Foucault, Scott, Giroux, and Kikula – a myopic and ineffectual panopticon that constitutes an infraction on the people's sense of identity and engagement with the urban environment.

As earlier argued, the city is a dialectic space, shaping and reshaping people who in turn shape and reshape it. I must emphasize that my intention is not to discourage state-created utilities or actions aimed at improving human condition. My argument is that such state-created utilities or actions, to the extent of their infractions on subalterns and their interaction with city, have the tendency to be panoptic, lopsided, misleading and destructive. This is what in *Arrows of Rain* portrays.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SHANTY CITY AS THE ‘REAL’ AFRICAN CITY: SLUM AND THE DIALECTICS OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN CHRIS ABANI’S *GRACELAND*

Slum, semi-slum, and superslum ...

To this has come the evolution of cities.

– Patrick Geddes²⁶

I wish to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people’s activities in the city.

– AbdouMaliq Simone

Slums and the African City: (Re)constructing Spatial Morphologies and Identities

This chapter examines the pervasiveness of slums in the postcolonial city as represented in Chris Abani’s *GraceLand*. It is theoretically founded on Edgar Pietersie’s notion of the shanty city as the ‘real’ African city, and also on AbdouMalik Simone’s conception of people as infrastructure. The chapter thus explores how slums are represented in *GraceLand* and how people serve as infrastructure in the face of debilitating living conditions. A convenient starting-point is to examine the pervasiveness and impact of slums in the postcolonial city.

²⁶ As quoted by Mike Davis in Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its origins. Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. New York, 1961. 464.

Slums are synonymous with, and are integral parts of shanty cities. Quoting Patrick Geddes above in Lewis Mumford (464), Mike Davis emphasises the prevalence of slums in cities across the world. Indeed, the world – not just Africa – has become a site or planet of slums. Davis draws attention to the explosion of urban population through rural-to-urban migration, noting that urban population has accounted for two-thirds of the entire population of the world since 1950. He further avers that due to the explosion of urban migration in addition to natural population increase through births, besides other factors, the world's urban population is certain to outnumber that of the rural.

Echoing Wolfgang Lutz, Warren Sanderson, and Scergei Scherbov (803-804), Davis projects that “cities will account for virtually all future world population growth, which is expected to pick at about 10 billion in 2050” (2). He notes that urban climacteric will be more pronounced in the Third-world, and emphasizes, particularly, the doubling and tripling of Indian and sub-Sahara African population respectively. Hence, according to him, “The exploding cities of the developing world are also weaving extraordinary new urban networks, corridors, and hierarchies” (5).

Instructively, population explosion of cities, especially – in the context of this thesis – postcolonial (African) cities, is predicated on a number of factors. The scenario envisioned by Davis (as cited above) is, indeed an echo of Eugene Linden's insight into cities' population explosion. While Davis concentrates on urban-rural migration and economic indices, Linden extends the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors and emphasizes that: “Lured by the bright lights, or driven from the countryside by political and economic

turmoil, population pressures, and ecological breakdown, billions of people have been migrating to the cities” (52).

It is essential to, among others, expatiate upon the factors that have been advanced by Linden and Davis. As both note, rural-to-urban migration has largely been predicated on rural poverty and frustration. Hence, both Linden and Davis have advanced “the bright lights of the city” attraction as irresistible to rural dwellers. Rural gloom, helplessness, and hopelessness – stemming from lack of basic infrastructure and sundry economic opportunities – are often considered by its (rural) dwellers as a cancer from which they must flee, in spite of the cities’ own grave and foreseeable hazards:

Migrants from the desperately poor interior of sub-Saharan Africa continue to come to Kinshasa, Zaire, despite the collapse of its economy and services, which has led to rampant disease and malnutrition and brought the city to the edge of anarchy.

Pakistanis pour into Karachi despite factional violence characterized by car bombings and gun battles in the streets. (Linden 52)

Several migrants, it would seem, would prefer to die in the city – where they, at least, anticipate to ‘hustle’ to have something to eat – rather than die of hunger in their villages where there seem to be no food in sight. The city is therefore seen as a space where ‘man must wack’²⁷ and where subjects, especially the unemployed are expected to ‘use their

²⁷ A common slogan among urban poor in sub-Saharan Africa, especially rural-to-urban migrants, indicating that there will always be food in the city, no matter the odds. This is an indication that people are prepared to do desperate things to survive in the city.

heads'²⁸ to put food on their tables. Hence the pervasiveness of informal sales of goods and services, fraud, drugs, violence, prostitution, child labour, human trafficking, etc. These find an apt representation in Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and will be expatiated in the novel's (textual) analysis.

Christine Kessides, however, downplays the significance of rural-urban migration in the population explosion of African cities. While she concedes that it plays a role in the region's urban population explosions, she argues strongly, nevertheless, that it is not the primary factor. She emphasizes the impact of the hardly- noticed internal geometric population explosion of cities, vis-à-vis the reclassification of cities amongst other (internal) factors. She avers that: "the traditional view of one-way movements mainly from rural to urban areas is by no means the whole story, and is much less important in overall population mobility than circular and seasonal migration" (x). But she recognizes rural poverty as a 'push' factor and the economic opportunity of urban areas, that is, "the bright lights of the city" as a 'pull' factor as urban areas provide a wider, deeper and deeper labor market." This recognition, therefore, underscores the place of rural-urban migration as a fundamental – if not the most significant – contributor to the population 'siege' on African cities.

Apart from migrants who have responded to "the bright lights" of the city, postcolonial cities, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, are continually flooded by immigrants fleeing from political turmoil. While some are fleeing from the persecution of

²⁸ As above – a slogan that indicates people's resolve to fashion out desperate measures to survive in the city.

their home governments as a result of perceived political differences, others are fleeing from the 'harsh' political climates of their respective countries. Several people have become disoriented with their countries' political leadership and no longer consider their home countries safe for them and their families. The region has continually been a theatre of political strife, from wars to violence arising from electoral conflicts. Thus families continually migrate in several thousands, and sometimes millions, into neighboring cities whose political climates are perceived to be relatively calm. For instance, persistent wars in Monrovia, Kigali and Mogadisu (Linden 58) have occasioned the influx of migrants into other African cities like Kinshasa, Johannesburg and Lagos. Several thousands of Zimbabweans and other African nationals continue to 'flood' South African cities in order to escape from their home countries' political and economic turmoil.

Globalization is yet a crucial factor with regard to the population of cities. The world has become a global village. Hence, free migration has seen millions of people migrate to cities in the belief that they may be better able to survive there. Following what is considered their global appeal, some cities continue to experience more influx of people than others. As such, there is the tendency for the 'preferred' cities to record geometric population growths. Free movement has therefore made such cities to be vulnerable to population crises. As Linden notes, "the ever-increasing global integration, problems that arise in one city can quickly spread throughout its region and even worldwide" (53). This, it would seem, accounts for why Mike Davies has come to see the World and its cities as a "Planet of Slums."

The African city has been characterized by Enwenzor *et al* as ‘under siege’ as virtually everybody in the continent desires the city, and sees it as the ideal place to be. Onokome Okome, as earlier cited, captures this vividly in his now famous assertion that “we live in the age of the city. The city is everything to us – it consumes us, and for that reason, we glorify it” (Okome 316, Davis 1). Instructively, colonial regimes of some African countries, especially those in the Southern African Axis, had their cities (e.g. Johannesburg, Cape town, Pretoria, etc.) mapped and constructed to exclude the natives. Natives were not expected to live in these cities. If anything, they were permitted to work in the city but to return to their respective villages, townships and neighborhoods at the close of work. As Peter Lloyd (13) notes, “it was possible to view them as temporary sojourners in the city. Their squalor mattered little, for were they not saving hard-earned cash to take back to their idyllic rural homes?” No space was, thus, envisioned for them in city, and they were not to be encouraged to remain in the urban space²⁹. It is therefore arguable that the city was deliberately designed to be a harsh and illegible space for them. Branwen Gruffydd Jones takes a similar position as Davis’s that some African cities were a colonial creation – mapped and constructed along antipodal structures of formal and informal spaces as well and racial and class structures whereupon formal, orderly and planned spaces were exclusive reserves of Europeans while the informal, unplanned and disorderly spaces were inhabited by ‘natives’ and the urban poor. During the Apartheid era in South Africa, for instance, native or black South Africans were expected to keep

²⁹ This was however not the case in sub-Sahara African cities like Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, etc., which were already cities of ‘natives’ before colonialism.

away from the city. It was a crime for a black South Africans to be found in the city, unless they were duly permitted, and issued a pass to enter for menial labour within a specific time. According to Davis:

A principal barrier, of course, was European colonialism which, in its most extreme form in the British colonial cities of eastern and southern Africa, denied native populations the rights of urban land ownership and permanent residence. The British ... feared that city life would “detrribalize” Africans and foster anticolonial solidarities. (51)

There is thus, as earlier noted by Yaeger, the fact of overcrowding, and the challenges of accommodation, among others. The city is stretched beyond the aprioristic and preconceived legible appurtenances of its designers. Since there are more people than the city is originally intended for, satellite camps and emergency settlements are established, and the rural poor metamorphose into urban poor. The original cartography of the city, from the point of view of its colonial designers, is eroded, and its spatial morphology and legibility are compromised. Migrants and others who are not able to afford the usually high cost of rent are constrained to seek alternative means of accommodation in nearby satellite towns. The conurbation that soon occurs is perceived to further erode the urban environment of its cityness. There emerges ‘locations,’ squatter camps, shacks, and other forms of informal settlements. The city is thus ultimately ghettoized and villagized.³⁰

³⁰ This is not to be confused with Scott’s concept of the term (see James C Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*).

While Scott rejects Villagization in terms of forced grouping in the State’s attempt at governmentality, the term ‘villagization’ is used here in reference to ‘villages’ which, as a matter of necessity, usually emerge

Carol Rakodi summarizes the impact of the population siege on postcolonial cities to include rapid population growth, unaccompanied by industrialization or economic growth, absence of economic dynamism, failures of successive governments, severe infrastructure and service deficiencies, inadequate land administration, poverty and social breakdown (Rakodi 3-5).

A direct consequence of the geometric growth of the population of postcolonial cities is the pervasiveness of slums. African cities, have especially, been presented as sites of slums (Edgar Pietersie, Mike Davis), and chaotic spaces synonymous with poverty and crime. Over time, the story has been the same everywhere, from the Lagos slums of Maroko, Ajegunle, Isale-Eko, Iponri, etc, in Nigeria through Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Langa and other ‘Locations’ in Cape Town, to various other slums and ‘Locations’ in Johannesburg, South Africa. There is, as well, a pervasiveness of slums in all major cities in Africa.³¹

There arises the question: What is the place, role or impact of slums in African cities? To what extent do slums contribute to the growth or perceived failures of the African city? What is the propriety, if any, of the various attempts by governments or other agencies to clear African cities of slums? Do slums actually rob the African urban space of its ‘cityness’? Indeed, slums have been constructed as overcrowded

within the city, as people fashion desperate measures to meet their accommodation needs and other challenges.

³¹ Okui Enwenzor, *et al* especially single out Lagos, Kinshasa, Freetown and Johannesburg as being under siege.

neighborhood, where people live in abject squalor and dirt (Peter Marris), and where disease, and death are commonplace. This finds an essential representation in Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, and will be expatiated in the textual analysis later in this chapter.

Davis (23) recalls the UN-HABITAT's revelation of Ethiopia as consisting of the world's highest population of slum dwellers, put at 99.4%. He notes particularly that the poorest urban population (as well as highest child mortality) are found in sub-Saharan African slums:

“The poorest urban population, however are probably found in Luanda, Maputo, Kinshasa and Cochabamba (Bolivia), where two-thirds or more of the residents earn less than the cost of their minimum required daily nutrition. In Luanda, where one quarter of the house-holds have per capita consumption of less than 75 cents per day, child mortality (under five) was a horrifying 320 per thousand in 1993 – the highest in the world (23).

The question still remains: Are the so-called Third-World cities mere sites of slums? No doubt, the foregoing literature points to that. Peter Lloyd (13) is under no illusion that slums are more pervasive in so-called Third World cities.” He avers that “Among the spectres of poverty few can today match the sprawling slums peripheral to almost all the cities of the third world,” whilst noting that “The endless spreading slums form a terrifying backdrop to the striking modern architecture of the city centres.” This situation, he avers, “contrasts starkly with the technological affluence of the urban populations of the industrial nations of the world.” This tends to give impetus to the “exclusion” of the African city from the ideal or global city. Hence African cities are often imagined to be

peripheral to (the minimum standards of) globalization (Schneider and Susser 3), and Cartesian canon³². This profiling or perception – of African cities as peripheral to globalization – appears not to abate. This less than important status often ascribed to the African city was brought to the fore when in an international workshop on urban ethnography that focused mainly on the state of cities did not consider any African city. This much is acknowledged by Jane Schneider and Ida Susser³³: “Regrettably, no African city is considered; two invitees to our conference, specialists on the South African cities of Johannesburg and Durban, were unable to attend. The lacuna is unfortunate, as it reinforces the tendency to caricature much of Africa as peripheral to globalization.” (3)

There have been conscious efforts at ridding African cities, and indeed all cities of slums, in what Branwen Gruffyd Jones has perceived as “The global urban agenda for African cities” (ii). Davis however adds an interesting caveat that “not all urban poor, to be sure, live in slums, nor are all slum dwellers poor” (25). This seems to interrogate the notion of slums as strictly squalid urban sites. Is slum life, therefore, a normal way of life among African urban dwellers regardless of social standing? As can be inferred from Davis’s caveat, some people live in slums as a matter of choice. He continues to lament that slum life in Africa is a creation of colonialism. He notes that the situation was especially brought to its dystopian extreme in South Africa:

³² See Rene Descartes’ classification of cities into ancient and modern, as earlier cited in Chapter One of this thesis.

³³ The editors of *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*, the title under which the workshop’s key debates and papers were published.

“Building on a foundation of colonial racism, post-war South African legislation not only criminalised urban migration, but also provided for the uprooting, with enormous brutality, of historical inner-city transport hubs to generate formal employment and urban growth. Everywhere, native labour was consigned to slums and shanty towns” (51).

This prevalence of this kind of scenario probably accounts for why Davis refers to attempts by governments in Africa to clear or rid their cities of slums as acts of treason³⁴, and tends to bring to the fore, Edgar Pietersie’s earlier position that the shanty city is normal and is not all about squalor and chaos. Thus, the pervasiveness of slums in African cities does not necessarily presuppose dystopic urban spaces. Since the city’s cartography did not take them into account, slum dwellers tend to create spaces (within the city that is) for themselves, in the belief that they have as much right to the city as other dwellers. They tend to construct their own identities within the city; thus new itineraries of legibility, meaning, assertions, and even intersections, are created, and antipodal structures – order and disorder, love and hatred, formal and informal, chaotic and sublime, peace and violence – continue to exist side by side. The tendency is for slum dwellers to adapt to, and employ new and often desperate means of survival in an urban environment designed to be harsh and unliveable for them from the outset. As Ambrose Adebayo notes, “African cities are faced with a lot of problems emanating from their past development with influences of colonisation and apartheid, as well as unprecedented

³⁴ Davis recalls various attempts to keep African peasants out of African cities, especially during European colonialism (See “The Treason of the State in Davis’s *Planet of Slums*. Also see

urbanisation and population growth” (351). He notes that despite the emergence of democratic governments “with sound poverty alleviation policies and strategies, poverty levels have not reduced, and in some cases have continued to rise, exacerbated by both man-made and natural disasters, and political conflict in Africa” (351).

A question that continually arises is: What roles do slums play in the evolution or development of African cities? What is not in doubt, however, is the pervasiveness of slums in African urban spaces. As a result, African urban spaces – as indeed, everywhere slums are prevalent – have largely been construed as entropic. Accordingly, the bulk of urban scholarship has dismissed slums as dystopic catalysts. They are therefore synonymous with urban rot, decay chaos, crime and grime, etc. Slums are therefore depicted as undesirable urban spaces; hence, as has been noted, various levels of authorities make efforts to ‘sanitise’ cities by ‘ridding’ them of slums. Kwesi Darkoh sums up the disgust associated with slums in his portrayal of slum life in Nairobi:

A very high proportion of people live in dilapidated buildings and overcrowded houses. Garbage lies rotting outside their makeshift shelters, restricting access along narrow unpaved pathways and clogging surface drains. Pollution, waste disposal problems, inadequate and neglected infrastructural services, social unrest, and other stresses of the environment are endemic. Diarrhoea, typhoid and many other diseases are ever present menaces of life (55).

And Peter Maris contends that “Slums are amongst the most obtrusive of social evils. Physical squalor catches the eye; the degradation of human dignity shocks the social reformer, civic pride is outraged, the privileged are uncomfortably reminded of the

circumstances in which their fellow countrymen must live” (123). In his investigation of Lagos slums he paints a gloomy picture:

The rooms are sometimes so full of bed and baggage that there is hardly space to put a chair. ... The houses are shabby – the walls patched, the roofs leaky, the ceilings blackened with smoke. But some have solid walls, well-made doors and windows, and a concrete floor raised above the ground. They have suffered as much from neglect as from dilapidation. (123)

Indeed, the descriptions of slum life in Nairobi and Lagos are representative of the general tradition of thought – everything bad is associated with slums! Hence, as earlier noted, conscious efforts are made by various authorities to embark on slum clearance, as their presence (slums) is considered a hindrance to urban development. Marris however argues that:

The people of central Lagos are, therefore, largely dependent upon their location at the centre of commerce for their livelihood. And because they have, on the whole, been long settled there, an integrated pattern of social and family life has grown up. The affection and sense of mutual obligation of the family group is the outstanding loyalty of Lagos social life” (124).

This is one of the major conflicts that will be analysed in Abani’s novel. Besides the resistance of slum inhabitants to attempts to displace them from their environment in the name of clearance, there is an emerging scholarship which tends to insist that slums have their positive roles in urban spaces (Davis, Pietersie, Marris, Dunton, Simone). Forced eviction of slum dwellers and their eventual relocation to new spaces, to live with new

people(s) is within the purview of the concept of high modernism – forced group relocation could result in forced villagization. Forced ejection, as Davis infers, is indeed, felonious. Slum clearance results in social dislocations of the people. Marris’s conclusion is instructive: “Slum clearance raises the fundamental problem: how can you destroy a neighbourhood physically, without destroying at the same time the livelihood and way of life of the people who have settled there? If these are destroyed, the clearance of slums is likely to do more harm than good” (128).

To some urbanists, what appears as abnormal is, indeed the norm. Edgar Pietersie observes that African cities are in crises, as a result of the pervasiveness of slums. He, nevertheless, emphasises the fundamental place of the shanty city in African urban development such that “the shanty city is the *real* African city” (2). Pietersie contends further that “a big part of the problem has been the tendency to try and “fix” the negative social and environmental externalities of urbanization.” Clearly, slum clearance has not been a popular option as the people are often left to their fate. What is evident is a deliberate, systematic neglect of the people, for if slums or shanty towns are recognised as the ‘real’ African cities, priority would be placed on improving the living conditions and/or welfare of the slum dwellers by providing them with basic amenities, rather than forced clearance, or (dis/re)location. What authorities have done, instead, has been to make the slum environment even more inhabitable and less navigable for the people.

The fact that slum dwellers resist relocation at all suggests that there is something that authorities do not understand about them and their environment. Lack of basic

amenities does not necessarily mean that the slum environment (or shanty city, to use Pietersie's term) is not understood by – or does not work for – its dwellers.

