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CONTENTS

METAPHOR AND EVALUATION AS ECOLINGUISTIC DEVICES IN HELON HABILO'S <i>OIL ON WATER</i> Rachel Omoyokan Davidson	1
THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE DOMINANCE ON YORUBA LANGUAGE USE AMONG SELECTED YOUTH IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA Moshood Abimbola Alabi	8
A COGNITIVE STYLISTICS STUDY OF MIND-STYLE IN DUL JOHNSON'S <i>ACROSS THE GULF</i> Ogechi Stella Mmeka	16
LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF HELON HABILO'S MEASURING TIME Victoria Bala & Jesimiel Kefas	28
SALIENCE AND ERASURE AS ECOSTYLISTIC DEVICES IN HELON HABILO'S <i>OIL ON WATER</i> Alfred Austin Obi	38
ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS IN THE DISCOURSE OF POLITICAL APOLOGIES IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOSEMANTIC STUDY Faith Ibrahim	46
INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERDISCURSIVITY IN POLITICAL APOLOGIES: TRACING THE REUSE OF APOLOGY TROPES IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC HISTORY Covenant Adura	58
CONFLICTS AND MULTIPLE INTERPRETATION OF JUDGEMENTS IN THE NIGERIAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: DEALING WITH THE ABUSE OF ENGLISH AS THE ROOT CAUSE Ukaoma Comfort Obiageri & Iwunze Emeka Innocent	71
MUSIC AS CATALYST FOR PEACE, UNITY AND NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A SOCIO – PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECT NIGERIA PEACE AND UNITY SONGS Chinecherem Esther Obasi	87
CIVILIZATION OF THE DARK ROMANTIC HEROES IN <i>THINGS FALL APART</i> AND <i>ACROSS THE GULF</i> Mary Adebayo, Zainab Oyiza Momoh, Rebecca Kenseh Daniel Irany	98
MEMOIRE MATRILINEAIRE ET CONTRE-ARCHIVE DANS LA SAGA <i>SEGOU</i> DE MARYSE CONDE Obinna Okah	108
NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF DEPICTING ENDURING SHADOWS AND HORRORS OF THE EMPIRE IN GEORGE FOX'S <i>AMOK</i> Catherine John Mamman	116

STIGMATISATION, PROTEANISM AND THE ADOLESCENT FEMALE IN
TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* AND JAMAICA
KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN*

Ethel Joffi MOLUA

125

METAPHOR AND EVALUATION AS ECOLINGUISTIC DEVICES IN HELON HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER*

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Abstract

This paper investigates metaphor and evaluation as ecolinguistic devices in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, a Nigerian novel that dramatises the ecological devastation of the Niger Delta. *Oil on Water* presents an imaginative re-creation of how oil exploration has altered the natural environment and human livelihoods. Within the framework of ecolinguistics and drawing insights from cognitive metaphor theory and appraisal theory, this study examines how metaphors construct ecological meanings and how evaluative language conveys attitudes, judgments, and values about environmental degradation. The analysis reveals that metaphors in the text highlight tensions between purity and pollution, life and death, and nature and exploitation, thereby encoding the struggle of marginalised communities in ecologically compromised spaces. Evaluation, on the other hand, amplifies ideological positions by foregrounding negative judgments of oil corporations and political elites, while affirming sympathy for human and nonhuman victims of ecological violence. The study concludes that metaphor and evaluation function not merely as stylistic devices but as ecolinguistic strategies that deepen readers' awareness of the politics of ecology and the ethics of environmental survival in Nigeria. The paper argues for the continued use of literary texts in ecolinguistic inquiry to illuminate the cultural and moral dimensions of ecological crises.

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, Metaphor, Evaluation, Niger Delta, Helon Habila, *Oil on Water*

Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has long been a site of ecological, social, and political tensions. Oil exploration, while fueling the national economy, has devastated local ecologies and communities. Literature from the region captures this paradox, presenting both the beauty of the environment and the violence inflicted upon it. Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) is one such text, dramatising the catastrophic effects of oil exploration on rivers, forests, and people. In the novel, represented not only through narrative but also through language and style.

This paper investigates two central devices—metaphor and evaluation—as ecolinguistic strategies in *Oil on Water*. These devices are significant because ecolinguistics emphasises how language constructs human relationships with nature (Stibbe, 2021). Metaphor frames ecological experiences by mapping environmental realities onto familiar conceptual domains, while evaluation reflects the stance of narrators and characters toward environmental events. Together, these devices construct ecological meaning in literature.

Literature Review

Ecolinguistics examines the relationship between language and ecology, emphasizing how linguistic structures shape human interaction with the natural environment (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Stibbe, 2021). Concerned initially with ecological metaphors and environmental discourse, the field has broadened to include the analysis of literary texts. Literature, with its symbolic and imaginative power, plays a significant role in framing ecological realities and shaping environmental consciousness (Aluya & Uduma, 2024). African literature, particularly works from the Niger Delta, has been studied from ecocritical perspectives (Bassey, 2016; Ojaide, 2020). Scholars argue that these texts function as cultural responses to ecological crises by exposing exploitation and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Ecolinguistic studies of African texts, though fewer, have highlighted how linguistic resources—such as metaphor, lexical choices, and narrative stance—construct ecological discourses (Okoro, 2021). This study builds on that tradition, focusing specifically on metaphor and evaluation.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary frameworks: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Appraisal Theory within ecolinguistics. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003), revolutionized the study of metaphor by shifting the focus from metaphor as a mere rhetorical ornament to metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of thought. According to CMT, metaphors are not simply decorative features of language; they are cognitive devices through which individuals understand abstract, complex, or intangible domains of experience in terms of more concrete, familiar ones. In this sense, metaphor is both a linguistic and a conceptual phenomenon.

Metaphors involve systematic mappings between a *source domain* (the familiar or concrete domain) and a *target domain* (the abstract or less familiar domain). For instance, in the expression “pollution is a disease,” the source domain of *disease*—with its associations of spread, pain, and the need for cure—is mapped onto the target domain of *pollution*. This mapping shapes how people perceive environmental degradation, framing it as a pathological condition and an urgent remedy (Aluya & Iangba, 2025). In the context of ecolinguistics, metaphors are significant because they reveal the underlying cultural and ideological frameworks through which societies conceptualise the environment (Stibbe, 2021). By portraying ecosystems as “resources,” for example, discourse legitimizes exploitation, while metaphors of the earth as “mother” invoke care and protection. Thus, metaphor is not neutral; it has ethical and ecological implications.

Applied to Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*, CMT enables an exploration of how the Niger Delta environment is conceptualised through recurring metaphorical patterns. The polluted river described as a “snake” or a “corpse” activates source domains of danger, death, and fear, shaping the reader’s perception of ecological devastation not as an abstract event but as an immediate, embodied reality. Similarly, when oil pollution is framed as a “shroud,” the metaphor invokes mourning rituals, highlighting loss and grief (Aluya & Terver, 2024). These metaphorical constructions demonstrate how ecological realities are experienced cognitively and affectively, reinforcing the argument that metaphor is a central ecolinguistic device.