Are slums in African cities (or anywhere else), to the extent of their perceived navigable and 'legible' spatial morphologies, desirable urban spaces? Put simply, is slum life in Africa or anywhere else desirable? Are the squalor, dirt and rot often associated with slum life accepted by slum dwellers with regard to their understanding of their environment? Do slums function, or do they contribute to the development and progress of the city? The slum or shanty city may have been presented by Pietersie as the 'real' African city; but as earlier clarified in a previous chapter, this position does not suggest an embrace of slum life and its attendant squalor. Neither does it suggest that slum life is good or desirable. Pietersie instead draws attention to pervasiveness of slums in Africa, and the fact that they (slums) have not robbed its urban spaces of their 'cityness.' He insists that slums' spatial syntax is vitiated by administrative ineptitude and deliberate neglect, which authorities tend to hinge on discouraging rural-to-urban migration. Kessides, in a similar argument, notes that "the demographic picture in Africa is one of rapid and dramatic change, and yet not a situation that is anomalous or wildly out of line for its level of development or relative to other regions." (x)

Indeed, most slum dwellers in the postcolonial city live in abject squalor. This does not however presuppose life in slums as completely useless; neither does it make the slum environment such a nuisance fit only to be cleared of its subjects. A functional environment is that which has meaning for its subjects in terms of spatial navigation, wayfinding, and (re)construction of identities. To this extent, slums cannot simply be

characterised aprioristically as incurably dysfunctional; it is desperation and administrative neglect that has tended to turn them into sites of self-help.

Slums are, also, often imagined to constitute undesirable infractions on the city's original plan; hence they are often metaphorically regarded as parasites on a city. In this regard, African cities have been presented as sites of crime, desperation, violence (Gandy 38, Dawson 18, Davis 202). They are perceived to negatively affect the free flow of cities' economic activities. As a perceived self-help environment, slums, are therefore considered breeding grounds for social vices: militia, prostitution, drudgery, illegal drug dealing, human trafficking, and fraud, among others. Indulging in these vices is usually the subaltern's way of resisting the social situation s/he has found himself/herself, vis-à-vis the desperate need or desire to achieve prosperity. Mike Davis aptly avers that there are "myriad acts of resistance. Indeed, the future of human solidarity depends upon the militant refusal of the new urban poor to accept the terminal marginality within global capitalism" (202). He avers further that:

It should not be surprising that some poor youth on the outskirts of Istanbul, Cairo, Casablanca or Paris embrace the religious nihilism of al Salafia Jihadia and rejoice in the destruction of modernity's overwhelming symbols. Or that millions of others turn to the urban subsistence economies operated by street gangs, *narcotraficantes*, militias and sectarian political organizations." (202)

The inference that can be drawn, from all of the foregoing, is that slum dwellers and other subalterns in informal environments in the postcolonial city are constrained to resort to self-help.

Man must Wack: Subalterns and the Dialectics of Survival³⁵

The resolve of governments to discourage rural-to-urban migration has been advanced as a major reason for the neglect of slums and their dwellers. It is necessary to re-quote Edgar Pietersie's argument:

The prevalence of slums in African cities and towns highlight the lack or insufficiency of basic services. ... Most African governments continue to regard migration to cities and towns as a bad thing and see proactive policy to address the needs of the urban poor and slum dwellers as an incentive for even larger volumes of migration. (3-4)

The question that then arises is: Have African governments provided the enabling environment for rural prosperity? I need to emphasize that the concern, in this thesis, is not on rural dwellers or their survival as the focus is on the postcolonial city as represented in the Nigerian novel; but it is important to emphasize that it is the quest to be free from rural poverty that informs rural-to-urban migration in the first case. Hence, the inference is that African governments are not able to discourage rural-to-urban migration by making the rural environment exciting. They (African governments), accordingly, are not able to discourage urban congestion. There is therefore, as earlier noted by Patricia Yaeger, the ever present fact of overcrowding. Furthermore, African

³⁵ 'Wack' or simply 'wak', meaning 'eat' – a common slang used in informal environments in Nigeria. A common Nigerian pidgin English equivalence is 'chop.' Hence "man must chop" and "man go chop" are common statements denoting that man (used generically) must fashion a way to survive, no matter the odds.

governments unable – or as the case may be, unwilling – to address the deplorable living conditions in the overcrowded areas of the city leave the subaltern with the undesirable, but only available option of self-help. Upon arrival in the city, the subaltern discovers that the ‘bright lights of the city’, which s/he hitherto finds attractive do not hold any promise of a good life. The subaltern discovers that life in the city, as it had earlier appeared to him/her is not in any way better than life in the rural area s/he has just come from. Sometimes, some new urban migrants have the desire or urge to return to the village, but lack the means to do so, in addition to the fact of having sold everything s/he owned to be able to migrate to the city. The result is hopelessness and despair, as the subaltern discovers that there is, to put it metaphorically, an abysmal darkness beneath the bright lights of the city. Faced with hunger, homelessness and penury, it is then up to the subaltern to fashion out a means of survival. Every means becomes fair in the survival game, as the subaltern must create his/her space as well as construct his/her identity and boundary in the chaotic world of slums.

There have been interesting contentions in the dialectics of survival and agency. Thoughts on new urbanism have focused on the African city at work with regard to the means and methods by which postcolonial urban subalterns create or achieve agency in the face of debilitating urban conditions. Bracing all the odds, the postcolonial subject devises ways to survive, and to be relevant in the urban space. His/her primary goal is survival. Thus through the various means by which s/he crafts his/her survival, the subaltern seeks to achieve agency either independently or in collaboration with fellow

urban subjects faced with the same challenges of life. As Saumitra Jha, Vijayendra Rao and Michael Woolcock observe:

Migrants to the burgeoning slums of the developing world face the difficult challenge of securing access to vital services and protecting their lives and livelihoods. While the scale, heterogeneity, and relative anonymity of cities may limit the effectiveness of traditional institutions, the urban environment facilitates the development of new strategies for the poor to survive and advance. (230)

The extent to which the development of the aforementioned strategies results in, or amounts to agency has generated an interesting scholarly engagement.

Slum dwellers have been literally profiled as “the wretched of the earth.”³⁶

Majority of subjects who live in the informal sectors, live in squalor. With no basic facilities and visible means of survival, they are constrained to live even below poverty level. Accordingly, fate and their social circumstances have tended to classify them as a surplus humanity. Outside these (fate and social circumstances) is the fact that even authorities consider them as surplus to humanity, and as such, treat as subhuman. There is therefore no better way to treat or profile a people as the wretched of the earth. Felix C. Morka captures this vividly in the Government’s treatment of the Oluwole slum dwellers in Lagos who were, without any consultation or notice, forcibly evicted and relocated to Ijora-Badia³⁷ (another slum in Lagos):

³⁶ Couched from Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. Richard Philcox). New York: Grove Press, 2004. Print.

³⁷ Or ‘Badia,’ as Morka later refers to the slum.

The evictees were abandoned to their fate, to find their own means and resources.... The Federal Military Government failed to address the host community's (Badia's) pre-existing severe lack of basic social and economic infrastructure ... thereby further worsening an already dire situation.. (3)

The foregoing shows that the reasons often advanced by governments for forced evictions are only a smokescreen to carry out acts that merely serve their (governments') interests. According to Morka, the Oluwole slum was acquired by the Nigerian government and cleared of its dwellers for the purpose of erecting the National Theatre at Iganmu in preparation for FESTAC 77. Instructively, the slum was considered a strategic site – one that would enable the government to 'showcase' the 'beauty' of Nigeria – and specifically, that of the city of Lagos – to the international community. By the act, the government demonstrated its lack of interest in the well-being of the Oluwole slum evictees. It demonstrated its preference for showing-off the 'beauty' of Lagos over that of the welfare and wellbeing of the evictees. If anything, the government treated the evictees – its own people – with contempt. It demonstrated its preference for a building over the lives of several tens of thousands of its own people. The government considers the Oluwole slum dwellers as a surplus set of people, and promptly moved to evict them. Just as will be seen in Abani's *GraceLand*, the uncoordinated resistance of the people did nothing to compel or even persuade the government from enforcing their eviction. Worse for the evictees was the fact that those who were 'lucky' were relocated to another slum, Ijora-Badia, which was already overcrowded and suffers from the same neglect and want as Oluwole.

Instructively, the inhabitants of Ijora-Badia were not treated any better. It did not matter to the government that the community lacked basic facilities, and was already overcrowded. Yet the Oluwole evictees were relocated to the slum – dumped and left to their fate. The Nigerian government, from Morka’s account, did not care about the subjects of the Badia community either, as there is no excuse for relocating to the slum, several tens of thousands of evictees from another slum without regard for the subaltern of the overstretched urban space.

Morka (8) reports that “The Oluwole evictees were never informed about the rationale behind the choice of Badia as a resettlement location.” Thus they were “vulnerable to persistent eviction threats and attacks” from their new Badia abode. The fear of “This insecurity of tenure” informs their preference “instead to build temporary shacks to meet their immediate shelter needs.

The government’s treatment of the Oluwole slum evictees and the Badia community dwellers was inhuman. But this appears to be insignificant, when compared to the (mis)treatment of several other slums and their subalterns. Morka again captures this vividly:

On 15 July 1996, residents of 15 Lagos slum communities learned of plans by the Lagos State Government to forcibly evict them from their homes and businesses.

... The State Government had no intention or plan to compensate or resettle persons whose homes may be affected by the project, adding that such losses should be taken as the victims’ contribution to the development of Lagos State.

The targeted slums had a total population of over 1.2 million people. (9)

It is safe to argue, from the foregoing, that the slum dweller has often been treated as less than the ‘wretched of the earth.’ There has been the tendency for governments and their agencies – as we have seen in the reported cases in Lagos – to treat slum dwellers as less than human in the vain bid to aestheticize the city.

Sometimes, excuses are given for clearing the urban space of slums. For instance, the reason for clearing Oluwole and evicting its dwellers is the erection of the National Theatre to ‘showcase’ Lagos. The purpose is, by inference, to make Lagos more visually appealing or legible to the international community. One of my major positions in this thesis, as portrayed in the primary texts, is that in the crafting of urban legibility, the place or role of the subaltern is a major factor. In other words, urban legibility is determined by the people inhabiting the space. Forceful eviction of slum dwellers and their eventual relocation to another slum is to stand legibility on its head. In the second case, a World Bank – assisted drainage system was given as the reason for the clearance of the affected slums. 1.2 million people were to be forcefully evicted without any form of relocation or compensation. 1.2 million people would be rendered homeless and surplus to the city! Another reason often given is that the overblown populations and slums erode cities’ master plans (Morka 4). Again, it has been argued in previous chapters that so-called master plans were aprioristic and did not envision the present urban challenges. It is not my concern to dwell on the flimsiness of relying on an aprioristic and ineffectual canon that does not envisage the ever evolving nature of the city. The point is that spatial legibility is not restricted to the physical environment; neither is it achievable without regard to the pulse of the people. I argue that it is in fact

the people who determine legibility – whether spatial or temporal – through their local understanding of the environment. It is this understanding that enables spatial cognition and/or creation, intelligibility, liveability, wayfinding and visual navigation. Concisely, it is the local understanding that enables subaltern mastery of spatial morphologies. In this regard, I argue that spatial legibility is not solely dependent upon ‘adherence’ to so-called master plans without corresponding consideration of how the urban space is imagined by its subjects.

The subaltern has often been constrained to, in various ways, react to his/her profiling as the wretched of the earth. S/he exists in the face of damning odds. He/she in, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s consideration is confined to “the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by the epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of urban subproletariat” (25). In this regard, the slum dweller, as urban “subproletariat,” to use Spivak’s word, is faced with a plethora of crises, the most crucial of which is the crisis of survival. With his/her profiling as being surplus to humanity, the subaltern is considered not to belong in the city. City mapping, therefore, has not tended to include him/her from the outset. It is therefore left to the subaltern in the face of being considered a ‘nobody’ to construct and secure his or her space³⁸ by reconstructing the urban environment. The creation and reconstruction of this space is essential for subaltern survival; hence subalterns often tend to resist acts that threaten their survival and identities. Acts concerning slum clearance and evictions are often met with stiff resistance as they are

³⁸ Space, as used here, subsumes identity and/or profile.

considered to erode subaltern identities. The resistance is especially predicated on foreseen hopelessness that such acts by ‘outside agencies’ – to reconstruct subalterns’ well-understood space – would result in. This, as will be seen later in this chapter, is a fundamental portrayal in Chris Abani’s *GraceLand*. Thus the slum dweller, in what appears to be a literal response to Spivak’s fundamental question – “Can the Subaltern Speak?” – does not only raise a voice, but acts, or at least, attempts to do so. Such resistances are usually informal and uncoordinated, and have therefore tended to be largely ineffectual and easily contained by the superintending agencies, leaving the slum dwellers to – in addition to being robbed of their accommodation, legible space, and by extension their only means of livelihood – contend with decimation, injuries and death of selves, neighbours, friends, acquaintances and family members.

In his examination of the resistance to eviction in Bangkok slum communities, for instance, James Ockey observes that “As land became more valuable, slum clearance became more common. As slum clearance became more common, new methods of resistance developed in response” (1). Ockey’s investigation tends to provide fresh insights into why various authorities embark on slum clearance and evictions. It tends to reveal that slum clearances are usually embarked upon in a reckless act of governmentality and bereft of altruistic motives or the need to fashion a more legible urban environment. With the knowledge that they are being forcefully evicted from their environment – and that their (slum) environment is, in fact, being cleared – to gratify the whims of government officials and other better-placed individuals, the subaltern is left

with the sole choice of ‘systemic resistance’ – one of which methods is within the purview of what Spivak refers to as “epistemic violence.”

Postcolonial slums are therefore webs or itineraries of resistance. These itineraries include those of hunger, homelessness, joblessness, poverty, diseases, forced eviction and dislocation. The subaltern is an endangered species, with his/her *raison d’être* under constant threat of erosion; hence s/he is constantly fighting a war of resistance against all of these. As Ockey argues, “Threats are an effective tactic of oppression, as they force a continuous reaction” (11). I need not emphasise the various levels of subaltern resistance, but it is instructive that survival is the cardinal objective; hence any method, means or weapon employed in achieving this is considered appropriate, regardless of its desirability, or otherwise by other people, and regardless of how the lives of others are affected (by the use of such means, method or weapon). The subaltern departs markedly from employing what James Scott has developed as “weapons of the weak³⁹” to more radical epistemic methods. These methods range from sporadic and organised violence, sabotage, (un)desirable organised behaviour, rent-seeking⁴⁰, etc. Thus, every subaltern slum action or reaction forms part of the dialectics of resistance. I shall examine in the next chapter how, and if, agency is creatable from survival that accrues from subaltern

³⁹ As cited by James Ockey (1). According to Ockey, “Weapons of the weak are aimed at resisting oppression through methods like dissimulation, false compliance, foot-dragging, and sabotage. They are low-risk strategies of resisting the unjust demands of those in power.”

⁴⁰ Organized or conscious action taken in the anticipation of a corresponding goodwill. There is often the tendency for trouble if/when the expected goodwill is not returned. This is prominent in Abani’s novel.

acts of resistance. What is not in doubt, however, is that the subaltern creates a space and fashions a way to survive in that space – a spatial survival that is often achieved at some cost to others urban subjects, the state or even the subaltern himself/herself. This is an itinerary that finds apt elaborations in *GraceLand*.

Toward a Dialectics of African Urban Infrastructure

Patricia Yaeger provides an insight into a global concept of infrastructure:

“infrastructure represents the equipment, facilities, services, and supporting structures needed for a city’s functioning. Airports; communication systems; computer grids; highways; gas, electric, and water systems; computer grids; highways; gas, electric, and water systems; mass transit; public toilets; sewers; streets, waste management” (15).

Echoing Henri Lefebvre (345)⁴¹, Yaeger (15) opines that ‘infrastructure may be taken for granted in global cities (unless it breaks down) but represents each city’s “fixed capital,” its “measure of social wealth.”’ Accordingly, a city with infrastructure is that which possesses everything good. This mediation of ‘everything good’ has been the underlying global paradigm for determining city infrastructure. The bottom line is therefore a well-defined economy, mediated by both fiscal and physical facilities.

Within the purview of the global paradigm of the city, infrastructure is virtually non-existent in the postcolonial city. If there has been any semblance of it, infrastructure

⁴¹ Yaeger especially notes Lefebvre’s insistence that “Marx’s theorems about fixed capital should describe more than the “equipment premises and raw materials of a given enterprise” and become a measure of the infrastructural wealth of cities and towns” (Yaeger 24).

in the postcolonial urban environment is obsolete and overstretched. The major concern of emerging urbanism has largely been on the means and methods of subaltern survival. Yaeger (15) formulates the pertinent questions: “How do we create taxonomies for cities and citizens that are at once off the grid and overly taxonomized? What is it like to be stuck, night and day, dreaming of infrastructure?” and observes that the main concern, as portrayed in Jose Saramago’s novel *Blindness*⁴², for instance, is “how to survive in a city lacking infrastructure.” There have been conscious attempts to determine or portray patterns of urban survival. The argument has largely been predicated on portraying subaltern survival through collaborative efforts in an urban environment that is bereft of infrastructure.

As can be inferred from arguments in foregoing chapters, slums or shanty towns and their dwellers are considered surplus to the city. Hence they are construed to be a burden on the infrastructure set-up of the urban environment. While the tradition of thought has mainly been focused on the city as a dystopic space, characterized by decayed – or in some cases, non-existent – infrastructure, and peripheral to modernity as

⁴² *Blindness*, like Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*, is a highly symbolic novel – somewhat in the magic realist tradition – on social decay and survival. It centres on the loss of essence or identity and the efforts to survive the ‘calamity’ that has plagued the people and taken root in the land. In the novel, a man inexplicably goes blind while negotiating traffic in his car. A ‘good Samaritan’ offers to drive him home, but steals the blind man’s car after dropping him off. Virtually everybody he comes across in the city, in the attempt to restore his sight also goes blind, and the reader is presented with the city of the blind; hence survival becomes the only essence of remaining alive.

Schneider and Susser have shown, emerging scholarship has tended to interrogate this perception by emphasizing the place of people as infrastructure (AbdouMaliq Simone), vis-à-vis the place of the human infrastructure in the economic well-being of the postcolony. Simone, as earlier noted argues for the admissibility of the various collaborative activities of the people as significant contributions to urban economies. These “intersecting fragments,” to him, constitute an integral part of the city’s infrastructure:

I wish to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people’s activities in the city. African cities are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections, particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city (407-408)⁴³.

It is essential to consider Carolyn Humphrey’s conception of infrastructure as “the basic equipment, facilities and services necessary for the functioning of a community” (91). No doubt, slums or shanty towns lack equipment. However, a sustained argument can be made for the presence of facilities – usually by way of mutual assistance – and services borne out of creative endeavours. There is thus the expansion of the notion of

⁴³ Part of this had earlier been cited in Chapter One, but I consider it essential to cite it again for the purpose of emphasis.

infrastructure beyond the material construction or structure of a city. Hence urban infrastructure is beyond the ‘physical’ structures of a city – road network, buildings, banks, hospitals, hotels, smooth fiscal economy, etc. It is essential that the people’s collaborative activities also are in the purview of infrastructure. These activities, even if uncoordinated and “complex” are a significant aspect of a city’s driving force. A city’s fiscal economy is complemented by the cultural economy established (sometimes unconsciously by these “intersecting fragments.” Accordingly, so-called intersecting fragments constitute unseen, informal but vibrant structures, thus enhancing the legibility of the postcolony. The postcolonial city functions largely as a result of the activities of these fragments. I argue that the postcolonial city thrives mainly as a result of subaltern presence. Accordingly, ‘ridding’ the city of these ‘surplus humanity’ will only erode it of its legibility which members of so-called surplus humanity have desperately managed to craft. The next section examines how Chris Abani represents the city in *GraceLand*. Chris

Chris Abani’s *GraceLand*⁴⁴

Set in the Nigerian cities of Lagos and Afikpo between 1972 and 1983,

GraceLand tells the story of Elvis Oke, a teenager who relocates to Lagos, from the small

⁴⁴ A recipient of the PEN USA Freedom-to-Write Award, among several others, Chris Abani has written three novels: *The Virgin of Flames* (2007), *GraceLand* (2004), *Masters of the Board* (1985), some Novellas *Song For Night* (2007), *Becoming Abigail* (2006), and five volumes of poetry that include *Sanctificum* (2010), *Hands Washing Water* (2006), *Dog Woman* (2004) *Daphne’s Lot* (2003) and *Kalakuta Republic* (2001). He recently edited *Lagos Noir* (2018), an anthology of short stories.