Appraisal Theory, developed within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Martin and White (2005), extends Halliday’s (1994) interpersonal metafunction by detailing how speakers and writers position themselves and their audiences through evaluative language. It moves beyond the notion of evaluation as a

broad category to offer a systematic model for analysing how attitudes, emotions, judgments, and values are encoded in discourse.

The theory is organised around three interrelated subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation.

1. **Attitude** refers to the expression of feelings, judgments of behaviour, and appreciation of things, processes, or states of affairs. It has three domains:
 - *Affect* (the expression of emotions such as fear, joy, sadness, or hope).
 - *Judgment* (the moral or ethical evaluation of human behaviour, such as condemning greed or praising courage).
 - *Appreciation* (the aesthetic or value-laden evaluation of things, texts, or phenomena, such as describing a landscape as “beautiful” or “spoiled”).
2. **Engagement** concerns the ways speakers and writers acknowledge, align with, or distance themselves from other voices and viewpoints in discourse. It highlights dialogism—the interplay of perspectives—and shows whether a text presents ecological degradation as a matter of consensus or contention.
3. **Graduation** refers to the scaling of evaluative meaning in terms of force (intensity, quantity, degree) and focus (sharpening or softening categories). For instance, describing oil pollution as “utterly devastating” intensifies judgment, while referring to it as “somewhat harmful” downscales the evaluation.

In ecological discourse, appraisal resources are crucial because they do not simply describe environmental phenomena but frame them in ways that guide readers’ attitudes and ideological alignments. As Hunston and Thompson (2000) argue, evaluation is central to how texts construct authorial stance and influence interpretation. Applied to Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*, Appraisal Theory reveals how the novel encodes ecological positions. Through **negative judgment**, oil corporations and political elites are portrayed as corrupt, greedy, and destructive. Through **appreciation**, the environment is represented both nostalgically (as “endless green”) and tragically (as “lifeless and dark”), creating a contrast between ecological abundance and devastation. Through **affect**, characters voice fear, despair, and anger in response to ecological degradation, humanizing the environmental crisis. By combining attitude, engagement, and graduation, the novel constructs a moral landscape that delegitimizes exploitation and foregrounds empathy for victims—both human and ecological. Thus, Appraisal Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how evaluation in *Oil on Water* functions not merely as subjective commentary but as an ecolinguistic device that shapes moral, emotional, and ideological responses to the Niger Delta environment.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, drawing on methods of textual analysis and ecolinguistic stylistics to investigate how metaphor and evaluation function as ecolinguistic devices in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*. The methodological approach is interpretive, focusing on uncovering the ecological meanings embedded in language use, rather than on quantification or statistical generalisation.

The primary data for the study are Helon Habila’s novel *Oil on Water* (2010). The text was purposively selected because it is one of the most influential Nigerian novels that thematises oil exploration and environmental devastation in the Niger Delta. Within the novel, passages vividly describing landscapes, oil pollution, community experiences, and ecological conflict were identified for analysis. These passages are

significant because they foreground ecological realities and provide rich material for metaphorical and evaluative interpretation.

The analysis proceeded in two stages:

1. **Identification of Metaphors**

- Following the principles of **Conceptual Metaphor Theory** (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), metaphorical expressions were identified by examining instances where one domain of experience was described in terms of another. Attention was given to recurrent source domains (e.g., disease, death, darkness, animal imagery) and their mappings onto target domains of ecological degradation. This enabled the researcher to trace dominant metaphorical patterns in the novel.

2. **Identification of Evaluative Language**

- Using **Appraisal Theory** (Martin & White, 2005), evaluative instances were categorized according to *attitude* (affect, judgment, appreciation), *engagement* (alignment with or distancing from viewpoints), and *graduation* (intensification or downscaling of meaning). This systematic framework helped reveal how ecological crises are emotionally charged and ideologically framed.

Both metaphors and evaluative expressions were analysed within an ecolinguistic perspective (Stibbe, 2021), which emphasises how language constructs relationships between humans, other living beings, and the environment. The combined use of CMT and Appraisal Theory ensures that the analysis captures both the cognitive dimension (how readers conceptualise ecological degradation) and the interpersonal dimension (how readers are positioned to feel, judge, or value ecological realities). To ensure validity, interpretations were validated against existing eco-linguistic scholarship on African literature (e.g., Okoro, 2021; Ojaide, 2020). Contextual knowledge of the Niger Delta crisis was also used to ground interpretations in socio-ecological realities. While the analysis is qualitative and interpretive, it aims at theoretical generalisation—showing how metaphor and evaluation operate as ecolinguistic resources—rather than statistical generalisation. The study is limited to a single novel, which constrains the generalizability of findings. However, this focused analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of ecolinguistic strategies in one representative text. Future research may expand the corpus to include multiple Niger Delta novels for comparative analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of *Oil on Water* reveals that metaphor and evaluation work hand in hand to construct ecological meanings and ideological positions. While metaphors encode how the Niger Delta environment is conceptualised, evaluation highlights attitudes and values attached to ecological practices and actors. Together, these devices transform the novel into an ecolinguistic narrative that dramatises the lived experience of environmental crisis.

Metaphors of Pollution, Death, and Disease

Habila repeatedly employs metaphors that link ecological degradation to death and disease. For instance, the description of oil spills as “a dark shroud covering the river’s face” (Habla, 2010, p. 41) casts the river as a corpse. The shroud metaphor evokes death, mourning, and burial, suggesting that the river—once a source of life—has been killed. This conceptual metaphor, *THE ENVIRONMENT IS A CORPSE*, forces readers to confront the gravity of ecological destruction as an irreversible loss rather than a temporary inconvenience.

Similarly, pollution is described as “an open sore on the land” (p. 73). This metaphor draws from the source domain of disease, suggesting infection, festering, and pain. It resonates intertextually with Wole Soyinka’s (1986) metaphor of Nigeria as “the open sore of a continent,” linking ecological degradation to national trauma. The disease metaphor positions pollution not only as an environmental issue but as a pathological condition that threatens both land and people.

Animal metaphors also appear prominently. The river, described as “a thick black snake slithering into the horizon” (p. 34), invokes danger, fear, and unnaturalness. Snakes, often culturally associated with deceit or threat, highlight the corruption of a natural element that should nourish life. Here, water—normally conceptualized as purity and sustenance—becomes alien and hostile. These metaphors reconfigure the environment from life-giving to life-threatening, underscoring the ecological violence wrought by oil exploration.

Evaluative Judgments of Ecological Actors

Evaluation in *Oil on Water* targets the human agents responsible for ecological devastation. Through judgment, oil corporations and political elites are condemned for greed and corruption. The narrator describes “greedy politicians who feed fat on the people’s suffering” (p. 59), invoking parasitism and exploitation. This aligns readers against elites, positioning them as morally culpable for both human and ecological suffering.

Similarly, militants are evaluated ambiguously. While they claim to fight for environmental justice, their methods often involve violence and kidnapping. This dual evaluation reflects the complex moral terrain of the Niger Delta crisis: militancy is both a response to oppression and a contributor to instability. Habila’s language captures this ambivalence, enabling readers to grapple with conflicting ideological positions.