GraceLand is Abani’s most influential work.

town of Afikpo, following the death of his mother, and after his father loses an election. At the tender age of eight, Elvis's mother, Beatrice dies, leaving his father, Sunday, with the responsibility of raising him. His father, Sunday Oke, loses an election, and consequently, all of his savings. Father and son relocate to Lagos in search of new opportunities. The novel presents contrasting lifestyles and values between the small town of Afikpo and Lagos. Afikpo is presented as a space of order and adherence to cultural values. He spends his formative years in Afikpo in the midst of his relatives – his father Sunday Oke, his mother Beatrice, grandmother Oye, uncle Joseph, aunt Felicia, and his cousins, Innocent, Efua, etc. As he is considered to have grown up, Elvis is initiated into manhood in Afikpo, underscoring the importance placed on Igbo cultural norms in Afikpo. Honour is preserved, even to the point of killing blood relations, for its (honour's) sake. This is the case when the Oke brothers, Sunday and Joseph pay Godfrey to kill Joseph's son, Innocent. When Elvis confronts his father on his role in his nephew's murder, Sunday explains that it was done purely to preserve the honour of the family:

“He was killed for a name.”

“No! he was killed because he was a threat to all we had. The only inheritance I had to give you was a name of honour. His actions were muddying the only thing of value we had to give you.

“So he *was* killed for a name.”

“No! He was killed for honour.” (187)

Elvis does not see the honour in carrying-on with the family name, in view of the several atrocities that he now associates with it. Yet, his father is adamant:

“All I have to give you is my name, your name, Elvis Oke. ...

“Your name is associated with failure. Where is the honour in that? How can I carry this name knowing that it belongs to murders and rapists?”

“That was not murder! Dis was a mercy killing. It was only a matter of time before de police caught up with Godfrey in some crime and executed him publicly. Dat would have killed all of us. (188)

Elvis knows better. What his father tries to “force” him to accept as an act of honour, is far from being such. He sees evil being glorified and represented as honour. Uncle Joseph has not only arranged the murder of his own son, but has repeatedly raped Efua, his own daughter. Elvis has been raped too, inside the church, by his uncle – the same Uncle Joseph. These actions portray the intrigues and often “untold” family secrets and occurrences in Afikpo.

Back in Lagos, Elvis finds himself in a different world. Although barely a teenager, he must look after himself. He understands that people strive to make a living, using every means at their disposal – talent, wit or otherwise. Lagos is a place of survival, not just of the fittest, but of the smartest. Those who live on their wit employ the art of persuasion as their tool. There is always something to do to survive.

Elvis is thrilled at the prospect of living in Lagos – attracted by the “bright lights of the city.” He is soon disillusioned as he, like several other immigrants into the city, finds out that there is more to Lagos than its bright lights. He discovers that Lagos, in spite of its inviting appearance, is also a site of violence, poverty, desperation and survival:

He hadn't known about the poverty and violence of Lagos until he arrived. It was as if people conspired with the city to weave a web of silence around its unsavory parts. People who didn't live in Lagos only saw postcards of skyscrapers, sweeping flyovers, beaches and hotels. And those who did, when they returned to their ancestral small towns at Christmas, wore designer clothes and threw money around. They breezed in, live an expensive whirlwind life, and then left after a couple of weeks, to go back to their ghetto lives. (Abani 7)

Elvis and his father are attracted to the city only to be 'condemned' to the reality of slum life in Maroko. Life in Lagos is dramatic. It is a survival-of-the-fittest-site – a city where people live on their wit. In ghetto parlance, people rely on their 'fitness.'⁴⁵ Maroko is filled with Elvis's jobless neighbours who employ all means at their disposal, especially wit, to construct their space and identity in the city's life game of survival. While Elvis opts to be a dancer as an Elvis Presley impersonator, Jagua Rigogo and his fellow druids opts for spiritual "service." There is also Joshua Bandele Thomas, Mama Caro (who can be likened to Madame Koto in *The Famished Road*), Sergeant Okafor, etc.

As soon as he arrives in Lagos, Sunday is immediately attracted to the opportunistic Comfort. The latter, a mother of three, wrongly assumes him to be a man of some means, and woos him. Elvis recalls how Comfort had managed to 'force' her way into their lives, showering him and his father with love and humility:

⁴⁵ The term, 'fitness,' is used here to encompass not just physical strength, but also, mental or psychological strength, as well as the strength of wit.

“She had been a neighbor in a nearby tenement when Elvis and Sunday arrived in Lagos, and although his father was fleeing bankruptcy and a loss at the polls, Comfort somehow thought he had prospects; he was, after all, educated and had been a Board of Education superintendent. She began to woo him, and at the time, Elvis. (49)

Comfort, soon after, moves in with them as Sunday’s wife and Elvis’s stepmother, whereupon her open display of affection for Elvis and his father soon wanes. She is disillusioned, as she soon after realizes that Sunday’s jobless situation and penury are hopeless. As for Sunday, he soon discovers that there are no job opportunities in Lagos – at least, not in Maroko – as earlier envisaged. He is confronted by stark hopelessness as the several job interviews he attends yield no result:

As soon as she moved in, all the niceness vanished and he learned that he had no time for anyone but herself – not his father, not him, not even her own children. Elvis initially forgave her abrasive manner because he thought she might shake his father out of his slump. And when Sunday began to go for job interviews, Elvis thought she had done just that. But he turned down the one firm offer he received when he found out that Comfort had bribed a member of the hiring committee with sex. (Abani 49)

Curiously, upon the discovery of her illusion, and in spite of Sunday’s hopelessness in getting a job, Comfort remains in the marriage. This (resolve to remain in the marriage) is not done out of patience or love but out of the need to preserve her status as a responsibly married woman. As Elvis’s friend, Redemption, explains to him, “A divorced woman

with three children in this society? Shit, dat's a hard life. Now nobody can call her a harlot or wonder which man is supporting her. She only wanted the respectability dat being with a man can bring." (50)

Elvis learns that the first "law" of ghetto life is the law of self-preservation. From the presentation of Comfort's character in the novel, the reader is reminded of the fact that postcolonial city dwellers are capable of devising various means, even if unconventional, to construct their identities, create spaces and boundaries, and are able to negotiate these spaces and boundaries. Although, it has been argued that "not all urban poor, to be sure, live in slums, nor are all slum dwellers poor" (Mike Davis 25), *GraceLand* depicts the ghetto as a site peopled by disillusioned characters, as Sunday, who are compelled by circumstances to devise desperate and ingenious means to craft their identities and spaces, and make themselves 'dependable.' It is presented as a site of the urban poor – those that are abandoned to their wits, and who are considered by the state to constitute a nuisance to the city. The State does not do anything to alleviate their squalor; instead, it preoccupies itself with clearing the site of "the unwanted elements" that currently inhabit it. Interestingly, as portrayed in the novel, slums are usually cleared of their dwellers to gratify the whims of the rich. Essentially, there is nowhere in *GraceLand* where rich people are presented as inhabitants of Maroko. Contrary to Davis's argument, there is a depiction of slums as sites of poverty:

"Dis crazy government. Dey want to bulldoze this place" ...

"Why?"

“Well according to the paper, dey say we are a pus-ridden eyesore on de face of the nation’s capital. ... “Not only Maroko, but all de ghettos in Lagos. A simultaneous attack on de centers of poverty and crime, dat’s what they are calling it. They even have a military sounding name for it – Operation Clean de Nation.” (Abani 247)

GraceLand, in view of the foregoing, depicts Pietersie’s earlier contention that governments, as a way of discouraging rural-to-urban migration, do nothing to cater for the welfare of slum dwellers. They would rather have slums cleared of their dwellers, or at best, relocated to other locations whose spatial conditions are not better than the slums themselves. The point that is noted here is that slum conditions are squalid because they are deliberately made to be so by authorities, in corroboration of Okon’s earlier assertion that “We are who we are because we are who we were made.” (Abani 312). Truly, people are who they are, because they are who they are made to be; hence Maroko is home to all kinds of characters like Jagua Rigogo, Joshua Bandele Thomas, Redemption, Okon, the king of Beggars, etc. With no job or any visible means of livelihood, people live by their wits.

Abani’s novel, more than any other representative text analysed in this thesis epitomises the pervasiveness of slums in the postcolonial city as the reader is, from the outset, confronted with the squalor of the city and its inhabitants. The novel does not only portray the Maroko part of the city as a squalid space, but also as one that is characteristic of a chaotic spatial morphology. Not only do the people live in abject poverty, make-shift structures are erected in any available space, and the atmosphere is

chaotic and noisy. Everywhere is noisy and everyone seems to be shouting at the same time or at themselves – people playing loud music from detuned radios, babies crying and shouting in need of food, women in hot altercation, and several Molue bus conductors doing everything to outshout themselves as they compete for passengers – in a never-ending cacophony. Thus, like the situation in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet born*, everything in *GraceLand* is characterised by filth. The novel is, indeed a tale of slum life, squalor and poverty. As Sita Maria Kattanek notes, "Maroko, the place to which Elvis and his father move, is home to a poverty- and crime-stricken community virtually drowning in garbage and mud" (427). It also does not contest the several claims of the fact of overcrowding in the African city. Infrastructure is overstretched, as:

The buses had a full capacity of forty-nine sitting and ninety-nine standing, but often held sixty and twenty. People hung off the sides and out of the door. Some even stood on the back bumpers and held on to the roof rack. The buses wove through the dense traffic so fast they threw the passengers about, and caused those hanging on to sway dangerously (Abani 9)

Kattanek examines the novel from the perspective of global economics, and sees it (the novel) as speaking from a global concern, and also, as a globalization device which interpolates western and Nigerian themes in the sense that it's author "shows an amalgamation of African shortcomings and Western meddling to raise an awareness of the complexity of contemporary problems in Nigeria within the context of a globalised world" (426). The primary interest is global capital whereby emphasis is on the commodification of everything, including people and relationships. She illustrates this in

the novel where Redemption advises Elvis to charge a fee for whatever he does at the club:

You are dere to keep dem entertained, no more, no less. You have to move from woman to woman. You are disposable and dey will never care about you. Dey will go on to marry rich foreigners like demselves. ... De best you can hope for is to make a decent living while things last and maybe get in a good fuck or two – for which you must charge extra. (Abani 95)

Nevertheless, she highlights Abani's use of the novel as a tool to hit back at the West. The West is responsible for the chaos and squalor of Third World cities. She shows how it is, that America and Europe – aided by African collaborators – create and continue to recreate the postcolonial space as a site of disorder, pointing out that this is to their benefit. She is convinced that Redemption's monologue, which she considers the climax of the novel suggests clearly that the "white man" creates and sponsors chaos, poverty crime and other vices in the postcolony:

American hospitals do plenty organ transplant. But dey are not always finding the parts on time to save people life. So certain people in Saudi Arabia/and such a place used to buy organ parts and sell to rich white people so dey can save their children or wife or demselves. ... Anyway, de rich whites buy de spare parts from de Arabs who buy from wherever dey can.. (Abani 241-242, Kattanek 429).

Although my interest is not on how Abani employs his novel as a globalisation tool, I find Kattanek's argument, nevertheless fundamental. The inference is that whatever dystopic imagining is being ascribed to the postcolony, such dystopia is created

and nurtured by the West for its own advantage, with collaboration of vested interests from the postcolony itself. This is in line with earlier arguments that that colonial authorities are largely, if not totally, responsible for turning postcolonial cities into cocoons of slums. There is therefore continued colonization and underdevelopment of the postcolony.

Kattanek alludes to the novel where “the degradation that Elvis experiences turns out to be the rule rather than the exception when he observes life in postcolonial Africa” (428). She notes, of Elvis, that “everywhere around him people try to eke out a living – labouring for the rich, thieving or selling their bodies.” (428)

While Kattanek examines *GraceLand* from the perspective of global economics, Amanda Aycock does so from the perspective of identity. She asserts that the novel reflects the search for, and construction of subaltern identity, noting that there is less emphasis on the postcolonial content in Abani’s novels generally, as “his protagonists are not meant to represent, say, the development of Nigeria as a nation” (12). She posits that what Abani has done instead is to show that “those on the margins of society are deserving of full personhood as well” (12). She asserts that the novel does not necessarily portray an attempt at reacting against the West, but as one that calls for self-introspection. She buttresses this in Abani’s own words:

Nigerian literature has engaged the West in its many forms (colonialism, neo-colonialism, even apartheid) in attempts to create a literature of protest and opposition, but now, with these spaces losing their urgency, the time has come to begin to imagine and deal with more homegrown (albeit universal) concerns –

gender, sexuality, familial tyranny, history and even hybridism, among others⁴⁶.

(Abani 24-25)

Aycock also explores *GraceLand* from the bildungsroman perspective in relation to the portrayal of performance as a tool for negotiating boundaries and constructing identities. She focuses on the novel's bildungsroman features but observes that its narrative style subverts the genre's linear plot tradition:

The narration of *GraceLand* swings back and forth between periods in the life of Elvis, the young protagonist: between his childhood and adolescence in the 1970s in Afikpo, a small fishing town in the eastern part of Nigeria, and his later location in Lagos as a sixteen-year-old in 1983, where he moves with his father after his mother's death from breast cancer and his father's failed political campaign. (12)

Although the bildungsroman perspective in the novel is noteworthy, my interest is primarily not in how the latter's narrative method deviates from the genre's (bildungsroman's) linear plot tradition, but in how the novel portrays the postcolonial city, vis-à-vis subaltern engagements with the urban space. What is foregrounded in Aycock's position, in this regard, and which I find interesting, is *GraceLand*'s portrayal of the role of performance as a tool for negotiating boundaries and constructing identities. It gives fictional representation to a similar position canvassed by Sonjah Stanley Niaah's that subalterns in Jamaica significantly employ performance (dancehall) as a tool for

⁴⁶ Cited in Aycock 12.

constructing their identities and engaging with the Island's urban spaces.⁴⁷ As Aycock notes, Elvis develops an interest in dancing, and takes lessons in it, financed by his grandmother. When he drops out of school, on arrival in Lagos, he pursues a full-time career in dancing as an Elvis Presley impersonator. Although he engages in some stop-gap engagements, like teaming-up to wrap cocaine – and afterwards, transport human parts for the colonel - Elvis's primary desire is a lifetime of performance. The activities of the Joking Jaguars in the novel also represent how performance is employed as a tool for constructing subaltern identity and space. This, as well as the construction of gender in the postcolonial city will be examined in the next chapter.

***GraceLand* and the Conception of People as Infrastructure**

The question comes to mind: how does *GraceLand* depict the concept of people as infrastructure? As earlier noted in the arguments of Simone, vis-à-vis inferences drawn from the positions of other urban scholars (Caroline Humphrey, Patricia Yaeger, Onookome Okome, etc), urban infrastructure has been imagined beyond the architectural structures and layout of the environment. The paradigm thus expands to encompass the presence and activities of people, and is foregrounded in *GraceLand* via the statement “people are important” (134). It is a statement, by the Barkeep, which seems to have been made without much thought. But I consider it the most significant in the novel, as it foregrounds the place of people in the ordering of things. Accordingly, legibility is dependent, more on people than on spatial morphology. As seen in previous chapters,

⁴⁷ For more on this, See Sonjah Stanley Niaah's *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto*.

there is more to urban legibility at spatial or temporal levels. ‘Cityness’ is determined primarily by the activities of the people. People determine the extent to which a city, and indeed, any environment is legible, works or functions. Hence in the novel, when Elvis and the king of Beggars seek to know from the barkeep what he likes most in the film that he is watching, he calmly replies: “there was the opening line. ‘People are important’” (134). This motif courses through the novel. The point that is stressed, as shown in the novel is that no matter how lowly placed people may appear, they are important, not just to themselves, but to others. They are important to the city. This perhaps accounts for why some slum dwellers may find their environment legible and navigable. Yaeger gives an illustration from Suketu Mehta’s *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*:

Mehta asks a Muslim woman (a member of a collective fighting for water rights and latrines) if she would prefer to live in a decent apartment instead of the open-guttered slum she now inhabits. ... ‘There’s too much aloneness. A person can die behind the closed doors of a flat and no one will know. Here,’ ... ‘there are a lot of people’. ... These crowds connect to their social geography even when that geography shelters heap upon heap of intimates. (Yaeger 55)

The people-are-important motif courses through *GraceLand*. First, Elvis, by chance, meets Redemption, a seemingly low-life, who like him, has no job, but is presented in the novel as the consummate Mr. ‘Fix it:’ Elvis is late to school and is afraid of the punishment awaiting him for that. Meanwhile, he runs into Redemption who is hardly in school himself and who only turns up about twice a month with gifts items for the

teachers and headmaster. On this occasion, Redemption, pulling a reluctant goat and carrying some tubers of yam on his head promises to “make things right” for Elvis if only Elvis helps him to pulling the goat to the headmaster’s office. Redemption, indeed, makes everything alright for Elvis. As such, “Elvis adored Redemption, deferring to him as if he were the elder brother he’d never had (25). Thus, in spite of the portrayal of Redemption as a corrupt and criminally-minded character – and indeed as everything that is not good – He proves himself useful to Elvis. Ultimately, he proves himself to be Elvis’s redeemer as his name implies. This ranges from saving him from being harmed – from the hoods at the beach and Iddo Park (26), from Prakash (Abani 92), and from the Colonel. At the end of the novel, Redemption accords Elvis ultimate redemption when he gives the latter his Passport to travel to the United States of America. It is noteworthy that while Elvis sees Redemption as his ‘everything,’ the latter appreciates Elvis for accepting him when others would not have anything to do with him. Thus, their friendship, for Redemption, “offered the possibility of something he desired most, acceptance” (Abani 26). Hence, Redemption treasures Elvis, and is prepared to do anything to “make things right” for him. Indeed, Redemption’s character is presented in the novel as dubious; his ways are crooked. He is a desperate character who is prepared to do anything without asking any questions, as long as the price is right. In the process of “making things right” for Elvis, Redemption encourages the latter to drop out of school and concentrate on his dancing art. He also introduces Elvis to the ‘agency’ of drugs. He involves Elvis in human trafficking and the transportation of human parts. Because Redemption, himself never

asks questions before taking on a business deal, he never expects Elvis to ask any. Yet, he has a ready explanation for any unanticipated discovery:

“So what is really going on?”

“With what?”

“With these kids. Why are we transporting them tied up to another country?”

... “As I know it, de Colonel dey supply dese children to white people who want to adopt them.”

“And why are they so silent” Are they drugged?

... “I no go lie. Me too don begin suspect dat story. But as you know, they have paid us five thousand Naira each (235-236).

When the operation turns sour, Redemption is able to ‘redeem’ himself and Elvis, in a stolen get-away Mercedes Benz car, whilst sacrificing Anthony and Conrad who are apparently lynched to death by the mob. It is after their narrow escape that Redemption explains to Elvis that they have actually participated in the trading of human parts:

“What exactly happened back there?”

“I no sure, but I think we were trading in spare parts.”

“Spare parts? What are you talking about?”

“Spare human parts. For organ transplant.”

“What?”

“Light me one ciga and I go tell you.” (241)

Elvis is terrified as Redemption explains in detail what has just happened, and why the trade in human parts – a one-way sale of human parts from Africa to the west – continues to boom⁴⁸

Interestingly, at the end of the novel, Redemption's criminal activities are understood as merely a response to the subaltern's desperate need to create a space for himself. Introducing Elvis to crime is Redemption's way of assisting a treasured friend – one who has accepted him like an elder brother and has looked up to him. It is his way of rising to the responsibility of catering for a younger 'brother.' Whether or not, Redemption is forgiven for his criminal tendencies is up to the reader; but it is arguable that he has dared to craft a legible and navigable urban space for himself. This is why he refuses to travel out of the Lagos slum that he has found legible and easily negotiable, as *GraceLand* clearly shows. Hence he gives his passport which contains a valid American visa to Elvis – his own contribution of helping Elvis to settle in the American urban space. This is clearly representative of the presence of people as infrastructure unto themselves and to the city. Although, Redemption may have been presented as a thief, a drug dealer, human parts trader, or even a pimp (by arranging for Elvis to dance with rich ladies for a fee), his activities, especially the "energy" he puts into "making things right" for people underscore the fundamental argument in *GraceLand* that people are important. He is thus a fulfilment of people's creative energies.