Appreciation of Environment and Nostalgia for Loss

Evaluation also emerges through appreciation, especially in descriptions of the environment. Early in the novel, the narrator recalls the Delta as “a place of endless green and shimmering waters” (p. 12). This positive appreciation contrasts with later depictions of polluted, lifeless rivers. The shift creates a nostalgic frame, emphasizing what has been lost due to oil exploitation. The rhetorical effect is to amplify grief for the destroyed environment and to highlight the magnitude of ecological injustice. The environment is not merely described but aesthetically valued. Negative appreciation—“lifeless and dark waters,” “rotting mangroves”—frames the landscape as degraded and violated. These evaluations reinforce the metaphors of death and disease, ensuring that ecological devastation is experienced as both physical and moral loss.

Affective Responses and Human Cost

Affective language further humanizes ecological crises. Characters express fear and despair: “We watched the river with dread, knowing it could no longer feed us” (p. 82). Such affective evaluations bridge the gap between ecological degradation and lived human suffering. The river’s inability to “feed” communities illustrate how ecological damage translates directly into hunger, poverty, and despair. Moreover, affective responses create solidarity with victims. The grief of families displaced by oil spills, the anger of fishermen whose livelihoods are destroyed, and the despair of children growing up amid pollution all foreground the human cost of ecological destruction. Evaluation here functions not just as commentary but as an invitation for readers to share in the emotions of the oppressed.

Interplay Between Metaphor and Evaluation

The most powerful ecolinguistic effects occur when metaphor and evaluation interact. For example, when the river is described as a “corpse” (p. 90), the metaphor

encodes death, while the evaluative stance signals mourning and outrage. Similarly, when oil is described as a “curse” rather than a blessing, the metaphor frames it as supernatural punishment, while evaluation condemns the exploitation that produced this curse. This interplay ensures that ecological realities are not presented as neutral descriptions but as morally charged narratives. Readers are positioned to see oil not merely as an economic resource but as an agent of death, disease, and despair. Through this dual strategy, Habila constructs a discourse that critiques ecological violence while mobilizing empathy for its victims.

Ideological Implications

The analysis demonstrates that metaphor and evaluation in *Oil on Water* are not stylistic ornaments but ideological devices. They delegitimize corporate and political exploitation, highlight the suffering of marginalized communities, and frame the environment as a victim of violence. In doing so, the novel aligns with what Stibbe (2021) calls “beneficial stories”—discourses that encourage care for the environment and resistance against destructive ideologies. At the same time, the novel complicates ecological narratives by acknowledging the contradictions of militancy and resistance. By offering multiple evaluative perspectives, it prevents ecological discourse from being overly simplistic, instead reflecting the complex socio-political realities of the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

This study has examined metaphor and evaluation as ecolinguistic devices in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*, demonstrating how language is central to the representation of ecological crises in the Niger Delta. Through conceptual metaphor, Habila translates environmental degradation into experiential realities by framing pollution as death, disease, and danger. These metaphors allow readers to grasp the enormity of ecological devastation in embodied and affective terms. Similarly, through the evaluative frameworks of judgment, appreciation, and affect, the novel assigns moral responsibility, articulates aesthetic values of the environment, and foregrounds the human cost of ecological violence.

The interplay of metaphor and evaluation transforms *Oil on Water* into a text of ecological advocacy. By framing the environment as a victim, the river as a corpse, and oil as a curse, the novel challenges dominant capitalist discourses that frame oil as a resource for national progress. Instead, it offers what Stibbe (2021) describes as “beneficial stories”—narratives that encourage care, justice, and ecological consciousness. In this sense, Habila’s novel not only bears witness to ecological destruction but also challenges readers to rethink the stories that legitimise exploitation and violence.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to ecolinguistics, literary stylistics, and African literary criticism. It highlights how African literature provides a vital space for ecological discourse, drawing attention to the complex intersection of environment, politics, and human survival. By showing how metaphor and evaluation construct ecological meanings, this paper affirms the power of language to shape ecological consciousness and mobilise resistance to destructive practices. Future research could extend this study by conducting comparative analyses of other Niger Delta texts, exploring metaphor and evaluation across genres such as poetry, drama, or oral narratives. Additionally, combining ecolinguistic analysis with empirical reader-response methods—such as surveys or eye-tracking experiments—could reveal how audiences actually process and are influenced by ecological metaphors and evaluations. Ultimately, *Oil on Water* demonstrates that literature is not merely reflective but also transformative. Through its ecolinguistic devices, the novel bears

ethical witness to ecological injustice while offering discursive tools for imagining alternative, sustainable futures.

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THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE DOMINANCE ON YORUBA LANGUAGE USE AMONG SELECTED YOUTH IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language endangerment, which can lead to linguicide (language death) in some cases, is an important concept in linguistics. The dominance of the English language over other local languages can be a threat to the growth of some of these languages. This study investigates how the English language in Lagos State dominates the local language, Yoruba, in Nigeria. The method adopted for the study is a mixed method. The basis for the analysis was through the investigation of the school subjects and the outcomes of the interviews conducted with some filmmakers in Lagos State. We collected data from the sources so as to demonstrate the influence of the dominant language on the local language (Yoruba) through the Language Imperialism Theory. Our results showed that most schools in Lagos do not adhere to the language policy of the government on the use of the local languages, and most of the movies that are supposed to be acted in the Yoruba language are dominated by the English Language. The implications of this are that the Yoruba language has been marginalised. This study contributes to the policy of the government in ensuring that the local languages do not become extinct.

Keywords: Endangerment, Linguicide, Language Policy, Code-Mixing, Code-Switching, Bilingualism and Multilingualism.

Introduction

An important question that demands attention is, “How has the English language influenced the local languages? Is it a positive or a negative influence? The English language, as the official language in Nigeria according to the country's language policy, has dominated the local languages to such an extent that many users of local languages feel inferior and uneducated because they lack a good command of the English language. Does that imply that the regional languages in Nigeria are endangered?

The English language has achieved a lot of functions in Nigeria. It is the status marker, language of unity, language of international relations, language of business, language of law and language of instruction in schools, Eyisi (2025). This paper aims to examine the implications and the implementations of the language policies in Nigeria and investigate how the dominance of the English language has affected some educated Nigerians in the loss of their native languages. By examining language policy and planning, language death and endangerment, we will demonstrate the impact of English on the growth or unpopularity of the local languages. This study contributes to our understanding of the endangerment of the local languages and has implications for other researchers in language studies.

Literature Review

Language Planning and Language Policy

Language planning and language policy share some relationships. The two concepts determine the position and the dominance of the official language and the local language in a country. Brown and Miller (2013) describe language planning as

the formal policy that is used to determine the language that is favoured over other languages for the purpose of official use, education and leisure.

Matthew (2007) further explains that language planning is usually a deliberate attempt by the government to give preference to one language over other languages in a particular country. With this, it is obvious that the proclamation of a language as being more promoted and acceptable in a country is in the hands of the government of that country. Language planning occurs when politicians and linguists intervene in the decision of how language should be used. Language planning has been criticised as being a favour only to the elite. This criticism was stated by the Marxist, post-structural and socio-linguists (Ferguson, 2006).

Language is important because it is used to create social interaction among people. People cannot establish any relationship without a language. The problem here is to have a single language for people of different cultural backgrounds in the same society. Bamgbose (1994) condemns the idea of one language, stating that it cannot unify the people, especially in a large population of different ethnic groups. Liddicoat (2007) identifies literary planning as the language planning that is concerned with education. It is used to determine the status of the languages used in a community and foreign languages. Having examined language planning, it is important to explain the second concept, which is language policy. Wang and Yang (2017) see language policy as a branch of sociolinguistics that has evolved recently. The growth of the discipline has been through their publications for the past twenty years. The major goal of language policy has been identified as improvement in communication. It is the choice of language made at different levels of interaction in life.

Wright (2004) traces the origin of language policy to the Second World War, and it became a university subject as a result of the creation of new nations. The new nations need a language to interact and establish some relationships. Language is also needed to create the identity of individuals in a society. The major challenge, as stated by Bamgbose and restated by Wright, is the problem of one language. Bussmann (2006) further explains that language policy is a political measure which is used to place the regional languages in multilingual states. It is used to determine the status of regional languages and foreign languages. Spolsky (2004) is ambivalent about the protection of the regional languages from the dominance of foreign languages. The author explains how some countries adopt the use of the regional language in their schools and media houses. To them, the best way to protect the regional languages is to make them the language of instruction in schools and the language of the media. Examples are the Turkish parliament, which recommends the Kurdish language in broadcasting and education. Cyrillic was recommended by the Yugoslav parliament. The same happened in Tanzania after using English for three decades. The author also mentioned some countries where English has been adopted, like Malaysia. Any wrong decision emanating from language planning and language policy can lead to language endangerment, which eventually leads to Linguicide or language death.

Language Endangerment and Language Death

Language endangerment is a serious issue in the study of language. It is a situation where a language is threatened. Bradley and Bradley (2013) argue that the endangerment and the disappearance of many languages have been of less concern to many linguists, and the field of linguistics has also not been investigating this area of research for a long time. According to these authors, the rate of language endangerment is quite alarming to the extent that the extinction of many languages is predicted in the 21st century. Some scholars estimate that up to 90% of the world's languages.

Piirainen and Sherris (2015) explain that language endangerment occurs when there is a decline in the number of speakers of the language and there is also a decrease in the environments in which the language is used.

By paying special attention to our situation in Nigeria, the regional languages do not have the same status as the English language.

Ndimele (2015) observes that endangerment is happening to most languages in Nigeria. The threat is not limited to the uncommon ones among the languages, but the threat is extended to the prominent ones, which are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The prominent ones cannot presently compete with the foreign languages, especially in terms of acceptance, number of users, acceptability and international intelligibility.

Crystal (2000) describes the major causes of language endangerment as natural catastrophe, war and genocide, avert repression, cultural, political and economic dominance. The author further explains that most languages are just on record, but do not have speakers anymore. He concludes that most of the languages only exist as documented information, but do not have existing speakers in the real world. A language is endangered when the number of users declines.

In an attempt to explain the fear of losing many languages to dominance, Austin and Sallabank (2011) think the estimated number of languages globally is about 7,000. There is no doubt that the children of this generation do not acquire 50% of the estimated number. The implication of this is that many of the languages that are not learnt will be endangered and may later go into extinction. Having explained the meaning of endangered languages, it is necessary to describe the death of a language, which is the final stage of endangerment. Schmidt and Richards (2010) give another term, language decline, to describe language death as a situation where the users of a language give preference to another language and abandon their language. It is also a situation where the children in that community stop learning the language. Whenever either of the situations or both of them happen, the language dies.

In another view, Crystal (2008) thinks that language deaths also imply language loss or obsolescence because it occurs when the people of a community have no ability to use their language anymore. The author identifies two situations of the loss of a language. It can be a gradual loss, which he refers to as attrition, it can also be a sudden loss. Matthews (2007) supports the view of Schmidt and Richards by explaining that a language dies when it disappears. This disappearance is due to the abandonment of the languages by the users.

The Status of The English Language in Nigeria

There are different varieties of the English language in Nigeria. The language is the official language of interactional relations, business and law. It is also the language of instruction in schools. In 1958, Brosnahan used the parameter of education to classify the English users in Nigeria. The first level represents those without any formal education who speak pidgin. The second level represents those with a primary school education. The third level represents English spoken by those with secondary education, often marked by the avoidance of pidgin. The fourth level represents the English spoken by graduates who are close to the standard English Brosnahan (1958). The assumptions of Brosnahan were improved by Banjo in 1971. Banjo states that social interaction and exposure of people can determine their level of English usage. Although Bayo (1971) does not state demographic factors like age, sex and level of education. In our current situation in the country, age cannot be used to determine the level of competence in the use of the language, as well as the level of education. Some Nursery and Primary school pupils of this generation speak better than some graduates.

This is possible because in the era of digital communication, children are exposed to more activities that can enhance their linguistic performance. The language experience of some of the children today is that some of them are only exposed to the English language and do not understand their regional languages. They may have insufficient vocabulary, but the level of accuracy in their sentence construction is high. Many users of the language today possess linguistic performance and little or no linguistic competence. Their competence in the use of English is not determined by their level of training, and as a result, they cannot account for the reasons for using certain expressions in a particular way. They must have earned the skill through television programmes, interaction with people, social media and imitations. Speakers like this cannot confidently identify the different varieties of the English language, and they also lack some level of inconsistencies in their use of the language.

Bilingualism and Multilingualism

It is important to examine bilingualism and multilingualism as these are the concepts that make it possible for two or more languages to coexist in an environment. The ability to have a good command and understanding of two languages is bilingualism, while an individual who possesses this quality is known as a bilingual (Graciua, 2009). Perain et al (2003) explain that the brain expands and becomes more effective in the process of learning languages because there will be some degree of comparisons and proficiency.

Bialystok et al (2008) support the assertion by stating that bilinguals possess more cognitive qualities than monolinguals because they expose their brain to the acquisition and learning of the linguistic features of more than one language. Garrafa et al (2015) demonstrate the advantages of being in possession and command of two languages through the speakers of some local languages. Bilingualism encourages cognitive competence in language use. However, the availability of more than one language in a community and the capacity of an individual to use more than one language are aspects of multilingualism. Cenoz (2013) perceives multilingualism as a field of study because it is interdisciplinary. It can be used to focus more on language acquisition and language processing.

Code Mixing and Code Switching

One of the features of bilingualism and multilingualism is the overlap of two or more languages in the speech of a bilingual or a multilingual. Code mixing and code switching are the terms used in linguistics to represent such a situation.

Alhazmi (2016) identifies code switching as an attempt to move from one language to another in a conversation. It is inter-sentential when the switch occurs within a language. It is intra-sentential when it is from one sentence to another. It is used to demonstrate the speaker's level of competence in the languages in use. Code switching is organised and deliberate. It is for the purpose of achieving clarity in message delivery. De Ruiter and Ziamari (2019) think that code switching and code mixing are often used interchangeably. Code mixing has been specifically defined as the transfer of the features of one language to another language during a conversation without any obvious reason. It is important to note that both code switching and code mixing can be used to achieve creativity and aesthetics in language. They are both present in a multilingual society like Lagos State, Nigeria.