⁴⁸ See Elvis's monologue, earlier cited in this chapter (Abani 241-242 and Kattaneke 429).

Another chance meeting with a mendicant, Caesar Augustus Anyanwu, popularly known as the King of Beggars also crucially underscores the place of people as infrastructure. It is in fact the King of beggars that brings this to the fore when he tells Elvis, as earlier noted, that “people are important.” After he begs Elvis for alms and shares a meal with him, he assures Elvis that they shall meet again: “I mus’ go, but I am sure we go meet again, Elvis de musicman” – an indication that he will always be available to assist Elvis. The latter is only amused. It is understandable that Elvis does not see how the apparently helpless King of beggars is in a position to help him. Events in the novel however prove the worth of the King of Beggars on the life of Elvis and other Maroko inhabitants. He is always around Elvis, giving him routine advice and encouraging him to stay away from crime. He saves Elvis’s life when, the Colonel sends Jimoh to kill him and Redemption, by offering to take him (Elvis) with his theatre troupe on tour of the country, in the hope that by the time they return, “everything go done cool down” (259). This appears to be the only way by which Elvis’s life can be saved, in the circumstance, as Redemption is able to look after himself. He (the King of Beggars) later becomes the rallying point of the people in the resistance against Maroko’s clearance and the people’s forced eviction by the military authorities. Ultimately, the king of Beggars succeeds – at the cost of his own life – in killing the Colonel, who earlier passes a death sentence on Elvis. It does seem that the king of Beggars sacrifices his life for Elvis’s own.

Another mendicant, Okon, is another point of reference in the novel’s portrayal of the significance of people (as infrastructure), in the lives of others. His chance meeting

with Elvis, when he is in a desperately hungry situation is a curious one, as he is driven, by hunger, to the point of madness:

As he approached another buka, Elvis saw a man standing outside, begging the owner for food. The owner's heated response was attracting a small crowd. The man grabbed hold of the plate of food the owner was about to serve and desperately tried to wrench it from her, but she held on tightly. As they struggled for it, the plate gave way and fell to the floor, spilling food everywhere. The man pounced on it, triumphantly scraping rice and dirt into his mouth (47).

It is easy to immediately pass the man off as mad, as only a mad man will scoop food and dirt from the floor into his mouth. Elvis is however thrilled by the beggar's 'victory' over the buka owner, and he later orders some food for the beggar. The way the man 'attacks' the food Elvis has ordered for him, and the speed with which he "shovelled balls of fufu into his mouth" and "Apparently unaffected by the heat of the food" shows the extent of his hunger. After he has eaten to his fill, he curiously offers to help Elvis whenever the latter is in need:

He sat back and smiled at Elvis. "If you need something, any time, just ask for me, Okon," he announced.

Elvis nodded distractedly. It seemed like every mendicant in Lagos was able to help him, first, the king of Beggars and now this man.

Okon grabbed Elvis by the hand. "I dey serious, my friend, nobody knows tomorrow. Remember – Okon."

Elvis looked from the intense eyes to the grip of his arm. "Sure, Okon."

“Dat’s me.” (Abani 47-48)

It is apparent, from the foregoing, that Elvis does not take Okon’s assurance of assistance, should Elvis ever be in need, seriously. But, he is wrong, for not long afterwards, when Elvis has been retrenched from his building labourer’s job without pay-off, and is hungry and unable to buy food for himself, and wondering what to do, he runs into Okon:

A man stood in the open door of the buka, dressed like Superfly. ...

“It’s me. Okon.”

It hit him. It was the man he had fed barely a week ago, at this same buka. ... How come he was so kitted out now? ... ‘Yes. It’s me. Okon. Okon!’ Finally he offered Elvis a drink and some food.

“Take anything you want – extra meat, stout, anything.” (75)

This second meeting sees Okon buying Elvis whatever food and drink he wants. Besides repaying a favour, Okon is prepared to introduce Elvis to his new source of income which has to do with blood donation for a fee. Elvis does not eventually take Okon’s offer as a result of Redemption’s counter offer; but it is noteworthy that Okon, indeed, does reciprocate Elvis’s earlier favour and is prepared to do more. Although the idea of donating blood as a means of livelihood does not appear to be attractive, to Okon, it is significant, as it is predicated on the saving of lives:

“I know you de wonder how I manage get all this money,” Okon explains. Elvis does not care, and does not wish to know, weary of becoming an accessory to any crime Okon may have committed. But Okon is bent on disabusing Elvis’s mind; so he explains

simply: “blood.” Elvis is alarmed, and thinks that Okon has become an assassin, but the latter senses this and explains further: “Blood. The hospital de pay us to donate blood. One hundred Naira per pint. If you eat well, you can give four pints to four different hospitals, all in one day. It’s illegal, of course, but it’s my blood and it’s helping to save lives, including mine. Right?” (76).

The significance of the above is not necessarily on the fact of sale of blood – whether legal or illegal – but on how people constitute infrastructure to one another. It is apparent from Okon’s explanation that he sells cheap blood to local hospitals without the resources to make purchases from blood banks, and these local hospitals, in turn, make blood available to people who are in need of blood but cannot afford the its high cost in established hospitals and blood banks. The importance of this so-called illegal activity of blood sale to human survival is not lost on the reader of Abani’s novel. Okon, again, embarks on the same illegal activity that is aimed at ‘saving’ lives. This time, he makes a living from the sale of human parts. This is however different from the trade in human parts – harvested from people, especially children who are kidnapped and eventually murdered – that Elvis and Redemption have earlier been involved in, on behalf of the Colonel (which is a destruction of lives). Okon, in his reasoning, aims to save lives, that is, his own life and the lives of others. Okon scavenges for corpses and human parts from those killed in the Maroko levelling. He reasons that rather than allow the corpses to rot, it is better for parts, like hearts and kidneys to be harvested from them to save those who are still alive. The reader is amused, but it tends to make sense as there is a strand of morality in Okon’s activities. It is his way of making the dead useful to the living. The

‘hustling’ activities of the Maroko characters aptly capture Dunton’s argument, that creative energy can become negative. In Okon’s case, his ‘negative’ creativity and enterprise, as indeed those of others, are occasioned by circumstances beyond him. As he puts it, “we are who we are because we are who we were made” (312). There is no attempt to justify Okon’s activities; the point, however, is that he, like others, is forced into such activities, as the subaltern is profiled as belonging in a surplus humanity, whom relevant authorities do not care about. Hence he again tries to recruit Elvis into the ‘business.’ He will eventually “fix” Elvis “up” in Bridge City, their new ghetto, as a caretaker. Of children:

Bridge City was a dangerous place, and when crowds fell, it was easy to be very much alone in the crowds that milled everywhere. ... Young children who had been out all day begging were prime targets for the scavengers spawned by this place. They were beaten, raped, robbed and sometimes killed. So they came up with the idea of “caretakers.” The children paid one set of scavengers to protect them against the others – simple and effective. (309)

Okon’s sense of altruism in what he does, perhaps, spares him from being condemned by the reader.

GraceLand therefore questions preconceived global templates of urban infrastructure and highlights the importance of people’s encounters, relationship(s), activities and interdependence – even at the informal level – in its determination. Infrastructure, like legibility is inseparable from the people. Hence, through the likes of Elvis, Redemption, the king of beggars, Okon and other characters, the novel presents the

significant – whether positive or negative – role of informal structures in determining the city. It shows that, in the postcolonial city, pathologized as chaotic in view of its debilitating spatial conditions, there, nevertheless are visible and invisible activities that keep the city – or the slum space, as the case may be – functioning.

The role of people as infrastructure is perhaps best captured in *GraceLand* through the mind-set of the bar owner, with the way she allows people to eat and drink on credit:

She was very ready to extend credit to all her customers, who were mostly poor and unemployed anyway. But even her generosity had its limits, though she understood that they had come to down their sorrows in her watered-down alcohol. They needed her, and she needed them. They drank, she sold. If she was owed, she owed the palm wine supplier, who owed someone else; everyone owed someone these days. It was the vogue. (52)

This, simply, is the informal economy at work – like the way the regulated economy works in the formal set-up. Thus, in spite of their challenges, people support themselves and make a conscious effort to construct, maintain and (re)claim their environment. It is an exception that has become the rule – a depiction of the abnormal is the norm.

***GraceLand* and the City**

The question may yet be asked: From the foregoing, is *GraceLand* a damning depiction of the postcolonial city as utterly dystopic? Hilary Dannenberg tends to answer in the affirmative. She observes that in the novel, “the city itself, including its structures and human forces, is depicted as a monster which consumes its inhabitants” (43). For

Matthew Omelsky, *GraceLand* depicts a postcolonial urban dystopia – one of filth and hopelessness – from which its subjects desperately seek escape:

From the state’s all-encompassing violence to the decayed landscape, the disquieting social relations, and finally, to this deterioration of the body and mind, every political, social and spatial layer of the novel is rendered perilous. This fractured world – with its systemic violence, socioeconomic marginalization, and decay – shapes and constrains the lives of Abani’s youth subjects. ... They desperately seek to navigate their way out of their shattered surroundings. (86-87)

Omelsky notes that the novel depicts postcolonial urban hopelessness, pervasiveness of violence and a “decayed urban landscape” (86), to the extent that the only way out for its youth characters is to ‘escape’ elsewhere. For Elvis therefore, this ‘elsewhere’ is America and not the damning Lagos slum is the place to be. Salvation lies in the West and its ideals; hence, “From this bleak life, the youth in *GraceLand* turn to Elvis Presley, Bazooka chewing gum and Coca Cola as their path out of dystopia.” (87)

Truly, *GraceLand* depicts the pervasiveness of violence (especially state violence-sanctioned violence as represented by the Colonel and other soldiers), poverty and frustration in the postcolonial urban landscape, leading to subaltern resolve to seek survival elsewhere. As Susan Z. Andrade also notes, “the Colonel and his minions are part of the reason why Elvis ultimately finds it impossible to remain in Nigeria. And much of the novel has the quality of a witnessing of military violence and the quotidian poverty that accompanies it, setting the record straight about environmental degradation and the violence of gross economic disparities” (236). Hence, Elvis feels redeemed from

all of these when he is called (as Redemption) at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport by the airline clerk to board:

‘Redemption,’ the airline clerk called.

Elvis, still unfamiliar with his new name did not respond.

‘Redemption!’ the clerk called louder.

Elvis stepped forward and spoke.

“Yes, this is Redemption.” (Abani 321)

The above quote hints at an apocalyptic nature of the postcolonial city, as Elvis only feels redeemed when he is called to board the aircraft out of Lagos.

The novel, however, depicts the uneven nature of Lagos and by extension the unevenness of development that has continued to plague the postcolony (Harrison 99). Elvis’s remark about the city as “half slum” and “half paradise” depicts this and is, at least suggestive that the postcolonial city is not all about dystopia.

In spite of all of the foregoing, however, *GraceLand* contests the aprioristic template for mapping the city. It represents Lagos, not as a work of art on a painter’s canvass, in the Cartesian sense, but as a dialectic urban space that shapes and reshapes its subjects who, in turn, shape and reshape it. The functioning of the city is not consequent upon the mapping or construction of its cartographers, but upon the activities and complexities of the people, vis-à-vis the latter’s reactions to the challenges and/or opportunities presented by the urban space.

The novel confirms the indispensability of metis (local knowledge) in crafting the cartography of the city, vis-à-vis the construction of its spatial legibility. It confirms

arguments regarding the pervasiveness of chaos and crime. But such is not restricted to the metropolis. The killing of Innocent by Godfrey on the arrangement and instruction of his own father, Joseph , in collusion with Elvis's father, Sunday, as well as and Joseph's rape of his own daughter (Efua), and later, of Elvis himself inside the Chapel, in Afikpo, are instructive of the ever present fact of crime even in the smaller towns and rural communities.

GraceLand contests the notion of slums as surplus cities and of their dwellers as a surplus humanity (Dawson 21). The indispensability of the urban poor and their continued presence in the city is portrayed in a short dialogue between Elvis and Redemption:

To their left, through a skirt of trees, was the road, and across the lagoon from it, on the distant shore were lights.

“Is that Ikoyi?” Elvis asked.

Redemption squinted.

“Oh yes,” he replied. “Dis is why I like Lagos.”

“Why?”

“Because though they hate us, the rich still have to look at us. Try as they might, we don't go away.” (Abani 137).

Informal environments will, thus, never go away. The relationship or companionship between “slum” and “paradise” – which characterizes the postcolonial city – is ever present.

Overall, Abani's novel represents the postcolonial city as a site where formal and informal structures coalesce. Thus the postcolonial city is not a dystopic site that merely harbours a surplus humanity but a dialectical, hybrid space that builds its subjects, who, in turn, rebuild it in a symbiotic relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM INERTIA TO AGENCY: SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*

While people moved slowly, they were not idle ...

If no one would employ them, they would employ themselves.

– Sefi Atta, *Everything Good will Come*

People are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them. ... People create social systems, and these systems, in turn, organize and influence people's lives.

– Albert Bandura

Human Networks as Spatial Catalysts

In this chapter, I examine how Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* represents the postcolonial city. Focus is primarily on the novel's depiction of subaltern reaction to the debilitating living conditions of the city, and how the need or quest for survival galvanizes urban subjects to acquire agency as they construct and navigate their identities and spaces. The chapter seeks to address the essential questions: What are the survival strategies of postcolonial city subjects? Does survival in the urban environment amount to agency? How does the subject acquire agency in the face of the debilitating living conditions? To what extent does the subaltern contribute to the city's functioning?

As has been noted in the previous chapters, several factors have predicated the often illogical, overcrowded and squalid postcolonial urban space. It has been noted that urban climacteric, with the attendant population explosion, has been prodigious, but has not been matched by job creation to go round the people (Brown, Lyons and Dankoco 666-667). Hence, there has been the challenge of legibility and infrastructure. As a result, the postcolonial urban subject is compelled to devise means of coping with, and surviving, harsh living conditions. In Nigeria, for instance, Victor A.O. Adetula notes that “a majority of urban residents ... experience acute socioeconomic hardship and are consigned to poor housing and accommodations, as exemplified by ghetto settlements such as Ajegunle and Mushin in Lagos, Bere, Oje, and Inalende in Ibadan and Angwan Rukuba, Angwan Rogo, and Dilimi in Jos” ((359). In the bid to survive, there is usually the resort to self-help – fraud, crime and other desperate measures; but there is also the significant and effective strategy for subjects to organize themselves into various welfare associations, aimed at easing the burden of a harsh urban life.

The creation of enterprise through collaborative efforts has been advanced by various scholars as a fundamental coping strategy. Adetula emphasizes the strength and value of such associations, a position that tends to reinforce AbdouMaliq Simone’s conception of people as infrastructure:

In many Nigerian urban centers, these associations engage in a range of activities, including the provision of social services and infrastructure, credit and loans, and religious and social events. It is possible that in the course of their work, these

organizations have deepened the content of their activities to the level of promoting the empowerment of members. (361)

Thus, the resort to communal life via welfare associations and other collaborative groupings under various names, not only proves to be an effective survival strategy, but also, a means of subaltern empowerment. The subjects are thus able to create infrastructure, and craft, for themselves, a legible urban space. In doing so, they create agency and contribute meaningfully to the functioning of the postcolonial city.

Francis Owusu laments that the significance of the informal settlement has not been given its due acknowledgement. He notes that the informal urban environment has often been associated with squalor and, as such, the bulk of scholarship has tended to emphasize the negative survival strategies of (informal) urban subjects. In portraying these survival efforts, emphases have often been placed on crime and other desperate steps taken by subjects to cope with the hardship in which they have found themselves. They are therefore imagined as urban subjects for whom the only thing that matters is survival. This profiling seems to suggest that they do not make meaningful contributions to the progress of the city. If this is so, it would mean that the absence of the subject from the urban space does not, in any way, affect the latter's legibility. Hence – and unfortunately so – they are not taken into consideration when mapping, imagining, and constructing the city. This direction of thought tends to suggest that the city has no use for its informal urban subjects. To Owusu, the line of thought is narrow, as it does not take into consideration the importance of the informal urban environment: “the usefulness of the informal sector and the survival strategies approaches for understanding

African urban economies have been undermined by the transformations in urban livelihood strategies brought about by the continent's economic crises and neoliberal economic reform policies" (450). Saskia Sassen, similarly, argues for the fundamental role of the subaltern in the urban environment:

In the day-to-day work of the leading sectors in global cities, a large share of the jobs involved are low paid and manual Even the most advanced professionals will require clerical, cleaning, and repair workers for their state-of-the-art offices, and they will require truckers to bring not only the software but also the high bulbs. Although these types of workers and jobs are never represented as part of the global economy, they are in fact part of the infrastructure of jobs involved in the running and implementing the global economic system including such an advanced form of it as international finance (182-183).

Owusu notes, also, that "the livelihood strategies of the not-so-poor urban residents who participate simultaneously in the formal and the informal sector have been ignored" (450). Collaborative activities in the informal environment are not restricted to the urban poor. Such activities, Owusu argues, and as will be seen in *Everything Good Will Come*, involve everybody, including the "not-so-poor," to use his (Owusu's) term, and the not-so-rich. The novel, I will argue, depicts that these activities and other creative efforts significantly contribute to the economic growth and vibrancy of the city; they also facilitate or enhance urban survival. Edgar Pietersie's earlier insistence on the presence of vibrant relations/relationship and interdependence between the formal and informal sectors, and also, Simone's notion of people as infrastructure, are apt theoretical bases for

this argument. To be able to appreciate the fundamental role of the informal sector in the functioning – or legibility, so to speak – of postcolonial cities, Owusu emphasizes “the need to indigenize urban planning” to “reflect the changing livelihood” in the cities.

It is important to emphasize, from the foregoing, that the subaltern continues to play a crucial role in the dynamics of the city, including so-called global cities. Sassen’s position strengthens the argument for the importance of the informal economy, especially in the postcolonial urban space. As she notes, the informal economy – or “these types of workers and jobs,” so to speak – is not envisioned or “represented’ in the global economic system; yet it (the informal economy) plays a significant role in sustaining so-called global economy.

Babatunde Ahonsi, who refers to himself as an “informed Lagosian,” notes the significant contribution of the subaltern in shaping and reshaping the postcolonial city. Like Owusu, he notes that the contribution of the subaltern in sustaining the city is often not given its due recognition; hence he (Ahonsi) seeks to give “greater visibility to the role of the poor majority in shaping the boundaries and population of the city” (130). This tends to be a response to the notion which profiles postcolonial urban poor as a surplus humanity that does not contribute, in any way to the growth and functioning of the city. Ahonsi examines “the contributions of “everyday” Lagos resident to the prevention of environmental collapse and to the governability of Lagos” (130). He notes the creative efforts and energies of urban poor, and argues that what remains is to properly harness “the productive, civic engagement, and sustainable livelihood activities of the urban

majority,” as a “basis for the transformation of Lagos into a more liveable and environmentally stable metropolis” (130).