Most of the speakers in this part of the world speak at least two languages. It is not impossible to have dominance of code switching and code mixing among these Lagosians in the broadcast media, some social media comments and even some lyrics that are produced in some songs by the Yoruba speakers in this part of the world.

Summary of the National Language Policy

In the Nigerian National Language policy of 2023, the Federal Government of Nigeria begins by emphasising that Nigerian languages should be preserved and protected from endangerment. In section 18, the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community must be the language of instruction from the Early Childhood Care and Development Education to the six years of primary education.

This implies that the English language must not be introduced to the students until they are in their first year of secondary.

In section 19, the government states clearly that a combination of the English language and the language of the immediate community should be adopted in disseminating information to the students from the Junior Secondary school one to three.

In the policy, the government assures the citizens of effective supervision of the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages at the Federal, State and Local Government levels.

The National Language policy on Education if properly implemented as promised by the government, is tending to resist the endangerment of the Nigerian languages from the dominance of the English language.

In sec. 33, the student shall be made to study one Nigerian language as a compulsory at the senior secondary school levels. In addition, the government encourages that students in these tertiary institutions should learn one Nigeria language at that level.

Projects, dissertations are expected to have additional abstract which is written in the language of the immediate community. The establishment of universities that teach in Nigerian languages is the last plan.

Methodology

This study used a mixed-method approach to investigate the dominance of the English language on the Yoruba language among the youth in Lagos State. A survey of some government-owned schools and private schools in Lagos State was conducted to investigate the implementation and adherence to the government policy on the preservation of the Nigerian languages and the use of the languages as the medium of instruction. Interviews were conducted with two Yoruba movie producers to investigate the causes of code mixing in their choice of words. The results were interpreted in the context of the existing literature. Of course, the limitations of the study are the availability of limited data and the restriction of the scope to a state in the country. The use of the mixed approach gave room for a comprehensive understanding of the topic. It enabled the investigation to go beyond education and extend to the use of the Nigerian language in Yoruba movies.

Theoretical Framework

Language Imperialism Theory

The major concern of this theory is that dominant languages usually have control over other languages and cultures. According to Phillipson (2009), the theory examines language spread, language shift and cultural homogenisation.

The assumptions of this theory are:

- i. The dominant language has a high level of dominance over the regional languages.
- ii. The dominant language usually absorbs the cultural values and norms of the regional languages
- iii. The dominant language exercises some supremacy over the native languages.

Data Presentation

A cross-section of primary schools in Lagos State was examined to examine the implementation of the use of the Yoruba language to teach the students. The schools selected are some private schools in the developed areas of Lagos State for the purpose of identifying the true picture of the Lagosians. The same was adopted in the selection of the public schools. Primary and secondary school levels were examined. Developed areas like Lagos Island and Lagos Mainland were used for data collection. Interviews were conducted as the instrument for data to reveal the true feelings of the school owners and the teachers. It is also through this tool that the respondents can clarify and amplify what a questionnaire that is mostly closed-ended cannot allow.

	Private School	Public School
Yoruba as the medium of instruction in primary school	No compliance	No compliance
JSS1 – JSS 3 (Combined approach)	No compliance	A little
Making it compulsory in SS1 – SS3	Few	To a large extent

1st interview: Private school owners and some selected teachers responded that an inferiority complex is the cause of the dominance of the English language

2nd interview: Some selected parents responded that the reality of Lagos State and the people's level of competence in the use of the language is the cause

Data Analysis

	Private School	Public School
Yoruba as the medium of instruction from early childhood to primary six	0%	0%
Combination of the two languages for JSS 1 - JSS 3	0%	20%
Making it compulsory in SS1 – SS3	20%	70% and above

Another interview was conducted with some Yoruba film-makers in Lagos to ascertain the reason for code-mixing or the dominant use of the English language in a Yoruba movie. Here is the summary of their response:

1st Interview: Users of the Yoruba language feel inferior, and they tend to practise code-mixing to demonstrate their competence in the use of the English language.

2nd Interview: Most educated Lagosians are not competent users of Yoruba, and if a movie is acted in only the Yoruba language without some elements of code-mixing, they may not understand the content, and this can affect the patronage of their products. The target population determines the language choice

Discussion

The dominance of the English language on has made the Yoruba language and its users inferior to the English language and its users. This has been confirmed by Phillipson (2009). It is rare to find any school that uses Yoruba as the language of instruction from the Early childhood to Primary six. The reason provided by the heads of the schools contacted is that parents of the pupils do not support the idea as they

embrace proficiency in the use of the English language from the early school days. Ndimele (2015) explains this endangerment as it happens to the major languages, such as Yoruba. The speakers of the language (Yoruba) without mixing it with the English language are few.

Piirainen and Sherris (2015) define endangerment as the representation of the decline in the number of users. As revealed in the second category of interviews with some filmmakers, this inferiority complex has compelled filmmakers to practise code-mixing in their movies to reach a wider audience. The study has some limitations in terms of data collection because Lagos State has a lot of schools in different Local Government Areas, and it is practically unachievable to account for the language situations in all the schools in the state; instead, some selected but popular schools were selected for data collection. Other future researchers can explore more schools and more causes of the decline in the use of the Yoruba language in other areas of the state or be specific in their chosen areas. The opinions here are the outcomes of the interactions with some heads of the associations formed by the private schools in Lagos State and some observations from the stakeholders.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms that the Yoruba language is endangered through the dominance of the English language in Nigeria. Yoruba language use declines in Lagos State because the schools do not implement its use as the medium of instruction from the outset. Many of the users prefer to use the English language as an interference to their Yoruba use. It is important to revive the use of the Yoruba language in Lagos State through constant use to avoid the death of the language. The need for some supervision is suggested to encourage regular use of the language in schools in Lagos State.

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A COGNITIVE STYLISTICS STUDY OF MIND-STYLE IN DUL JOHNSON'S *ACROSS THE GULF*

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Abstract

This article adopts a cognitive stylistics perspective, applying Schema Theory and Text World Theory to examine mind style in Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf*. Using qualitative textual analysis, it explores salient passages featuring Ifunanya, Janbut, and Ofala to demonstrate how linguistic choices and narrative structure construct distinct mental worldviews and guide readers' cognitive engagement. The analysis reveals layered text worlds and nested subworlds of memory, imagined futures, and traumatic recall that foreground a semantic split between characters' internal and external realities. Through deliberate schema affirmation and disruption, Johnson invites readers to reconstruct characters' perspectives: Ifunanya gestures toward a maternal schema while contesting imposed silence, Janbut unsettles masculine archetypes through vulnerability and displacement, and Ofala's communal authority fractures under threats to lineage. These stylistic strategies function as powerful devices that cultivate empathy, ethical response, and psychological complexity rooted in experiences of war and dislocation. The study contributes to cognitive stylistics and postcolonial reading practices by showing how text-world construction and schema dynamics mediate cognition and moral engagement with trauma and identity.

Keywords: Schema Theory, Text World Theory, Mind Style, *Across the Gulf*, Trauma

Introduction

Language, as the primary medium of literary expression, is both a vehicle for storytelling and a tool for representing thought, perception, and consciousness. In narrative fiction, linguistic choices shape how readers construct characters' mental worlds and interpret their worldviews. Cognitive stylistics, as described by Stockwell (2020), examines this interaction by treating readers as cognitive beings who draw on prior knowledge and experience to understand texts. It draws on stylistics, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and cognitive psychology to explore how meaning arises during reading, emphasising that meaning is not fixed in a text's structures but negotiated through readers' engagement (Jefferies & McIntyre, 2010; Aluya & Iangba, 2025). Within this framework, mind style highlights how language shapes characters' psychological worlds, revealing their perceptions and emotional states. First conceptualised by Fowler (1977, 1996), and later developed by Semino (2002) and Nuttall (2018), mind style refers to the distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual's mental self and worldview.

In Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf*, characters' mental functioning requires close analysis to understand how the fictional world is constructed and how readers interpret the author's message. Yet the application of mind style in cognitive stylistics to African war narratives especially those about the Nigerian Civil War, remains underexplored. Most scholarship on *Across the Gulf* foregrounds themes such as war,

identity, and reconciliation, often overlooking the systematic linguistic and cognitive processes that shape characters' worldviews and emotional states. This study addresses this gap by analysing the linguistic construction of mind style in *Across the Gulf*, using Text World Theory and Schema Theory to examine the narrative's representation of consciousness. In so doing, it contributes to scholarship on African war literature and expands the use of cognitive stylistics in analysing war and trauma narratives.

Accordingly, this study seeks to: (1) examine how Text World Theory accounts for the external, internal, and sub-worlds in the novel, showing how these elements project characters' perceptions and thought processes; (2) explore how Schema Theory explains readers' engagement with the text and their interpretation of traumatic and psychological experiences; and (3) identify the linguistic and stylistic patterns; lexical, syntactic, and discourse, that construct characters' mind styles in *Across the Gulf*. These objectives correspond to three research questions: (1) How does Text World Theory reflect the external, internal, and sub-worlds in the novel? (2) In what ways does Schema Theory explain readers' cognitive engagement with the text and their interpretation of trauma? (3) What linguistic patterns and stylistic features construct the characters' mind styles in *Across the Gulf*?

This study is significant for three reasons. It applies cognitive stylistics to African post-war fiction, a field still underexplored in stylistic research. It introduces mind style as both a textual and cognitive concept, demonstrating how Dul Johnson's linguistic choices reveal his characters' worldviews, emotional states, and psychological resilience. Finally, it enriches African literary criticism by moving beyond socio-political critique to explore the cognitive and linguistic layers of war literature, emphasising the psychological and emotional dimensions of conflict.

Empirical Review

The study of mind style has become a key focus within cognitive stylistics. In early stylistic works, Fowler (1977) introduced the term mind style to describe 'any distinctive linguistic representation of individual mental self'. Specifically, he presented mind style as a "cognitive impression" left on the reader by the consistent linguistic choices linked to a character or narrator's worldview. Fowler emphasises "the world-view of an author, or a narrator, or a character, constituted by the ideational structure of the text." However, later scholars, including Semino (2002) and Nuttall (2018), have broadened the concept of mind shift to encompass both the linguistic patterns in a text and the mental constructs that readers generate in their imagination. For example, Semino (2002) distinguishes between the terms mind style and world view, asserting that world view refers to the overarching perception of "reality" or the "text actual world" conveyed through the language of a text. Conversely, the idea of mind style is "most apt to capture those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are peculiar to a particular individual or shared by people with similar characteristics" (Semino, 2002, p. 97). This suggests that mind style differs from worldview by focusing on a personal cognitive aspect of the mind, rather than an individual's broader perspective on the world. Semino employs schema theory to illustrate how deviations in narrative language can generate unusual mental perspectives, particularly in texts that depict mental disorders.

A notable area of agreement is the understanding that language underpins mind style. Another shared view is the importance of deviation and foregrounding in signalling mind style. Beyond these agreements, notable differences exist in how mind style is conceptualised. Stockwell (2020) and Nuttall (2018) differ by placing mind style at the interface between text and reader. For Stockwell, mind style is best seen as the experiential quality of reading that emerges from textual patterns, while Nuttall

highlights its dual nature as both linguistic structure and fictional mental construct within the reader's imagination. Unlike Fowler, who believed mind style was embedded in the text, these cognitive stylisticians argue that it is co-created through the interpretive strategic readers use.

In an effort to apply cognitive stylistics' mind style to literary texts, Lugea (2016) makes a notable contribution to the study of cognitive stylistics by focusing on the representation of dementia in fictional narratives. Accordingly, Suleiman et al. (2023) present a detailed analysis of how linguistic and stylistic features reveal the consciousness of characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Aluya & Uduma (2023) examine, in their analysis of Selected Short Stories in Dul Johnson's *Shadows and Ashes*, how linguistic patterns and narrative strategies expose the mental states of characters in Johnson's collection. The study uses qualitative textual analysis of selected short stories from *Shadows and Ashes*, focusing on linguistic features such as transitivity patterns, deixis, modality, and lexical choices, as well as deviations and foregrounding.

The use of mind style in cognitive stylistics for analysing literary texts, as outlined above, reveals both similarities and differences. A key similarity among the three studies is their reliance on cognitive stylistics as a methodological approach to interpreting mind style. They also agree that mind style is a valuable tool for examining how literature portrays internal psychological realities, especially in cases of trauma, silence, or cognitive distortion. However, the studies also highlight significant differences in their scope and focus. Lugea's (2022) research pioneers a large-scale comparative analysis of dementia mind styles across several contemporary novels. Her contribution lies in extending cognitive stylistics beyond single-text analysis to identify unique features of dementia representation across multiple works. Conversely, Suleiman et al. (2023) focus on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, analysing how linguistic elements such as ellipsis and passivisation depict the protagonist Kambili's psychological state of suppression and muted resistance. Meanwhile, Aluya & Uduma (2023) apply mind style to African literature, emphasising how stylistic features like fragmented syntax, disrupted temporality, and shifts in deixis shape the psychology of characters in conflicting and traumatic situations.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the principles of cognitive stylistics, with a particular focus on the concept of mind style and its associated theoretical models. Mind style, within the framework of cognitive stylistics, can be examined from various theoretical perspectives, including schema theory, text world theory, conceptual metaphor theory, and mental space theory. Of these approaches, the study has adopted schema theory and text world theory.