Writing on life in a densely populated area of Zaria, a city in northern Nigeria, Mohammed-bello Yunusa observes the daily life activities of the people living in Anguwar Mai Gwado. He notes that, like the situation in every slum in the postcolony, the people live a squalid life: overcrowding, no portable water, no hygiene, no health facilities, and no credit system, and no jobs for the people. For instance:

Water is drawn from streams and shallow wells. Some households go to the city centre to fetch drinking water The community bought electric poles, which were appropriated by the national electric power Authority, but no electricity was supplied The environment of Anguwar Mai Gwado lacks virtually all the necessary infrastructure, even as a segment of an urban area with a high number of inhabitants.” (184)

Yunusa obtains information from some respondents, with regard to how the people survive the squalid living conditions. He observes that the people’s survival is based on a communal lifestyle anchored on mutual interdependence. These are based on closely-knit social and support networks. In what appears to echo Simone, Yunusa argues that “Associations of various types and purposes such as trade unions, religious associations, women’s organizations, youth groups, ethnic associations and professional associations pervade African towns and cities” (193-194). He emphasizes that “these institutions, together with interpersonal relationships, are crucial to individuals, groups, and household production, survival strategies and general livelihood patterns” (194). With the

absence of drainages in Anguwar Mai Gwado, for instance, he (Yunusa) learns that “some community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (particularly the Mai Gwado Youth development Association) help the community with the construction of culverts to control erosion” (195). This civic and productive engagement by the youth organizations and non-governmental organizations helps to sustain the environment, as well as make Anguwar Mai Gwado a habitable and hospitable urban space. They, accordingly, like the “everyday” Lagos resident, as earlier posited by Ahonsi, contribute significantly to the prevention of environmental collapse, and even to the “governability” of Anguwar Mai Gwado. Besides, they tend to derive joy from contributing to the sustenance and legibility of their environment. As Yunusa concludes, “members of ethnic, religious and area development associations derive psychological satisfaction from associating with their fellows, and this gives them a great sense of accomplishment” (195).

In the same vein, Mohamadou Abdoul considers associations and networks as catalysts for urban development. In his examination of Pikine, Senegal, for instance, he notes: “The activities of these associations provide for the individual and collective needs of their members. They also increasingly provide for the municipality in its functions dealing with the management of the urban living environment and the delivery of social services” (250). He argues that the developments reveal a process of empowerment through economic initiatives, as well as the regulation of public space. Accordingly, the people, by these activities, not only ensure collective survival, but also, through the agency they create, help the urban environment to function.

Ibrahim Abdullah reveals, in another instance, how the contemporary city of Freetown has been “reconfigured beyond the imagination of its city fathers or colonial planners” (202). He notes that following the ten-year civil war in Sierra Leone, vis-à-vis power centralization as well as the World Bank structural adjustment policies and the attendant austerity measures, all categories of people – including, but not limited to, the jobless, beggars, school drop-outs, hustlers, street vendors, etc. – have besieged the city and have devised various means of survival. Since these people do not have the means to leave in the formal or planned areas because of the high costs of owning houses for their accommodation and being too poor, as well, to pay exorbitant fees which landlords charged for rent, they resort to the only affordable alternative of living in the various informal settlements, slums and ghettos in the city. In doing so, they alter the original “mapping” of the city, in their effort to craft a legible and navigable urban space.

Alison Brown, Michal Lyons and Ibrahima Dankoco also stress the importance and influence of the informal economy. Citing the International Labour Organization, they note that “informal employment is thought to account for around 60 per cent of all urban jobs and to have provided 90 per cent of all new jobs created during the 1990s” (666). They argue that “African cities have now become non-industrial ‘trading cities’ serving as major economic nodes connecting national and international space” (667).

Curiously, some urban scholars have de-emphasized the contribution of the informal economy in to the growth and development of the city: “One of the simplest

definitions of the informal economy, given by Portes *et al.*⁴⁹,” Brown, Lyons and Dankoco inform, is that it is an “economic activity that uses illegal means to produce legal products and services, an understanding shared by De Soto⁵⁰ in his allusion to ‘extra-legal’ activities” (667). But there is, arguably, a problem of generalization with the definition of the informal economy as offered by Portes, Castells and Benton. I am not persuaded that every activity in pursuance of the informal economy is illegal. I therefore consider the conception an essentialist and generalizing “definition.” Brown, Lyons and Dankoco, rightly recognize that “many street traders’ networks spring from complex social capital relations of ethnicity, kinship or religion.” It is misleading therefore to classify all of such networks as illegal or extra-legal. It is noteworthy that “the importance of informal workers’ organisations was recognised by the International Labour Organization.” (Brown, Lyons, and Dankoco 671)

I have examined the foregoing tradition of thought to show that in spite of the debilitating conditions and challenges facing – or posed by – the postcolonial urban environment, its subjects are not redundant. Since formal structures are not available to cater for them, they have devised other means of catering for themselves and keeping the city functioning. This creation of agency is why the informal economy is crucial to the postcolonial city. Informal networks and structures keep the city and its subjects going, in the absence of formal ones. The point therefore is that urban challenges precipitate

⁴⁹ For details, see A. Portes, M Castells, and L.A. Benton. *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*.

⁵⁰ For details, see H. de Soto, *The Other Path*.

subaltern agency. Hence the postcolonial city does not collapse under its perceived dystopia.

Human Agency: Shaping Experiences and Events

People are shapers of events and the circumstances around them. Human agency is, accordingly, the ability of people to shape events, their environment and the circumstances around them. Albert Bandura construes agency as a perspective in which “individuals are producers of experiences and shapers of events” (75). He notes that emphasis has often been placed on agency realized through individual efficacy.

According to Bandura, “Conceptions of human agency have been essentially confined to personal agency exercised individually.” He argues that this confinement is not the only form through which people manage the events and circumstances that shape or reshape their lives. Social cognition, he emphasises, is anchored on three different forms of agency, which he identifies as “personal, proxy and collective” (75). The question that then arises is: In what situation, or under what circumstances does agency become personal, proxy or collective? Sometimes, people are able to directly manage or control the social circumstances, conditions and practices that affect their lives. They are accordingly able to achieve their personal goals without recourse to others. Situations also abound whereby people are neither directly in charge of, nor do they have direct control over, conditions and practices that affect their lives. In this case they need proxy agents; that is, other people, to help them to effectively manage or deal with the situations in other for their goals to be achieved. Also, people are able to manage or deal with the

situations or conditions that affect their collective welfare through collaborative efforts. Accordingly, an individual does not acquire agency solely through personal management of the events and circumstances – whether social or environmental – that affect, shape or reshape his or her life; such may be handled by another individual or a group of other individuals on his or her behalf. Furthermore, the affairs and circumstances that shape or reshape the lives of individuals are often managed by the individuals in collaboration with other individuals or groups of individuals. It is germane to emphasize the supremacy of the collective form of agency over other forms as mutual interdependence ensures subaltern empowerment and collective efficacy.

Although I am fascinated by the theorises of human agency, my interest is not principally in the supremacy or desirability of one form over the others but in agency as a totalizing construct, with all the boundaries of its strands or forms blurred. Like Olakunle George's position on modernity, "The issues devolve ultimately on the question of human capacity to know (or transform) itself as well as its environment and productive abilities" (ix). I find it convenient to also appropriate this (George's position) for human agency.

Elsewhere, Albert Bandura examines the properties of human agency to include "intentionality," "forethought," "self-reactiveness" and "self-reflectiveness." He affirms that people, sometimes in collaboration with other participating agents, form intentions and devise means and strategies for realizing them. The inference, here, is that intentions and their corresponding endeavours require the commitment of agents. In this self-regulatory process, people embark on things that satisfy them and accord them a sense of

self-worth while refraining from acts and behaviours that tend to violate their moral standards, as such conducts will result in self-condemnation.

Karen Coen Flynn, in examining the people's survival strategies in the city of Mwanza in Tanzania, notes how the people devise various means of survival through mutual collaboration and interdependence in the face of food scarcity and deprivation. Flynn notes that in the absence of so-called functional economy, and physical infrastructure, the people are able to put in place an informal but well-defined, and functional cultural economy, notably through collective farming. She calls this moral economy, and notes its potency in sustaining not just the lives of the people, but the city as well. She notes that some observers see farming in the city as having a tendency to evoke a rural environment which is an antipodal to some observers' spatial conception(s) of the urban imaginary: "Images such as these "rural" life in Africa's towns and cities evoke dismay in some observers because they seem incongruous with what is widely believed to distinguish urban from rural settlements" (129). The contention, to these observers, is that agriculture is to the countryside what industry is to the city and town. Farming in the city is thus considered a misnomer. Hence, a "city of farmers' is the last thing that African planners and policy makers will like to encourage" (Macharia 688⁵¹). The propriety of "both the ideological and tangible segregation of agriculture and urbanization" has been questioned by others, for "they not only recognise urban-based agricultural activities as an integral part of many towns and cities worldwide but also

⁵¹ Quoted in Flynn 128.

applaud those who engage in these activities for their valuable contribution to urban incomes and food supplies” (Flynn 129).

In a review of Flynn’s *Food, culture and survival in an African city*, Thomas Cousins writes that:

Central to Flynn's argument is the notion of a "moral economy" that acts as a "potent force shaping people's food entitlement in Mwanza." Such a moral economy is based on "socially shared and socially enforced moral rules regarding food" that shape and are shaped by "forces such as the meanings assigned to staple foods, their production and supplies, people's access to these supplies, and food-related divisions of labour." (Cousins 524)

Mwanza’s moral economy, observed by Flynn, is an apt portrayal of Bandura’s conception of moral agency, whereby people embark on only those activities that enhance their satisfaction, moral standards, and self-worth. The subjects of the city (of Mwanza) through their collective agency – and efficacy – are able to ensure their collective survival as well as keep the city functioning.

Ilan Kapoor examines agency as a weapon of resistance. Through a conscious deployment of moral agency, as will be seen in Atta’s novel, the people are able to mobilize themselves for the purpose of attaining ‘Everything Good.’ They, through collaborative efficacy, are able to resist circumstances that, hitherto, render the urban space illegible, even in the face of severe odds. The bid to tackle and survive a given social circumstance usually results in the generation of ideas and endeavours to tackle other pending social circumstances. For instance, Kapoor (651) argues that “discursive

instability” has the tendency to make for agency, like Gayatri Spivak’s idea of “enabling violence⁵²” (Spivak 19), as well as the persistent transformation of “conditions of impossibility into possibility⁵³” (Spivak 201). In this regard, Homi Bhabha, according to Kapoor, also provides contemporary illustrations, as “He singles out, for example, the British group, Women Against Fundamentalism, for using the Rushdie affair, not to endorse or defend either Western liberalism or Islamic conservatism, but to draw attention to women's issues (household inequality, education, prostitution)” (Kapoor 652), thereby “reconjugating, recontextualizing, translating the event into the politics of communities and public institutions⁵⁴” (Bhabha 114).

Although the Nigerian novel is used to examine the postcolonial city, it is important to note that it is the postcolonial city, generally – not necessarily the Nigerian city that is being examined in this thesis. I have therefore also reviewed scholarship based on cities outside Nigeria; hence the examination of scholarship on Sierra Leonean and Tanzanian cities. The intention is to show the direction of scholarship on how subaltern agency, whether individual or collective, is crucial to the sustenance of the postcolonial urban subjects and their environments. Reference to the significance of “city of farmers” (Flynn 129) is to show the extent to which subalterns strive to create agency and mediate an urban space (including farming in the city) that is bereft of formal structures. It foregrounds my argument that postcolonial urban subjects are galvanized ‘from inertia to

⁵² As cited by Kapoor.

⁵³ As cited by Kapoor

⁵⁴ As cited by Kapoor

agency,' and that, far from being indolent, they are active agents capable of creative energies and ready to combat emerging local and global realities. This, I argue, is what Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* significantly depicts as will be seen later.

From Inertia to Agency: Strategies for Subaltern Survival

Postcolonial African city subjects have often been profiled as indolent and perpetually in a state of inertia (Briggs and Yeboah 24). They are often conceived of as incapable of any creative action that would enhance spatial legibility and agency. Accordingly, the often common conception is that of the subaltern as a victim in urgent need of deliverance, and his or her city is a crooked urban space that is in drastic need of some straightening. Briggs and Yeboah lament that "all too often, Africans are represented as passive victims, overlooking the reality that Africans are active agents, capable of responding to both local and global circumstances" (24). The profiling of African cities as failed spaces or of their subjects as indolent and helpless is not accurate, as clearly visible human agency abound. Corroborating Patricia L. McCarney and Mohamed Halfani, Ilda Lindel maintains that "In the face of the failure of local governments to meet growing urban needs, popular initiatives have for quite some time played an important role in the provision of urban services" (Lindel 1879). She argues that "Large numbers of urban residents lack access to formal jobs or state provision of basic services and have created their own income activities and established the necessary services and infrastructure, often through collective efforts" (1879). Thus, human agency, Briggs and Yeboah argue, has "actively responded to circumstances and conditions, and

these responses have contributed to the continuing expansion of African cities. An extension of this has been an emerging middle class in many cities, and this middle class has helped to fuel the building boom particularly in the peri-urban areas” (24). Hence, in spite of the debilitating living conditions of African urban subjects, the African city continues to thrive as there is an ever-present “manifestation of local realities interacting with global forces” (Briggs and Yeboah 24). This finds an apt corroboration in Lindell’s contention that “The conditions in which urban citizens live and work are not only created locally, which means that their agency can be expected to stretch beyond the local level” (1884).

Deborah Potts identifies three survival strategies among the urban poor in Africa: “The first involves a great increase in informal sector activity, with previously non-earning household members entering the petty commodity sector, as well as wage-earners taking on supplementary cash-earning activities” (250). The second, according to her, involves the resort to food growing by virtually every urban household on “any available patch of arable land within and around the urban area,” while the third involves “the strengthening and adaptation of the rural-urban linkages which have always been such an important part of urbanization processes in sub-Saharan Africa (250). These highlighted strategies underscore subaltern significance, vis-à-vis the conception of survival as agency, as Bandura and Flynn have indicated.

It is important to point out subaltern contribution to the attainment of peace in the urban environment. Urban legibility can only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace. Hence individuals and groups have often devised means of combating crime and ensuring

peace and security where state agencies have failed. In Nigeria, various vigilante groups have been formed by individuals for this purpose: “Beyond the headlines captured by high-profile Nigerian vigilantes such as the *hisba*, the Bakassi Boys and the O’odua People’s Congress, night guards and vigilantes have been a popular local response to theft, armed robbery and threats to security – from rural lineage to urban street, right across the country” (Pratten 64). In this way, subalterns have made – and have continued to make – significant contributions toward the vibrancy and functioning of the postcolonial urban environment. In other words, it is significantly as a result of subaltern participation that the African city has functioned and has continued to function.

Sefi Atta: *Everything Good Will Come*⁵⁵

Set in the Nigerian city of Lagos between 1971 and 1995, *Everything Good Will Come* tells the story of Enitan Taiwo and Sheri Bakare. The latter shows up in Enitan’s house one day and they become “best” friends. The novel has aptly been categorised in terms of its bildungsroman elements or in terms of its ‘coming-of-age’ of its protagonists. Madelaine Hron examines how the image of the child is constructed in Third-generation Nigerian novels:

⁵⁵ Sefi Atta was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1964, and has contributed short stories to such literary journals as *World Literature Today*, *Los Angeles Review* and *Mississippi Review*. Besides *Everything Good Will Come*, her first novel, she has also published *Swallow* (2010), *News from Home* – a collection of short stories (2010), and *A Bit of Difference* (2012). Atta is a recipient of several literary awards.

Particularly striking in the recent wave of Nigerian fiction is the figure of the child or the youth, which features prominently in most of these novels. She notes that protagonists of *Everything Good will come* and most of the novels are all children, adolescents, or young adults; hence they are “most frequently described as ‘coming-of-age’ novels. (27)

This is rightly so in the sense that *Everything Good Will Come* significantly narrates the process the growth of Enitan and Sheri, its principal characters. The novel significantly depicts what growing up in the city is like, especially for the vulnerable girl-child for whom a single experience could shape or alter the course of destiny. This is the case with Sheri, for instance, when she attends a party with Enitan, and is gang-raped. Her destiny is completely altered as she discovers that she is pregnant from the rape. Jane Bryce particularly notes that the novel is a bildungsroman that follows the development of Enitan and Sheri and the change they experience as a result of their meeting: “This change is a result of the meeting between Enitan and Sheri as children, which leads, later, to Sheri's rape in the park, and to an adult relationship in which the consequences of this rape are played out” (60). Sheri is shattered to learn after undergoing an abortion that she is unable to conceive and give birth to a child for the rest of her life. Jonas E. Akung examines the novel primarily from a feminist perspective; but first, he identifies it as a bildungsroman – a coming-of-age novel: “*Everything Good Will Come* ... examines the growing up of a child from adolescence to adulthood. Through these various forms of growth the heroine becomes aware of her environment and how it affects her” (114). Sheri's experience is one that has a decisive effect on whatever step she takes in her life.

Sheri's experience also has a shattering effect on Enitan although she is not the one raped. It is an experience that disrupts their adolescent friendship and set them apart from each other. For instance, Enitan is sent to London to continue her education while Sheri drops out of school. While Enitan successfully completes her education and joins her father's Law firm, Sheri has to rely on her wit and energy to 'hustle' for survival in the city – especially after her father's death – including sugar-dating Brigadier Ibrahim Hassan. This is where the bildungsroman and gender or feminist boundaries are blurred in the novel. Thus, Akung notes – even though from a feminist or gender perspective – that awareness garnered from formative years helps in shaping the woman's vision, stressing that “The female characters in this novel are very assertive and utilize all means available to them to affirm their individuality” (114). Akung's feminist position and notion of *Everything Good* as a bildungsroman and novel of self-assertion corroborate similar arguments by other scholars (Nnodim 328; Bryce 60). As Nnodim notes of the novel, “a variety of female subjectivities are explored in their different facets, and these subjectivities come to constitute viable spaces from which women can and do formulate empowering identities” (328). Indeed, the portrayal of Enitan's experiences under her male partners, beginning with her first boyfriend in England, then Mike Okafor, and later Niyi Pedro, whom she later marries, and her efforts to combat these experiences, portray the novel's bildungsroman and feminist perspectives of the novel as Akung has argued – a position strengthened also by Ayo Kehinde and Joy Ebong Mbipom:

The story which is told from a first person perspective – Enitan's perspective – is a bildungsroman, which reveals an unbroken growth pattern till Enitan comes of age

as a self-conscious and assertive woman. Enitan's process of growth comes with self-realisation which prompts greater response and reaction to the activities which go on around her. These processes motivate her sexuality and individuality. (67)

The same zeal to survive can be said of Enitan and her mother's experiences with Sunday Taiwo, their father and husband respectively. Similarly, Sheri has experiences with men, in which she is also portrayed as the victim. First, she is gang-raped by Damola Ajayi and his friends, and later maltreated and denied of 'freedom' by Brigadier Hassan Usman. She has to fight the Brigadier in order to free herself. Hence, the novel's feminist dimension is not in doubt.

Beyond the bildungsroman and novel of self-assertion, my primary interest in *Everything good Will Come* is its representation of the postcolonial city in terms of subaltern (re)construction and (re)production) of space and identity as well as the patterns of subaltern survival that result in the creation of agency in the face of damning urban odds. In the novel, both Enitan and Sheri battle odds from childhood to adulthood. Enitan, for instance, grapples with her parents' incessant domestic fights and disagreements, and eventual divorce. She falls out with them and walks out on them on separate occasions. She is betrayed by Mike. She does not fare even better in her relationship with her first boyfriend, in England, who accuses her of being dull in bed, like other Nigerian women, and who mocks her for just lying there "Like dead women" (Atta 65). In her marriage, she is constantly bullied by Niyi, who expects unquestionable loyalty from her; but she will eventually fight against this domination till the end. She defies all the odds against her, as a woman, as well as those presented by Lagos as an

urban environment (like the dense and chaotic traffic, the squalid life of several of the city's inhabitants, armed robbery, sale of fake drugs, and government's insensitivity) to construct her identity. The same can be said of Sheri who rather than succumb to the odds that plague her life, resorts to manipulating the odds to craft her own independence, as well as her spatial legibility and identity.

As has been argued in previous chapters, the postcolonial city is characterized by a pervasiveness of slums and poverty. *Everything Good Will Come* portrays the African city as overcrowded, and as a site of poverty, through the 'eyes' of the characters. Enitan describes the city of Lagos as overcrowded and one that largely resembles a shanty town whose buildings were never repainted nor its road repaired. The rot, decay and squalid Lagos life is portrayed by Enitan, in her description of the dormitories at the Royal College, considered to be the best in the city. She recounts the filth in the dormitory: The toilets stink with excrements piled up for several days such that she has to cover her nose to be able to use them. Adding to the stench are soiled sanitary pads carelessly flung into the open buckets by girls who are menstruating. The dormitories are so filthy that survival at the college is a wonder. The condition (of rot) in the city remains the same, ten years later. Enitan foregrounds this in her description of the condition of accommodation facilities at the National youth service camp. She remembers her school days after she smells urine when walking up the stairs in her dormitory which, itself, looks like a prison to her.