Schema theory has become one of the most influential frameworks in cognitive psychology and has been effectively adapted for use in literary studies, particularly within cognitive stylistics. It proposes that people derive meaning from mental representations constructed from experiences linked to previous ones (Jefferies & McIntyre, 2010). The term 'schema' refers to background knowledge about a specific aspect of the world gained through direct or indirect experience. Schemata are dynamic and evolve through these experiences. The origins of schema theory can be traced back to Frederic Bartlett (1932), who argued that memory is not simply retrieval but an active reconstruction shaped by prior knowledge. Later, Jean Piaget (1952) expanded the concept within developmental psychology, explaining how individuals assimilate or accommodate new experiences into their schemata. During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as Schank and Abelson (1977) and Rumelhart (1980) extended the theory

into cognitive science, where it became central to understanding narrative, discourse, and comprehension. In literary studies, especially in cognitive stylistics, schema theory provides insights into how readers understand texts, negotiate meaning, and engage with characters' perceptions (Edem & Aluya, 2024). Cognitive stylistics emphasises that readers actively participate in meaning-making, as meaning is not solely contained within the text but also derived through their use of pre-existing background knowledge of the real world to interpret the text. Scholars generally distinguish between different types of schemata: content schemata represent background knowledge about the world; formal schemata regulate expectations of textual structures, including narrative conventions; linguistic schemata facilitate decoding at the level of lexis and syntax; and cultural schemata influence interpretation via shared traditions, values, and ideologies (Carrell, 1983). Writers often exploit, subvert, or disrupt these schemata to produce literary effects that challenge readers' interpretative expectations. This utilisation of pre-existing knowledge in text interpretation forms the core of schema theory in stylistics.

Text World Theory, a branch of cognitive stylistics, explains how readers derive meaning from texts. It relates to discourse processing and discourse semantics, with roots in Gilles Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces, developed during the 1980s and 1990s. Fauconnier's theory proposes that language users construct temporary mental models, called mental spaces. The text-world comprises world-building elements and function-advancing propositions drawn from the text. It depicts a reader's mental image of the text, formed through expressions of time, place, characters, events, and descriptions, known as "world-builders". In other words, discourse participants utilise textual and shared background information to construct a text world. The world-building elements within a text world can change at any point during discourse, leading to a world-switch (Gavins, 2007, pp. 45-48). The sub-world, which is the third level, is characterised by some form of temporal and/or spatial movement away from the primary text world. Characters' attitudes, expressed through modalised constructions such as bouletic modal worlds (highlighting desire), deontic modal worlds (highlighting obligation), and epistemic modal worlds (highlighting belief or certainty levels), also help develop the sub-world.

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretative qualitative textual analysis within a cognitive stylistics framework to explore how linguistic and stylistic features reveal the mental worldviews ("mind-styles") of characters in Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf*. Rather than analysing the entire text, eleven extracts were selected through a multi-step process designed to ensure relevance and coverage.

For the selection of extracts, this study focused on passages meeting three conditions: shifts in focalisation between narrator and character, clear presentation of characters' perceptions, memories or hypothetical situations, and activation of culturally significant schemas such as motherhood, lineage, war and displacement. Guided by these conditions, passages were purposively identified during a full reading of *Across the Gulf*. From this pool, eleven extracts featuring Ifunanya, Janbut and Ofala were chosen because they most clearly illustrated text-world construction, modality and schema affirmation or disruption. Each extract was recorded by page number to make checking and replication straightforward.

On the analytical framework and coding, the analysis combined Text World Theory, used to map discourse worlds, text worlds and sub-worlds, with Schema Theory, used to identify affirmed or disrupted cultural scripts. A coding template was created to capture world elements such as time, space, deictic centres, modality and

focalisation, schema categories including motherhood, hospitality, war, lineage and blacksmith craft, and stylistic features like lexical choices, multilingual insertions and narrative viewpoint.

Each extract was examined using the coding guide, as passages were analysed, a simple record of the codes was kept to track how often key features appeared and where, while short notes were written alongside each passage to explain interpretive choices and capture emerging ideas. As the study progressed, the codes and notes were refined until the main themes and patterns became clear.

The data interpretation after coding, patterns were grouped into three main text-world profiles; Ifunanya, Janbut and Ofala. For each profile, the analysis examined how linguistic choices and narrative structure produced distinctive mental worldviews and how these interacted with readers' likely prior knowledge. Schema disruptions such as Ifunanya's strategic secrecy, Janbut's survival among "strangers" and Ofala's failed patriarchy were linked to broader cognitive and postcolonial implications.

By specifying extract selection, coding procedures and interpretive steps, this methodology offers sufficient detail to enable other researchers to replicate or adapt the study.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf* shows how layered realities shape narrative structure by shifting between worlds. Focusing on Ifunanya, Janbut, and Ofala, this study identifies three interacting levels: the discourse world, the text-world, and the sub-worlds. The discourse world emerges through a third-person omniscient narrator whose fluid focalisation moves between public scenes and private consciousness. For instance, "Janbut threw the image into the fire and immediately regretted his action. It was like burning Ifunanya herself. He pulled it out and looked at the browning part that the flames had licked" (ATG: 131). Such moments reveal how public ritual worlds and intimate perceptual worlds; memories, dreams, and regrets coexist. This shifting narration also appears in indirect discourse and dense dialogue, as when Ofala and Ifunanya argue dramatically, blurring external action with inner perception by saying,

Extract 1

Ifunanya, please!! 'What's the matter, Ofala?' ... 'But in order to do that, you also have to forgive me. 'Forgive you? I don't understand.' I'm going to take a new wife. I'm going to marry Chizurum.' (ATG: 113)

The adoption of multilingualism also functions as a world-building lexicon that initiates a cultural shift within the narrative. Johnson employs Igbo, Tarok, Hausa, and Pidgin English expressions to depict different cultural worlds. This is clearly illustrated in the Hausa phrase: "You saved me. Gaskiya nagode maku dayawa. Allah ya albarkace ku. Allah ya biya muku bukatunku" (ATG: 221). Through the characters' discourse, the narrator shares contextual knowledge of the real-life world with the readers. Regarding Ifunanya's character, the narrator assumes readers will relate to her experience of Igbo wartime suffering, maternal struggle, and gendered vulnerability. The narrator presumes readers already understand the cultural significance of motherhood, marriage, and childbearing. For example, when Ifunanya insists on raising Nnanna, the text does not explain why a single mother might be socially vulnerable but instead implies that readers will connect with her motherly love. This is shown when Ifunanya tells Ofala, "I want to be able to accommodate Nnanna. I want to be able to learn to love him" (ATG: 113).

In Ofala's case, the narrator assumes readers share the same cultural knowledge of lineage and continuity. Thus, the text does not explain why Ofala sees

Nnanna's birth as an ancestral blessing but simply states the child is male: "Man,' Ofala uttered the word silently and remained silent thereafter" (ATG: 105). This positions readers within a traditional communal audience expected to understand the significance of a male child. Similarly, for Jambut, the narrator presumes familiarity with postcolonial war realities in Nigeria Biafran war, ethnic rift, betrayal, and desertion so his insistence on Tarok identity requires no further explanation. Thus, the narrator does not explain why Jambut insists on his Tarok identity, only noting his declaration: "I am Tarok to the bones! So, don't play games with me..." (ATG: 233). The text worlds of Ifunanya, Janbut, and Ofala are built from mental models shaped by time, space, characters, objects, modalities, and viewpoints. Temporal and spatial settings repeatedly used to construct and shift these worlds include Kano riots (1991 and 1994), Okigboli (town, arena, and pond), the nkelang, blacksmith's shop, Plateau, Langtang, Fabut, Mangu, and Jos. Ifunanya's text world centres on domestic and wartime spaces; her Okigboli household (kitchen, compound, market, maternal role, under the orji, and a hole in the canopy). Her worldview is marked by epistemic certainty, reflected in words like "must," "will," and "never," reinforcing her determination against cultural rejection. In her maternal voice, she often speaks with conviction, as in: "I will keep this child... I will raise him with or without your help" (ATG: 103). This certainty underscores her resilience. By contrast, the narrator presents Ifemelu's world as uncertain, evident in her frequent use of "Maybe" and "perhaps" to signal partial knowledge of events.