Indeed, *Everything Good Will Come* depicts Mike Davis's assertion of overcrowding and poverty in the postcolonial city: Accordingly, Atta, through her chief

character relays the presence of millions of people mainly comprising destitute and helpless people of various types and kinds. The novel presents the city of Lagos as a hybrid and diasporic urban space that is inhabited by all kinds of people – ‘the good,’ ‘the bad,’ ‘the hungry.’ As Enitan describes, “Lagos is festered with people: drivers, sellers, shoppers, loiterers, beggars, madmen” (99-100). She emphasizes that:

Millions lived in Lagos. They fell in and out with the elements as though the weather were created to punish and reward: “Sun beat my head,” “Breeze cooled me.” Most days it felt like a billion people walking down the labyrinths of petty and main streets: beggar men, secretaries, government contractors (thieves, some would say), Area boys, street children. (98)

The foregoing confirms Owusu’s position that the postcolonial city, as a hybrid space, is not all about slum and squalor as it is also peopled by the “not-so-poor,” the not-so-rich, as well as the rich, represented by the characters of Enitan and her family, Sheri, Niyi (and the Franco family) and many others. The “formal” part of the city is usually peopled by the rich. It is essential to note, as *Everything Good Will Come* portrays, the vibrant economic relations between these “not-so-poor” and “not-so-rich” on one hand, and the equally vibrant economic relations between these groups with the and the poor, and even the rich. As Nnodim observes: “Landscapes of poverty intersect with more affluent neighborhoods and middle-class spaces, such as the Sunrise Estate (inhabited by well-paid young couples) in Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*, and the white bungalows surrounded by the smells and colors of a “profusion of red hibiscus, pink crocuses, mauve bachelor’s buttons and sunflowers” in Abani’s novel” (322).

For instance, both of Enitan and Sheri are not poor. They are not from poor homes; neither do they live in slums. But they constantly interact with the poor and their informal environment. They are not spared the inconveniences of the city's overcrowding, dense traffic, and bumpy roads. They are not spared the spatial illogicalities of the city either:

A Peugeot had moved too quickly on the road and rammed into the back of a Daewoo. The Daewoo driver got out and smacked the open window. Mr. Peugeot jumped out and grabbed Mr. Daewoo's shirt. Mr. Daewoo was bigger. He slammed Mr. Peugeot against his car, held him by the scruff of his neck. ...

Even without a fight, the postcolonial urban space can be chaotic. Hence, it is normal for people to come out and watch fights. It is normal, also, for people to come out to watch, with excitement, when other people are being set ablaze over petty theft. These are all part of the urban dynamics in Africa, as portrayed in the novel and the other primary texts.

Everything Good Will Come also portrays the postcolonial city as a site that is capable of negative engagements. These engagements include crime, fraud, prostitution, desperation, etc. In the quest for survival and agency, people resort to different kinds of engagements and witty endeavours.

The city tends to be an urban space where violence is commonplace. This is not normal, ordinarily; but as a result of the regularity with which it occurs, postcolonial urban subjects have come to accept violence as a normal occurrence. An instance is the description of an armed robbery operation which Enitan and her boyfriend, Mike, encounter on their way to the Youth Service camp:

I heard a loud crack above the music. At first I thought it was fireworks. ... A man was running down my side of the street. His hands went up and he was shouting. The music drowned out what he was saying. I notice people in the market stand up, heard another crack. The man was thrown forward. He crashed over the trunk of the car behind us” (Atta 90).

The people have resigned to acknowledging such incidents as a normal part of their life experiences. Agents of the state are portrayed as doing nothing to curb violence. For instance, the policemen to whom the robbery incident is reported are indifferent to the incident: “We didn’t speak until we reached a police check point. Mike reported the raid and the policemen asked for his driver’s license” (Atta 90). What this suggests is that crime is so pervasive in the postcolonial city space that it has become normal, or at least, accepted as such. In this regard, reporting the crime to the police, and expecting the latter to embark on a pursuit of the armed robbers, appears to be a waste of time. It therefore seems that nothing is out of place in the postcolonial city, as far as people are concerned.

There has earlier, in this thesis, been an acknowledgement of disorder in the African city (Rakodi 45, Yaeger 13). Accordingly, crime anchored on fraud, illegal drug dealings, violence, etc., are all predicated on the city also as a space of what Chris Dunton describes as “high entropy” (69). This is especially so as urban population growth, as Brown, Lyons and Dankoco note, has not been matched by the creation or availability of jobs to go round the people. Since “man must wack” as noted in the previous chapter, any means by which survival is attained is thus accepted by the people as normal. As earlier noted, also, *Everything Good Will Come* portrays Lagos as being

peopled by all kinds of characters. Hence, there is the presence of all kinds of people and activities that foreground the postcolonial city “as a space of open flow, human interaction and proximate reflexivity” (Nuttall 742). The novel confirms the postcolonial city as a site of human activity and – to echo Nuttall – proximate reflexivity. It is therefore a space for the construction of agency, as subalterns devise creative energies to ensure their survival as well as the urban space. From the outset, the novel presents the reader with various strategies of survival adopted by the people. These strategies enable the people to create and recreate their spaces as well as construct their identities. The novel also confirms AbdouMaliq Simone’s conception of people as infrastructure. In the absence of formal structures and facilities that otherwise characterise so-called global cities, subalterns in the novel constitute themselves as Simone propounds, into human infrastructure, by embarking on creative enterprise either individually or collectively. There is therefore the creation of agency, through a plethora of activities, as revealed by Enitan, the novel’s protagonist and narrator:

It was a hard city to love; a bedlam of trade. Trade thrived in the smallest of street corners; in stores; on the heads of hawkers; even in the suburbs where family homes were converted into finance houses and hair salons according to the need.

The outcome of it was dirt, piles of it, on the streets, in open gutters, and in market places, which were tributes to both dirt and trade. (98-99)

It is safe to conclude, from the foregoing, that urban poor are not a surplus humanity, after all. By their activities, *Everything Good will Come* confirms Ahonsi’s claim that urban poor have “responded creatively to the challenges thrown up by the

rapid growth of Lagos in ways that provide pointers to some opportunities that could be harnessed in in planning and executing interventions for making the metropolis a more functional and hospitable city” (143). Indeed, there is a mixture of filth and enterprise – a pointer to the illogical nature of the postcolonial urban space, which, in Rakodi’s observation, encompasses order and disorder. Corresponding with the fact of overcrowding is the presence of organised crime in the postcolonial urban space:

Fraud rackets had recently increased. Overseas, they were calling it “Nigerian Crime.” Here we called it “419,” after the criminal code. Drug trafficking had also increased, and if the latest report were true, Nigerian drug rings were now one of the largest suppliers to the US and Europe. Foreign embassies were reluctant to grant us visas, and those of us who received them risked being strip-searched for drugs at airports. Many of the accused were single women, mules, who were caught en route to Europe or the US from the Far East. Some had swallowed condoms crammed with heroin and cocaine; others had squeezed them up their vaginas. There was the case of a woman who stuffed a condom of cocaine down her dead baby’s throat and cradled him on a plane. She was caught when an air hostess noticed the baby wasn’t crying. (Atta 156)

Accordingly, the novel depicts Carol Rakodi’s notion of the African city as a site where order and disorder coalesce.

There is, however, a creative enterprise embarked upon by the people, such that the city functions. Thus, the piles of dirt caused by the city’s informal trade notwithstanding, street trade among the people contributes significantly to their economic

survival as well as the vibrancy of the city, as the novel has portrayed. *Everything Good Will Come* corroborates Bandura's construction of agency as a perspective in which individuals produce experiences and shape events. For instance, formal facilities are impossible to access, either due to "bottlenecks," or they are simply unavailable to the subaltern. For instance, in the city's formal economy, it is almost impossible to obtain foreign currency; but in the informal economy – with people serving as infrastructure – this is easy: "There were places in Lagos where you went to buy US dollars and Pound Sterling, from hawkers who loitered like drug dealers," only that "You had to be sure you were buying the real thing" (Atta 125). The novel also corroborates Bandura's construction of agency as a social cognition perspective in which individuals produce experiences and shape events, as exemplified by Enitan and Sheri, its principal characters. The novel aptly represents or captures the three strands of agency on which social cognition is anchored. That is to say, *Everything Good Will Come* portrays subaltern agency at the personal or individual, proxy and collective levels. In the novel, Enitan begins with the description of Sheri's personal agency:

Living with Sheri, I saw how she survived as a sugary girl. ... She tidied after me and after the nephews and nieces who came to spend time with her. She dusted with cleaning rags, sometimes with her fingers. ... The rest of her time she spent preparing for Brigadier Hassan. ... and cooking meals. There wasn't a coy bone in her body to spare for the outrage of others. (Atta 157)

Enitan's description of Sheri's daily schedule above is, but a private aspect of individual agency. The point, however, is that through her domestic activities as described above,

Sheri acts as a shaper of experiences and events around her. She is able to condition her life and experience(s) as well as the lives and experiences of others. Street trade or hawking, petty sales, individual creation of utilities or enterprises, street begging, etc., are forms of individual agency that run through the novel. Mike for instance lives on his art and teaches in a community primary school, where he earns some extra money to subsidize his rent. His stipend from the National Youth Service is apparently not enough to sustain him; hence, he resolves to “Teach for national service and find small work to pay my way” (116). This is in addition to his hobby as an artist.

Enitan as an individual agent is able to embark on activities that shape and reshape her life as well as the lives of others. She plays a significant role in (re) ordering Sheri’s life and experiences. She recognises Sheri’s cooking talents and encourages her to go into food business, an advice which Sheri heeds, and which later ensures her survival and the survival of the entire Bakare family. By encouraging her father to let Sheri supply food for his party, Enitan gets Sheri her first business contract. She also encourages Sheri to be more resourceful and independent. For instance, when Brigadier Hassan asks Sheri to discontinue her food business because he does not want her to go out anymore, Enitan asks her to drop the Brigadier:

“Drop him,” I said. You don’t need him.

She raised her hand. “What will happen to me when my rent is due? Where will I live? I can’t go back to my father’s house. ...”

“Bide time,” I said. “Until your next rent is paid. After that, find more clients.

There are weddings, burials, christenings, every weekend in this place. Next year

you'll be paying your own rent. But this, I have to tell you, is rubbish. You're bright, you're young, and this man is treating you like his house girl." (Atta 136)

Sheri eventually takes this advice after her fight with the Brigadier.

It is noteworthy that when Enitan, on her part, falls out with her father, in the bid to assert her own independence from him, and after she discovers she is unable to move in with Mike, following her discovery of his unfaithfulness to her, it is to Sheri that she goes. She moves into Sheri's house – an indication of the importance of mutual interdependence.

Mutual interdependence, as argued by Bandura, and as portrayed in *Everything Good Will Come*, is a fundamental means of creating agency and ensuring survival. The novel portrays collective agency as envisaged by social cognition. For instance, after the death of Sheri's father, "Her stepmothers had kept the family together by buying and selling gold jewelry" (Atta 103). They later, following Enitan's advice to Sheri, set up a thriving food business. Describing its thriving nature, Enitan recalls:

There was a large lunch time crowd. They would have to wait for seats and their cutlery would not be clean or dry. Some would cut fried meat with spoons. If they complained, the cooks would ignore them. They had the same expression as cooks in the best food spots in Harlem, Bahia, Kingston: *Do not bother me*. The people came regardless. The food was good: black-eye peas, fresh fish, rice, vegetable stews with cow foot, intestines, lungs, and all manners of innards because in this part of the world we wasted no meat. (147)

Collective agency has proved to be an efficacious strand, in the construction of the notion of people as infrastructure. *Everything Good Will Come* confirms the efficacy of collaborative efforts as means of facilitating subaltern survival as well as the functioning and overall legibility of the postcolonial urban space. This is illustrated in the collaboration of Sheri's stepmothers and their children (including Sheri) after the death of Chief Bakare: "I wondered how they could live according to their traditional roles. I had wondered also how they could stay together without the man who had brought them together in the first place. The Bakares' collaboration in setting-up a food business is noteworthy, as it relates to Harry Garuba's description of a movement away from bonds of blood to other forms of association," in what, according to him, Edward Said describes as a "shift away from 'filiation' to 'affiliation'" (Garuba 181). This is illustrated, in *Everything Good Will Come*, in the 'affiliation' between Enitan and Sheri that between Enitan and Grace Ameh, and that between the women pressure groups. For instance, the "affiliation" between Enitan and these people proves to yield more results than the "filiation" or ties of blood, so to speak, that she has with her parents. Enitan's association with Sheri also reflects a movement away from a bond of blood to that of friendship, or rather, in Edward Said's conception (according to Garuba), a movement away from filiation to affiliation. The association, which dates back to their childhood, finally sees them collaborating to form a charity organisation, in spite of the fact that there are no filial ties between them. The same can be said of Sheri's stepmothers, who keep their home together and collaborate to establish a food business even when there are no filial ties between them. The same can yet be said of the group of wives that collaborate with

Enitan and Grace Ameh to form a campaign that will “force” the government to release political prisoner (Atta 295).

Everything Good Will Come, accordingly, reflects intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, which, Albert Bandura posits, are the primary properties of human agency. For instance, Sheri, as a self-regulator demonstrates her capacity to adapt to fresh challenges. This ability enables her to devise new survival strategies to cope with any eventuality. Her instant decision to return to her father’s house after her fight with Brigadier Hassan, on whom she had hitherto depended for her livelihood, indicates her capability to create agency and (re)construct her space and identity. Thus, for every eventuality, Sheri has an appropriate plan of action.

Enitan, on her part, is self-reactive, and also, self-reflective. She has a tendency for self-examination and awareness; hence her capacity for personal efficacy. This accounts for her seamless recoveries from potential personal crises – like the breakdown of her previous relationships prior to her marriage – as well as her ability to assert her freedom. It is her self-reflective capabilities that endear her to the group of wives who choose her to be the spokesperson of their campaign. Rather than succumb to fate, the characters (for example, Enitan, Sheri and Grace Ameh) create energies to order events and circumstances surrounding them. This, for instance, is illustrated in the novel by Sheri’s acknowledgement of the ability to bargain: “I’m good at asking for money, I know people and these photographers are always snapping me somewhere. Why not use them? The one thing that has stopped me is that I can’t stand people knowing where I am and

what I'm doing. But I think I can get used to that. It's a small price" (Atta 307). Her ability to manipulate people and circumstances is thus is thus foregrounded.

Enitan is convinced that Sheri will thrive in the charity organisation which she has decided to establish, with the aim of raising money for children. She observes that Sheri intrigues people and that those she approaches will feel privileged. Hence, Enitan insists that Sheri must set up the charity organisation.

"You have to do it," I said. "You will be so good and you'll be surprised how much you've missed being around. You're not a background person. What, you want to hide for the rest of your life because people talk? Let them talk. One day they will ask themselves what they're doing with own lives. Any social event in this place, people will come whether or not they care about your cause. They will buy tickets, give you money, so long as they're recognized. You have to do it, Sheri. If you had told me this before, I would have sat on your back." (307-308)

Enitan imagines that Sheri has, hitherto, been in a state of inertia; hence she rouses her to action – from inertia to agency – with vehemence. Commenting on Sheri's agentic qualities, Enitan observes: "Her birth mother and motherhood taken away from her, and she wasn't thinking of tearing her clothes off and walking naked on the streets. She was stronger than any strong person I knew" (308). Sheri's ability to shift from inertia to agency is illustrated in her fight with Brigadier Ibrahim Hassan, her sugar-date. Rather than resign to being a helpless victim in the Brigadier's hands, by making herself "invisible" in the manner of some women who "consciously modified their actions to

alter their partners' definitions" (Lempert 274), Sheri returns 'violence for violence.' She beats up the brigadier, breaking his hand in the process – after all, she has a choice:

“Nobody hits me. You hit me and I will hit you back. God no go vex.” ...

“Telling me I'm a whore for going out. Your mother is a whore. Raise a hand to hit Sheri Bakare, and your hand will never be the same again ...”

She beat him for every person who had crossed her path in life. I told her she didn't have a drop of white blood in her. Anyone who had white blood wouldn't beat up a whole brigadier. Like that, with a pot of okra stew. (Atta 170)

The point, being made, from the foregoing, is that tough postcolonial urban circumstances ennoble subalterns to make choices, even if such involve fighting, in order to ensure survival and relevance. People must shift from inertia to agency, as Sheri declares: “I was raised in downtown Lagos,” she said. Bring the Queen of England there. She will learn how to fight” (Atta 170). Agency is thus employed as a weapon of resistance. It is through creative choices and energies that subaltern are able to withstand or resist harsh economic and social conditions. Accordingly, a fight for survival is a fight for agency, since people make choices in line with changing circumstances.

Finally, *Everything Good Will Come* tends contests the claim of Paul, Castells and Benton that the informal economy uses ‘illegal means to produce legal products and services.’ It also does not reflect De Soto's allusion to the informal economy as a space of extra-legal activities. It is however necessary to restate the position of Brown, Lyons, and Dankoco that the informal economy springs from complex social capital relations. Thus, while the novel acknowledges the presence of illegal activities in the postcolonial

city, like drug business, armed robbery, fraud, rape, and other corrupt practices, the novel, nevertheless, presents the postcolonial city as a site of creative energies and legal activities. For instance, Sheri's decision to establish a charity to raise fund for children's welfare does not indicate any illegality or "extra-legality." Enitan's statement: "We will arrange the paper work for you at the office" (Atta 308), indicates that the charity will be duly registered in accordance with relevant laws or regulations.

In summary, *Everything Good Will Come* represents the postcolonial city as a space that works, in spite of its debilitating conditions. The novel represents the postcolonial city as a site that encompasses the formal and informal economy in a vibrant relationship and interdependence. The subjects, in spite of the harsh spatial conditions, are able to devise coping mechanisms that guarantee their survival and welfare. As a result of their creative energies, often through collaborative enterprise and network, subalterns shape events and circumstances, thereby acting as catalysts of the city's development. Thus the postcolonial city is confirmed as a symbiotic space that shapes and reshapes its subjects, who, in turn, shape and reshape it – a conception that is now famously associated with Okome. (Davis 1)

Bandura's summary of the role of people in the social system is particularly noteworthy: "people are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them. ... People create social systems, and these systems, in turn, organize and influence people's lives" (Bandura 164). This is the thrust of Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (and indeed, the other primary texts). It foregrounds Simone's conception of people as infrastructure in the making and remaking of cities.

There is thus the need to re-imagine or rethink the postcolonial (African city) in ways that indicate that it continues to function, in spite of the challenge of space and infrastructure, as the primary texts have shown.

CHAPTER SIX

BARS, GENDER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF POSTCOLONIAL METROPOETICS

Publics have become part of the social landscape.

– Michael Warner

Gender is a social relation that shapes the forms, functions, structures and governance of cities. Moreover, the urban is a key scale through which gender and gender inequalities are spatialised.

– Liz Bondi

This chapter examines the place of bars and gender as significant determinants in the construction of postcolonial metropoetics. They are key issues that cut across the four novels that are analyzed in this thesis, and they play central roles in the novels' depiction or representation of the postcolonial city. In the bid to give meaning to their lives, as well as negotiate the complex urban environment, and construct their spaces and identities in it, subalterns are involved in constant engagements, whether formal or informal. Bars, restaurants, nightclubs, hotels, etc., are significant platforms for such engagements. Also, there is an indication in the novels that subaltern experiences and engagements with the city are, also, significantly gender-based. A convenient starting-point would be to have

some theoretical insights into the role(s) of bars as subaltern publics, and also, the portrayal of gender in the postcolonial (African) city.

Bars as Subaltern Publics

Do bars constitute subaltern publics? What are their roles as spaces of subaltern engagements in the urban environment? In examining these questions, it is important to place them within the context of the historical descriptions and theories about the evolution of the public sphere.

I take for granted that the public sphere is generally recognized as a space of interaction for the achievement of common goals. It is, according to Gerard Hauser, "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment" (83). For Nancy Fraser, it is "a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk." While Fraser tends to conceive of the public sphere as a "theater," figuratively, Robert Asen conceives of it as "a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed." Although the public sphere had always existed, Jürgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (German: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*) is generally regarded as the one that has drawn attention to it as an inclusive space for interaction, and for assessing and regulating the state and/or other public institutions. Prior to participatory democracy, or the emergence of the public sphere (as the case may be) the state was normally considered the sole

authority. In his introductory note to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Thomas McCarthy observes that:

As a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed, the liberal public sphere took shape in the specific historical circumstances of a developing market economy. In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people" (Habermas ix).

The public sphere, from McCarthy's observation, has essentially been imagined as a primarily bourgeoisie domain as it indicates the coming together of powerful private groups in the society to influence or challenge state/ institutional policies. But this is hardly different from Habermas's argument that:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. (27)

Habermas gives a historical insight into the origin and practice of the public sphere, and presents the bourgeois public sphere as encompassing the "Private Realm" and the "Sphere of Public Authority" (30). This sphere, according to him, comprised the

State, that is, the realm of the “police,” and Court which comprises the ruling class. He describes the set-up as “courtly-noble society” (29, 30). In contrast, the private realm encompasses civil society that is, the “realm of commodity exchange and social labor,” and “Conjugal family’s internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)” (30). Habermas describes this latter part of the private realm as the authentic public sphere as “it was a public sphere constituted by private people” (30). He further distinguishes – within the private realm – between private and public spheres:

The private sphere comprised civil society in the narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and social labor; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (*Intimsphäre*). The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society. (30-31)

People were not consulted before laws or instructions were handed down to them; neither were they expected to challenge such laws or instructions. Besides, the public sphere was imagined to be an exclusive space for the bourgeoisie; hence, it was imagined as a space of bourgeois interaction. The state was the sole actor in political life.

In 17th century Europe, however, according to Habermas, people met at coffee shops, salons, cafes, etc., to discuss the actions of the state, church, vis-à-vis common or mutual problems and challenges. These outlets provided meeting-grounds for the people to critically examine the activities of the state. The outlets were thus utilized by the people as spheres to deliberate on issues and take decisions on plans of action. These outlets – ‘spheres,’ from now on – were used by the people as platforms to challenge

authoritarianism with a view to overthrowing it. The public sphere was therefore used to usher-in democratic participation. As Hauser notes, “Democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate” (83).

Habermas contends that the convergence, at public places, like cafes, salons, coffee shops, etc., by people of diverse interests and persuasions indicates that the state was not the only actor in political life. He reveals the public sphere as an outlet through which the state was constantly questioned, and its policies regulated, by the people. He notes that although these public spaces were different in sizes and compositions, they adopted identical ‘rules’ of engagement:

However much the *Tischgesellschaften*,⁵⁶ salons, and coffee houses may have differed in the size and composition of their publics, the styles of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientations, they all organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing; hence they had a number of institutional criteria in common (36).

Habermas specifically identified three attributes of the aforementioned public spaces – the first being that they had no regard for status: “they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether. The tendency replaced the celebration of rank with a tact befitting equals” (36). A second feature is that the public space was conceived of as the “domain of common concern” with the ultimate objective of dethroning authoritarianism and

⁵⁶ *Tischgesellschaften* literally translates as ‘dinner party.’

enthroning democracy and free speech. Thus state – often symbolized by the church – was no longer the sole actor in political life, as its actions could now be questioned by the people. Thirdly, Habermas identifies the public sphere as an inclusive space, contending that its drivers could not afford to exclude people, no matter how lowly the latter's statuses were considered. It was, accordingly, presented as an 'all-comers' space. According to him, "however exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique" (37), as everyone must be able to participate.

Subaltern Critique of the Public Sphere and the Presence of Counterpublics

Habermas's conception of the public sphere has however been subjected to subaltern scrutiny. Primarily of critical concern is its perceived double-edged nature. The public sphere which has been conceived of as a space for questioning the state and dethroning autocratic rule could be employed by the bourgeoisie as a tool for subaltern repression. This is based on the notion that the sphere was not as inclusive as it appeared (Fraser 59). Besides, since the sphere was bourgeoisie-driven, any resolutions and/or decisions made in or by the forum was 'forced' down on the proletariat; hence, the tendency to regard those who had divergent views from those of the bourgeoisie as saboteurs, and appropriate 'punishment' meted on them.

It has been argued that the notion of the sphere's inclusivity was the ideal rather than the real. In other words, the public sphere was, in reality not inclusive – or all-embracing, so to speak – as it tended to have excluded certain categories of people.

Echoing the arguments of Joan Landes, Mary Ryan, and Geoff Eley, Nancy Fraser notes that Habermas's conception only "idealizes the liberal public sphere," and that "despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, that official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions" (Fraser 59). For Fraser, the exclusion of women and men of common background from the public sphere erodes the notion of its inclusivity. This calls into question the propriety of Habermas's assertion that the public sphere had no regard for status, when it was, indeed, status-based. What was in place therefore was the bourgeoisie public sphere. Thus, even if the sphere "allowed" subaltern participation, it was driven or coordinated by a certain class of people. As a result, any "consensus" reached, pursuant to the public sphere was considered artificial. In other words, resolutions reached at the sphere were based on issues presented by its drivers. Accordingly, the consensus of the public sphere was the consensus of the bourgeoisie – that of a particular class – rather than that of all 'participants.' Fraser questions the propriety of Habermas's conception of the public sphere as the domain of common concern, in which all parties discuss matters of shared interests. The conception, she argues is a misnomer. The inherent irony in it, which Habermas fails to appreciate, is that "a discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction (60). Fraser notes that there existed other public spheres besides that which Habermas idealizes as the liberal public sphere. Habermas, according to her, "fails to examine other, nonliberal, non- bourgeois, competing public spheres." She emphasizes that "it is precisely because he fails to examine these other public spheres that he ends up

idealizing the liberal public sphere” (61). In other words, the public sphere, contrary to Habermas’s account, was, in reality, not the domain of common concern. There were other itineraries of interaction, like class and gender:

The view that women were excluded from the public sphere turns out to be ideological; it rests on a class- and gender-biased notion of publicity, one which accepts at face value the bourgeois public's claim to be the public. ... The bourgeois public was never the public. On the contrary, ... there arose a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics. (Fraser 61)

Fraser notes that there were always issues of contestations between the various publics; hence relations between bourgeois publics and other publics were always “conflictual:” “Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech. Bourgeois publics, in turn, excoriated these alternatives and deliberately sought to block broader participation” (61).

From the foregoing, there was a feeling of exclusion by a certain class of people from the sphere of others. This feeling (of exclusion), led to the desire (of this certain class of people) to create spaces where their contributions would be important, and where they could freely construct their collective identities and aspirations. In summary, the public sphere was, in reality, not a space for ‘all comers.’ It was an exclusive space – one which did not accommodate subaltern presence and views; hence, the emergence of subaltern or proletariat public sphere with the latter usually referred to ‘counterpublics.’

These are the spaces or spheres created by those who had been ‘shut out’ of the bourgeoisie public sphere.

Although Habermas’s conceptions provide theoretical bases for imagining the public sphere, the criticism, however has been that public sphere was not a straitjacket, and therefore, was not strictly conditioned by inclusivity, disregard for status, or as a strict domain of common concern. There were, for instance, those who were not in a position to ‘fully’ participate as they merely served as observers. In other words, they had no voice and were therefore not in a position to influence, direct or redirect state or institutional policies and actions. These were the subalterns, the proletariat, or the ‘voiceless.’ The sphere did not cater for them nor represent them; hence they belonged in, or constituted parallel spheres to construct their identities and give action to their collective psyche and aspirations. The resort to ‘counterpublics,’ therefore, does not necessarily imply a resistance to the public sphere; It is an alternative platform for subalterns to consider matters of common concern and reach resolutions on such. Subaltern publics, a constituent of Counterpublics⁵⁷ are sometimes platforms for mass actions as ways of attracting the attention of authorities with a view to getting the latter to effect desired changes. There is sometimes a resistance when the bourgeoisie public sphere makes resolutions or is involved in activities that directly affect the proletariat public spheres without the consent – or even input – of the latter. Such resistance has

⁵⁷ There are other categories of counterpublics that are ideology or value-based, rather than class. I am primarily interested in how the Nigerian novel portrays bars as subaltern publics.

often resulted in protests or mass actions as can be seen in the primary texts – *GraceLand*, for instance – analyzed in this thesis.

My examination of bars as subaltern publics is located within Fraser’s contention that “subaltern counterpublics stand in a contestatory relationship to dominant publics” (70). An examination of how bars are located as subaltern publics, in the primary texts, is therefore imperative.

Textual Representation of the Public Sphere

How are bars represented in the novels as subaltern publics? Do they fall within the purview of coffee houses, salons and table societies which characterized the public sphere in the 17th century (Habermas 30)? Or do they constitute the significant exclusions to the bourgeois public sphere, hence other publics, as observed by Nancy Fraser? Do the other publics constitute counterpublics as Michael Warner observes? The public according to Warner is “a kind of social totality (49). He argues that “this sense of totality is brought out in speaking of the public, even though to speak of a national public implies that others exist; there must be as many publics as polities, but whenever one is addressed as *the* public, the others are assumed not to matter” (49). Bars are one of these ‘many publics’ as they tend to fit into his notion of counterpublics. It is the kind of discourses that take place in subaltern bars that Warner considers autotelic – “a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself (51).

But are bars in the selected novels depicted as autotelic? Is Madame Koto’s bar in *The Famished Road*, for instance autotelic? To what extent does it depict subaltern

reaction to the public sphere, or: to what extent does it depict a significant exclusion to Habermas's conception as Nancy Fraser notes? These questions are necessary as bars, depicted by Madame Koto's – and also, Sonny's club in *GraceLand* – tend to blur the boundaries or categories of the public sphere. Although, a subaltern bar is imagined as a counterpublic, as may be gleaned from the arguments of Warner and Fraser, the point is that bars as depicted in the novels also do serve as platforms for subaltern engagement with the bourgeoisie. The public sphere constituted by these bars in the postcolonial city is therefore neither completely bourgeoisie nor completely proletarian. The inclusivity in the sphere constituted by such bars is however distinguishable from Habermas's notion in the sense that it foregrounds the conflicts that arise from the differences in classes. It foregrounds the attempt by one class to either 'annex' or exclude the other as well as the latter's reaction to the attempted 'annexation' or exclusion. This is depicted in the altercation between Dad and the politicians in Madame Koto's bar in *The Famished Road*. It is also the case with Sonny's – a club in *GraceLand* that attracts both rich and poor – where Elvis earns some money by dancing with rich foreign women. Sonny's arguably serves as an inclusive public sphere that caters for the needs of both poor and rich. But this engagement is often contestatory – to use Warner's term – as exemplified in Elvis's encounter with the Colonel. In both instances of contestation, the subaltern is at the receiving end. Thus Elvis's rough encounter with the colonel is similar to that of Dad with the politicians at Madame Koto's bar in *The Famished Road*.

Instances abound in the primary texts where bars have served as subaltern publics in African cities. Bars have often served as informal spheres for the exchange of

information. Through various discussions, debates, gossips and even quarrels, the general mood and atmosphere of the subaltern environment is revealed. In the *The Famished Road*, for instance, Madame Koto's bar is portrayed as a platform in which subalterns discuss the political situation in the country. The attitude of politicians is aptly captured by Madame Koto's friends that come to see her on their way from hawking: "In the backyard they talked about politics, about the thugs of politicians and how businessmen and chiefs sprayed money at parties and celebrations. Madame Koto fed them and they prayed for her prosperity and they left, their voices low and sweet as they chatted away down the street" (105). The bar is a meeting-place for all subaltern categories, including the jobless and energetic, like Dad, the physically challenged, like the man without thumbs and another with one bad eye and one good one, and even, a mad man. Azaro presents a subaltern and chaotic description of the bar:

The light flooded in. Lizards scattered from the tables. A slick gecko inched up the wall. The bar was a mess. It was almost unrecognizable. There was vomit on the floor; benches were scattered and upturned; tables were in unusual positions; fish and chicken bones were all over the floor; spilt palm-wine stank, covered in flies; and columns of ants had formed along the walls. The place looked wrecked. It had the air of a ransacked and deserted marketplace. (105)

Madame Koto's bar may have been portrayed as a chaotic or dystopic relaxation spot for destitute or low-life people, but it acts as a sphere in which the corruption of the state and attitudes of its politicians is continually scrutinized. Charles Angmor describes it as "a bar that serves as a microcosmic representation of the negative physical and spiritual

forces of national politics” (68). Indeed, as events in *The Famished Road* show, Madame Koto’s bar is not just a place for drinking palm wine and eating pepper soup.

Although Madame Koto is portrayed as a representation of everything that is evil (Angmor 68), her bar is a site or sphere for political engagement. It is a spot where the forces of good, represented by Dad, the Photographer, and even Azaro himself, among others, constantly engage with the forces of evil represented by politicians and, sometimes, Madame Koto herself. The intense engagements sometimes lead to altercations and physical confrontations. The confrontation between Dad and politicians who have come to hold a meeting at the bar will suffice:

‘Well, I don’t support your partyBecause it is a party of thieves.’

One of the men immediately shouted for Madame Koto. ...

‘Tell this man and his son to go.’...

‘I don’t want trouble. If you want to hold your meeting, hold it. They will go.’

... ‘Because you people have money you think you can prevent a poor man from drinking, eh?’ Dad said, spluttering.

‘Yes, we can.’

‘Okay, come and do it. Let me see you.’ (Okri 255-256)

The forgoing serves as an apt representation of the bar as a site of confrontation and foregrounds Fraser’s argument that there is a prevalence of contestatory relationships between bourgeoisie publics and subaltern (counter) publics. The contestation plays out when the politicians insist that Dad and Azaro leave Madame Koto’s Bar as they do not share common political persuasions.

Apart from the bar being a site of confrontation, and also, one where people lamented their squalid situation and the corruption and oppression of the rich, especially government officials and politicians, it is a spot for subaltern relaxation. In this regard, the bar is similar to Habermas's portrayal of the coffee houses and salons of the 17th century where patrons (of the houses and salons) address issues of common concern. To this extent, Madame Koto's Bar is arguably, in Habermas's conception, a domain of common concern. Corruption and thuggery, for instance, are common vices. The bar, as a subaltern public, thus plays a significant role as a mirror through which the general anxiety and concern of the people, the corruption of politicians and the overall subaltern resent of the state and its corrupt officials are seen. As is often the case with some subaltern public spheres, Madame Koto's bar represents an informal platform in the city where engagements are spontaneous.

Arrows of Rain also presents bars as subaltern publics. The conversation in a village bar is instructive of them (bars) as sites of engagement where subaltern consciousness and ideas and attitudes are shaped and reshaped. This is captured in the novel by Oguogua as he narrates how a conversation between two men in a village bar had shaped his consciousness as a youngster, and how crucially it has continued to impact on his way of reasoning as an adult. The conversation is between Man-Mountain Buzuuzu and Iji. Man-Mountain Buzuuzu announces to Iji his intention, along with others to enthrone communism as the operational ideology after chasing away the British who happen to be Madia's colonial masters. He explains to Iji the promise that communism brings; namely, that it means a common wealth. Everything belongs to everyone! It

means there are neither chiefs nor commoners. Whatever belongs to everyone belongs to everyone else. Nobody is wealthy; none is poor. People can have whatever they want. Iji is excited and is marveled at Karl Max who, he is informed, is the proponent of this brilliant ideology called 'komanizim.' He likes the idea that he could share everything that belongs to everyone else, including their houses and food. Iji is however disappointed when he learns from Buzuuzu that he could not share the king's wives with the king:

'Let me ask you,' he said, his eyes shining with mischief. 'Can I go and fuck one of the chief's wives when you bring tis komanizim?'

'No!' snapped Buzuuzu. 'Communism isn't about sex. Sex is decadent.'

Iji looked dejected. 'Leave the world as it is,' he said. (83-84)

The conversation between Buzuuzu and Iji, in the novel, is a depiction of the bar as a realm where citizens can engage in enlightened debates. It has had "a great impression" on the mind of the then young Ogugua and has, understandably, continued to play a crucial role in his perceptions, judgements and choices as an adult. Thus, the novel presents the bar where the conversation takes place as serving not just as a 'joint' for relaxation, but as a sphere for interrogating contentious issues, one of which, for instance, is communism, a political ideology that has continued to shape and reshape people and the world. Good Life Nite Club and Bar, where Ogugua first meets Emilia who later reveals her true identity as Iyese, is also, one of such bars. It is, like Madame Koto's bar in *The Famished Road*, presented as a bar for the down-trodden, for "It was a ramshackle place with a small circular dance floor illuminated by blue and red lights. The air reeked

of cigarettes and stale alcohol. The loud music made the furniture vibrate” (Ndibe 103).

Although presented as a mere relaxation spot for the lowly, the bar serves as a sphere for the (re)awakening of consciousness and the difference between appearance and reality.

This is illustrative of the conversation between Ogugua and the prostitute:

‘I like your smile. ... It’s the kind of smile you associate with temptresses in films.

But yours is real.’

‘... Was Shakespeare wrong, then?’

‘Shakespeare?’ I had not expected Shakespeare to enter the talk.

‘Didn’t he write that there was no art to find the mind’s construction on the face?’

‘He did,’ I said. ...

For a moment we remained silent. Then I asked. ‘Do you like Shakespeare?’

‘I taught his plays.’

‘... Why did you leave teaching?’

‘It’s a long story. And not the story to tell in a noisy bar (106-107).

Although the above conversation is between a journalist and a supposedly common-place prostitute, it is evident that the latter is an enlightened character. Thus, what begins as a normal or light chat between a prostitute and her customer turns out to be an intellectual engagement.

In *GraceLand*, bars, often called “bukas,” are prominent sites of action and attraction. Mama Caro’s buka, like Madame Koto’s in *The Famished Road*, is a relaxation spot and rallying point for the people. Elvis’s father Sunday, like Dad in *The Famished Road*, regularly finds succour in the buka. It is in a buka, or bar as the case

may be, that Elvis runs into Okon and the King of Beggars, two characters who like Redemption significantly influence his life, vis-à-vis his attitude towards it. Bukas, in *GraceLand* present a tango between the forces of good, or of wisdom and those of ‘evil’ or desperation. This conflict between the forces of wisdom and restraint and those of desperation is at play in Mama Caro’s buka in the ensuing dialogue between Elvis and Redemption when Redemption accuses Elvis of not trusting him. Elvis explains that he does not wish to be a blind follower since Redemption has not told him everything. Redemption is worried about Elvis’s association with the King of Beggars. Despite that Elvis does not know much about the beggar, he considers him his savior for which Redemption berates him:

‘You are a small boy. Dere are many things you don’t understand.’

‘About what?’

‘Me. De King. Lagos. Life.’ (Abani 140)

The import of the foregoing is that bars serve as platforms for self (re)assessment. Things are not always what they seem. On his desire to make quick money for less work, for instance, Elvis learns that appearance and reality co-exist, and that it is up to him to make his own choices as well as take responsibility for them. He learns that the ‘easy way-out’ is often deceitful and destructive. This, according to Caesar the King of Beggars is “Because de straight road is a liar” (Abani 96).

Bukas and clubs have served as platforms for the expression of brewing subaltern resentment against the state and its activities that are considered to be inimical to the collective well-being of the people. In *GraceLand*, the King of Beggars and his travelling

theatre troupe, the Joking Jaguars, often perform at bars and clubs. Thus the latter act as sites for the King to, through the Jaguars' performances, draw public attention to the inadequacies and excesses of the government. The intention is primarily to employ the performances in mobilizing mass action against the state, or its policies considered to be inimical to subaltern survival in the city. Thus, in the novel generally, bars, as subaltern publics present subalterns' diverse social life. They are also rallying points for subalterns to address matters of mutual concern.

In Ata's *Everything Good Will Come*, Sheri's (the Bakares') bar serve as a relaxation spot for workers in the nearby banks and other offices. These are workers who cannot afford to eat in the high-class restaurants and eateries in Victoria Island. There are other bars in the novel, one of which is Mama Maria's, a typically subaltern bar where people can find happiness in the arms of prostitutes, drink beer and dance to music. Importantly, it serves as an avenue for subaltern self-examination. The bars serve as an outlet for people to (re)examine themselves and their relationships with others.

Essentially, bars and other public spaces in the novel, as indeed in the other primary texts are not just places to 'wind down,' but as forums for evaluating and (re)constructing selves, environment and society, generally. S. Carr *et al.*, accordingly argue that "In the parks, plazas, markets, waterfronts, and natural areas of our cities, people from different cultural groups can come together in a supportive context of mutual

enjoyment. As these experiences are repeated, public spaces become vessels to carry positive communal meanings⁵⁸ (344).

Gender and the Postcolonial City

A convenient way to examine the construction of gender in the city is to explore “the different formations of gendered belonging as they are expressed in women’s and men’s daily practices in the city” (Fenster 242). It is important to examine how women in the city are portrayed in the primary texts in relation to their male counterparts, vis-à-vis their negotiation with, and interaction in, the complex, male-dominated urban environment. Liz Bondi, essentially notes that “gender is a social relation that “shapes” the forms, functions, structures and governance of cities. Moreover, the urban is a key scale through which gender and gender inequalities are spatialised” (7). The opening paragraph of Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain* on the rape and death of a prostitute at B Beach provides a convenient starting point for an exploration of the construction of gender in the postcolonial city. In a similar scenario, Asraf Jamal narrates the fate of a woman who is gang-raped to death – debased and taunted by her attackers as she dies:

The pain within is deafening, all encompassing. It has no single source. Blood everywhere. In the eye, the mouth, in the emptiness between her legs. (Jamal 9-11⁵⁹).

What immediately come to mind, from the ordeals of the women in the stories above are the harsh realities that are often encountered by a particular gender or sex in the hands of

⁵⁸ Quoted in Amin (5).

⁵⁹ Quoted in Jamal (120).

the other. In most cases, it is women, often regarded as the ‘weaker sex,’ that are victims, with men often the victimizers. The above is especially represented in *Arrows of Rain* by Iyese’s experiences. She is violently raped and beaten repeatedly by Isa Palat Bello. On one occasion, when she dares to report the abuse to the police, the latter only mock her:

They asked if he was my husband. I said no. Was he my sugar daddy? I said I didn’t know what that meant. So they asked, was he married? I said yes. And did he spend money on me? I answered yes, from time to time. Then the officer in charge said, “*Chikena*, he’s your sugar daddy. He can beat you.” I left the police station in tears. (Ndibe 160)

Iyese’s experience with the Madian Police following the report of her rape and physical assault in the hands of Isa Palat Bello, is indeed, a fictional equivalence of Nick Pron’s report of a woman’s experience with the Police in a city in Canada: “the man had grabbed a woman by her neck and started to choke her. ... When she went to the police, she was told it was a "common occurrence ... and that it wasn't worth their time to even get a description since [she] wasn't physically hurt"⁶⁰ (314).

Women are thus portrayed in the novel as objects of scorn – a portrayal that tends to confirm Ruggiero and South’s conception of the city as a spatial ‘bazaar,’ with women constituting some of its articles of trade. Ruggiero and South note that “In this 'bazaar' legality and illegality intermingle, and moral boundaries are constantly negotiated (54). They imagine the city as a “market-place – selling everything from the mundane to the

⁶⁰ As cited by Whitzman (115).

spectacular, meeting demands of need and necessity pleasure and diversion.” In Ndibe’s novel, the effort to meet the demands of pleasure has often resulted in violence, rape and death of women as illustrated in the two quotes from Ndibe and Jamal at the beginning of this chapter.

While the woman in *Arrows of Rain* is portrayed as a helpless victim, she is constructed as a survivor – if not a winner – in *Everything Good will come*. Ayo Kehinde and Joy Ebong Mbipom argue, in this regard:

The primary theme of *Everything Good Will Come* reflects Atta’s desire to project the woman as a survivor of the harshest conditions, vicissitudes and hurdles which characterise post-independence existence, and the wearisome atmosphere in contemporary Nigeria. Her central character’s education (formal and informal) and growth, therefore, function as a veritable launching-pad for surmounting the adversities that she encounters. (67)

The postcolonial city woman acquires education and uses it as a tool to craft her survival in a complex, unequal urban space. Unlike the situation in *Arrows of Rain*, where women are portrayed as helpless, and are abused, violated, denigrated and commodified by men, Atta’s female characters are strong-willed and able to construct their space. In *Arrows of Rain*, women are portrayed as helpless, whereas they fight back in *Everything Good Will come*. In other words, while the image of the woman in *Arrows of Rain* is that of helplessness, resignation, and a low sense of self-worth, *Everything Good Will come* portrays an image of self-realization and self-worth. Women succumb to denigration in Abani’s novel while they resist it in Atta’s. For instance, while women are routinely

harassed and some routinely murdered by male soldiers, in *Arrows of Rain*, Sheri engages or withstands or engages everyone in *Everything Good Will Come*. She, for instance, beats up an army general who dares to hit her. According to her, “Nobody hits me. You hit me and I will hit you back. God no go vex.” Besides Enitan and Sheri, other women, in the novel, like Sheri’s stepmothers, Grace Ameh, and even Enitan’s mother, among others are portrayed as resourceful and able to withstand and resist the odds as they negotiate the complex urban space. This is thus the image of the woman as presented in *Everything Good Will come*: a subaltern that withstands and resists the odds that tend to subjugate and denigrate her in her effort to (re)negotiate her identity and achieve spatial legibility for herself and those around her, as Enitan and Sheri and many other female characters in the novel have done. As Jonas E. Akung notes, “The female characters in this novel are very assertive and utilize all means available to them to affirm their individuality” (114). To this extent, events in the novel tend to support the argument that “Writings by African women actually transcend the shift from the peripheral to the central positions for women. They are largely concerned with the assertion of self, reaffirmation of female pride, authentication of African womanhood as well as a search for an independent identity.” (Uko 67⁶¹)

Overall, the novels depict the female gender as victim, fighter and ultimately, conqueror regarding the challenges faced in the subaltern urban environment. The conquering spirit of this gendered specie enhances the dynamics and growth of the city.

⁶¹ Cited in Akung (115).

CONCLUSION

RETHINKING POSTCOLONIAL URBAN DYSTOPIA: THE AFRICAN CITY AT WORK

In concluding this exploration of the Nigerian Novel and the postcolonial city, I will like to summarize the intertextual connections or contestations in the primary novels. A convenient way to determine this is to summarize how each of the novels has depicted the various approaches on the nature of the postcolonial city. The literature examined in Chapter One provides a theoretical framework for examining the fictional representation of the postcolonial African City. Chapter Two, for instance, problematizes the concept of urban legibility in the postcolonial environment. Indeed, the thrust of the chapter has been to subject Kevin Lynch's conception of Legibility – as propounded in *The Image of the City* – to intellectual scrutiny. The conclusion is that the city cannot be imagined solely in terms of spatial legibility as espoused by Kevin Lynch. Lynch's conception of Urban legibility cannot therefore, on its own, determine a city's viability, functioning, growth or progress. Legibility cannot stand on its own but in relation to other constructs like mobility, intelligibility, livability, mental mapping and even aesthetics. I concede, like the scholars whose arguments have been reviewed, that Lynch's model provides a standard upon which environmental legibility may be examined. I also agree with the positions of some of the scholars that legibility, in the conception of Lynch is not, on its own, enough to determine the image or viability of the city, but in relation to other constructs like the ones enumerated above. However, I argue from the standpoint of the primary novels, that rather than see the aforementioned constructs as distinct elements,

boundaries between them (the constructs) and legibility, if any, are blurred. Thus legibility entails mobility, way-finding, intelligibility, livability, mental mapping and aesthetics. The point therefore is that all of these elements are ingredients of urban legibility. Hence, it is the presence of the elements that determine environmental legibility. In other words, legibility does not coexist with the constructs as parallels; it encompasses them. Thus, rather than see them as complementary or alternative models, they are, instead, coalescing components of urban – and generally, environmental – legibility.

From my examination of relevant literature on urbanism, I conclude that there is no universal theory of the city. Theories of the modern city that imagine it as a work of art on an engineer's plane and with predetermined appurtenances are misleading. Thus, the Cartesian paradigm or model is misleading. Also, the postcolonial African city is not particularly a site of dystopia. Like all other cities, including so-called global cities, the Nigerian novel depicts African cities as having some dysfunctional elements which their subjects have devised ways of coping or dealing with.

With regard to the *Famished Road*, the city is portrayed as a hostile urban environment for its subjects. The novel depicts a postcolonial African city characterized by slum life, and the pervasiveness of slums in the postcolonial urban environment. It depicts the prevalence of squalor and inadequate (or even non-existent) physical infrastructure in the city. There is, however, the creation of a new order to subvert these damning odds. The subjects devise means of reconstructing the environment by recreating their own spaces and giving the city a new meaning, and their lives a new

identity. Consequently, the ‘recreated’ or reconstructed urban environment, in turn functions for the subjects and gives them a new meaning. In summary, the novel does not represent the notion of the African city, or any other city for that matter, as utterly dystopic. It instead tends to give a fictional expression to the view that the functionality of space is dependent on the practices, constructions and actions of the people who inhabit it. What is therefore important is to recognize the diverse ways in which urban dwellers are able to successfully interact with the environment.

Arrows of Rain also depicts the pervasiveness of slums in the postcolonial city. It shows the challenges the city poses for its subalterns and the various strategies employed by the latter to make it work for them. However, the novel, like *The Famished Road*, also contests the notion of the postcolonial (African) city as a completely dystopic and illegible urban space. The novel shows that from subaltern engagements with the city (prostitution, night clubs, bars and other means by which the people have kept the city going), it remains a functional and legible urban space. It shows that it is the interference of the state – via its bid to exercise governmentality – that tends to erode the legibility of the urban environment for its subjects in the first case. As the novel has shown, it is the state’s efforts to rid the city of what it considers illegible elements that actually threaten and even compromise an urban environment that is already legible and functional for its subject. In this regard, the novel confirms the rejection of ‘high modernism,’ in favour of *metis* (local knowledge). For instance, in the novel, the bid to rid Langa city of its prostitute erodes the city of its vibrancy – an exercise that tends to deprive some of its subjects of their means of livelihood and satisfaction as can be seen in Bukuru’s cross-

examination of Lieutenant John Lati. Indeed, *Arrows of Rain*'s presentation of Langa tends to depict the state's misplaced act of governmentality to the extent that it embarks on the exercise to rid the city of some of its subjects, especially prostitutes, in the bid to make the city attractive to foreign investors. The reality, conversely, from Bukuru's cross-examination of Lati, as well as other incidents in the novel, is that ridding Langa of its prostitutes would rather make the city illegible and unattractive for its subjects, including so-called foreign tourists.

GraceLand, on its part, does depict the postcolonial city as a sight of dislocation and slums; but it also depicts it as a functional urban space. The novel's representation of the postcolonial city is best represented in the words of Elvis, its chief character, who describes Lagos as "half slum, half paradise. ... a place so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time" (7). It is a hybrid space that encompasses the squalid slum of Maroko, among others, on the one hand and the serenity and bright lights of Ikoyi on the other. Since there are some areas or aspects of the city that are actually mediated by everything good, imagining it as a sight of dystopia is therefore inappropriate. Describing or imaginining the postcolonial city as an illegible urban space is accordingly inaccurate. Hence, the novel contests the dystopic image of the postcolonial city. *GraceLand* depicts the notion of the shanty city as the real African city as well as the notion of people as infrastructure. The statement of the Barkeep, "people are important" (Abani 134), for instance, is an apt confirmation of this conception. This fundamental role of people as infrastructure is especially exemplified by the characters of Redemption, Okon, the King

of Beggars, and to some extent, Mama Caro, as has been argued in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Everything Good Will Come, like the other novels, and has been seen in chapter five, depicts the pervasiveness of slums in the postcolonial city. It depicts subaltern frustration and challenges in the city. Specifically, it shares *GraceLand*'s "half paradise, half slum" depiction of the postcolonial city as represented by Lagos. To this extent, I conclude that it does not depict the postcolonial city as an utterly dysfunctional space, as its subjects via their engagement with the city are galvanized from inertia to agency. Indeed, the novel does not depict a city that is within the purview of the Cartesian paradigm of modern cities as those well-ordered towns that are carefully designed or crafted on the engineers' vacant planes before they are even established. Instead, it depicts an urban environment that is, through its subjects' constant engagement with it, continually evolving. Hence, the contemporary Nigerian novel depicts a sometimes debilitating urban space that engenders subaltern disillusionment, inertia and complacency, but which also "contains a potential for shaping re-configurations of identity and spaces of critical response to the urban crisis" (321). The novel thus portrays the city as a dialectical urban space that is shaped and reshaped by its subjects, and which in turn, shapes and reshapes its subjects. Subjects' experiences of the city determine or necessitate their patterns of engagement with the urban space. The postcolonial city is therefore not only a site of dislocation but, also, one of agency where people construct their identities and create legible spaces for themselves.

In all of the novels, subalterns are presented to engage with the city. There are, indeed, harsh realities, but they are able to devise means of engaging with these realities. The novels recognize that it is the people that determine or define the city rather than an engineer crafting it on a vacant plane. In all, the Nigerian novel, represented by the primary texts analysed in this thesis presents the city as a hybrid space – that which encompasses order and disorder, formal and informal, chaotic and sublime.

In what ways, however do the novels (re)present the postcolonial city differently? As Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall note, “urban development paradigm so prevalent in the rest of Africa ... approach the city as a problem to be solved, they are clearly prescriptive” (358). The Nigerian novel clearly dismisses this so-called paradigm. From the point of view of *Arrows of Rain*, the legibility of the city of Langa is only being compromised by the state and its agents whose action amount to a dislocation or disconnection of the people from their environment. The novel strengthens the rejection of high modernism and contests any paradigm of scholarship that imagines the African city as a problem to be fixed. It presents the city as an urban space that is misunderstood and misinterpreted by those who purport to ‘sanitise’ it. The conclusion is that those who lack local knowledge of the urban environment are not in a position to improve its legibility. This is in line with Scott’s rejection of high modernism and his ‘revelation’ of “how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.” Thus, the novel presents a city that is being destroyed by those who purport to be ‘repairing’ it. In other words, dystopia in the postcolonial city is a creation or imagination of those who only assess the legibility of the city from a panoptic viewpoint. Accordingly, *Arrows of Rain*

rejects dystopic views about the African city. The ‘dystopic’ elements are indeed those who seek to ‘sanitise’ the postcolonial city based on what may be considered their uninformed conception of it as a site of dystopia.

In equal vein, *GraceLand* confirms views that the African city functions. It confirms the conception of people as infrastructure; hence it foregrounds the contributions of characters – like Redemption, the King of Beggars, and Okon – to the urban society, although they are, as it were, mendicants. This is the same way that *Arrows of Rain* foregrounds the importance of prostitutes to international tourism. The aim is not to celebrate ‘low-life’ characters but to show that everyone has their positive contribution to the dynamics of the city.

Everything Good Will Come specifically represents the city as a work-in-progress. In the novel, the city is presented as a site that is continually adjustable in response to the engagements of its subjects. Hence, to echo the title of the novel, ‘everything good comes’ for those who dare to engage the city and construct their spaces, identities and legibility in it.

The Famished Road, which often seem to dwell on the margin of the city, *tends* to offer a more apocalyptic representation (of the urban space); but it does show efforts at subaltern engagement with the city. The picture painted is that of gloom, but also, trappings of sanity. It shows how subjects try to make the city work through collaborative efforts. It shows the resort to subaltern publics as a means of ensuring survival and agency in the city.

Rethinking Urban Dystopia in the Postcolony

Is the African city – to echo the title of Sarah Nutall and Achille Mbembe’s book on Johannesburg – an “elusive metropolis?” All cities of the world have specific complexities which make each of them – African cities inclusive – unique. Thus, each city has a specific status that is different from all other cities, one of which is history. As Saskia Sassen notes, “Each of today’s global cities has a specific history that has contributed to its current status” (116). Thus, as the world is diverse, so are its cities. Hence, it is misleading to dismiss some cities as dystopic and illegible because they do not have the same physical outlook as others.

There is therefore the need to rethink the conception of the African city as a site of postcolonial dystopia. The postcolonial city, as represented in the Nigerian novel, is not all dystopia. It also has its vibrancy, even if only in terms of human infrastructure and (human) capital. It is therefore inappropriate to imagine the postcolonial city as not meeting the paradigms of modernity or globalization, for as Appadurai argues, “We cannot simplify matters by imagining that the global is to space what the modern is to time. For many societies, modernity is an elsewhere just as the global is a temporal wave that must be encountered in their present” (6). Modernity and globalisation are not straitjackets and are, accordingly, not restricted to specific spaces or times. Mbembe and Nuttall affirm that “Africa like, everywhere else, has its heres, its elsewheres, and its interstices” (351). In this regard, its cities are, to the extent of their respective complexities and histories, modern. In other words, the postcolonial urban space is not eroded of its ‘cityness’ simply because it is not mediated by everything good, or

structured along the Cartesian concept of the modern. Kazimbaya-Senkwe aptly argues that:

If urban planners want to be relevant to the urban development agenda, then they should rethink their fixation with master planning ideas which hitherto has limited their role in the development of the informal sector. They must adopt approaches in which solutions do not come from master planning textbooks but rather are developed with the people concerned, using planning tools that respect the economic reality of the city and the voices of other stakeholders. (119)

Conclusion

What relationship exists between the novel, paradigms, and the city? My intention is not to have the postcolonial city remapped. This thesis is not a prescriptive work, and I do not claim that fiction – or literature generally – maps or crafts the cartography of the city. It does however show or write the city, presenting it as a dialectic space. Literature presents the city as a mapped space which in turn remaps its subjects. In doing so, it engages the crafted paradigms and portrays the extent to which they are appropriate in the (re)presentation of the city. The Nigerian novel represents the postcolonial city, not as a completely dystopic space, but as a hybrid space that encompasses the formal and informal, orderly and disorderly, chaotic and sublime spaces. It is the vibrant relations (and/or relationship) that exist between these seemingly antipodal structures that make the postcolonial African city functional.

Global templates for configuring, mapping and reading cities tend to have ignored the African urban space, in spite of the respective complexities and histories of its cities. Admittedly, the Nigerian novel does not portray the postcolonial city as utopian. The city is not mediated by everything good. It is, as indeed any city – including so-called global cities – not a finished and flawless work on an engineer’s plane, as envisioned in the Cartesian theory of the modern city; yet, it is not a failed urban space. It is a highly functional work-in-progress, as aptly portrayed in the primary texts.

Speaking about Africa generally, Mbembe and Nutall note that “the continent has been and still is a space of flows, of flux, of translocation, with multiple nexuses of entry and exit points” (351). The postcolonial African city is still evolving, and like every city, will continue to evolve, as the novels have shown.

Finally, it is important to recall that my objective in this thesis, from the outset, has been to examine the nature of the postcolonial (African) city, as represented in fiction. I have tried to bring various approaches in urban studies in conversation with literary representations of the postcolonial African city in Nigerian novels. Conventional urban approaches that imagine the so-called global city as a modern space mediated by everything good while conceiving the African city as a dystopic site characterized by squalor and decay have been brought into conversation with new approaches from African urban studies that emphasise the legibility and vibrancy of the African city in spite of its obviously debilitating state as well as the squalid living conditions of its subjects. I have endeavoured to deploy both approaches as the template against which I have examined fictional representations of the postcolonial city. While doing so,

however, I have tried to avoid the mimetic that conflates the fictive with the real. I hope that I have been able to achieve the set-objective to an acceptable extent, and I hope that this thesis will stimulate further efforts at employing fiction – and literature generally – as a tool for interrogating disciplinary paradigms and knowledges.

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