Extract 2

Janbut returned two days to the wedding and had read the note only the day before. He could not contain his shock. The note explained why she could not await his return, the sudden reappearance of Ofala, and the need for her to sort things out with him. "If I explain things to him and he decides to dump me, then I'm yours forever", the note said (ATG: 77)

On the other hand, Janbut's text world is largely transient, centred on warfronts. He moves constantly across the North and East, and symbolically between loyalty and betrayal. His secondary worlds include the CO's office, Janbut's forge, Nkelang, Tarok compound, Langtang gatekeeping, bodyguards, bricolage of jokes, Iko tree gatherings, mother's hut, beer cycles, Kayode's illness, health centre, the two-bedroom zinc house, separate rooms, and the renovated huts. The forge remains his deictic centre. His memory worlds emerge through carved images and photographs, objects that act as mnemonic sub-worlds, burned and then rescued. In the text, the narrator states that:

Extract 3

Janbut threw the image into the fire and immediately regretted his action. It was like burning Ifunanya herself. He pulled it out and looked at the browning part that the flames had licked. He took the carving knife and slowly scraped the brown off the wood. He would turn it into a handle for his hoe, he told himself. He would engrave her image on it. Since he returned home, Janbut had done everything possible to put Okigboli behind him, to keep Ifunanya out of his mind, but it was difficult. Sometimes he did not know whether it was Ifunanya herself he worried

about, or his child, which she was pregnant with at the time he left (ATG: 131).

Janbut's textual world emerges from fractured identities, occupying a space where he is neither fully trusted by the Igbo community nor secure in his Northern origins. To defend himself, he uses a modality of certainty, declaring, "I am Tarok to the bones! So, don't play games with me..." (ATG: 233), a line that affirms his identity, trauma, and guilt. Negations and hypothetical statements dominate his speech, revealing a wounded self, caught between loyalty and betrayal. For example, he protests, "I am not what you think... It is not my fault" (ATG: 122), exposing his defensiveness and internal conflict as an exiled father. By contrast, Ofala's textual world is rooted in ancestral compounds, communal gatherings, and cultural ceremonies a world of tradition, ancestral rights, and ritual landscapes. This is clearly shown when he urges his son to take up a chieftaincy title: saying

Extract 4

The Council of Chiefs has decided that you should be conferred with a chieftaincy title,' Ofala declared in an even voice. 'No, Father, I'm not interested. I... I don't want any title.' Ofala considered his son's response for a while. He was not surprised; it ran in the he thought of "blood", and then dropped the idea-it ran in the family (ATG: 179)

Ofala's primary social worlds are Okigboli's public sphere, Council of Chiefs and chieftaincy installations and his domestic compound. His worldview is framed through proverbial certainty and leadership authority, often rendered in narrator-reported direct speech. This is evident when he recounts the war scenarios, saying:

When I took aim, the man closed his eyes. But when I fired the first shot, which ripped through his chest, he opened his eyes, wide! It was his eyes, and not his mouth, that pleaded for mercy. But I knew that the man would not survive, and so I finished him off (ATG: 145).

The narrator allows Ofala to construct a mental world where images recur, as seen in: "He paused and squinted as if he was looking at the eyes he had been talking about. He nodded his head a couple of times and then said: 'And for three days, those pleading eyes continued to come at me'" (ATG: 145). Sometimes the narrator uses objective description like serving wine or receiving chiefs to show Ofala's social worldview, while at other times revealing his inner torment. In the text, the narrator notes that:

Extract 5

Ofala did not light a lamp. He sat on a stool in the darkness of his room, his head bowed but held firmly in his two hands. He was trying to understand his stepbrother's behaviour, but instead, his mind took him into the past; to the day his father sat with him, just as he had sat with Nnanna. It was in the dead of night like this, when the only sounds were those of crickets and toads, and the occasional hoots of owls and the flapping of bats, that his father had called him. He was tired and sleepy when the talk started. Bored, his mind had drifted away until his attention peaked at the point the subject caught his interest, and all sleep and tiredness vanished (ATG: 157)

Ofala's modality appears in deontic terms such as "It must be so" and "This is how it has always been," reflecting traditional roles of community, lineage, and male authority. His speech is confident and authoritative, as seen in, "The child is a blessing. He will bring honour to this house" (ATG: 113). Yet this certainty falters when Ifunanya challenges him, and he masks doubt with proverbial speech and elder wisdom. In text world theory, sub-worlds; or "world-switches" arise from memories, hypotheticals, and imagined futures. Ifunanya's world is built from memories of betrayal, trauma, and fractured motherhood, especially her forced relationship with Ikenna. The narrator states, "She wished she had not been caught in the whirlwind that brought Ikenna into her hut that night..." (ATG: 211), showing her pain and regret. Likewise, Janbut's sub-world reflects a shift from war trauma to imagined reconciliation. Walking down memory lane, he vividly recalls violence in the North, burnt villages, killings of Igbo people, and helpless victims. The narrator states that:

Extract 6

Scores of children spilled out of the many clusters of huts that formed the households in Fabut. They streamed towards the house, but would not go too close. Then the adults started to come, one by one, each heading to Rimbut's house. Before the Land Rover could come to a complete stop, the two soldiers in the back seat jumped down, their rifles firmly in their right hands. The children who were nearby scampered away, some screaming their lungs out. The elders shouted at them, sending them back to their houses. Janbut had disappeared into the house before they got to the compound. (ATG: 69)

Janbut's memory-worlds trap him in trauma, blocking his connection to the present. He also creates hypothetical worlds through unrealistic projections, as in, "If only the war had not cut him off, he might have been free to live among the Igbo without suspicion" (ATG: 138). This conditional statement signals alienation, longing for acceptance, and the impossibility of belonging. Ofala's sub-worlds, meanwhile, revolve around ambition, paranoia, and despair. He recalls his father's reign "He thought of how his father once ruled with authority, and how it was his turn to step into the shoes" (ATG: 233) a memory-world driving his desire for succession. His paranoia is voiced in, "What if Chizurum was already plotting with Njoku to undo him?" (ATG: 210), showing imagined threats shaping his trust and mental state. Ofala also constructs an imagined future sub-world where he envisions himself as the undisputed leader, but this is shattered by failure. His tragic death in the sacred pond marks the collapse of these sub-worlds. According to the narrator:

Extract 7

Early the next morning, just when the sun was streaking the grey skies in the horizon, screaming and yelling voices were heard from the direction of the sacred pond. People rushed out to meet the women running back with empty containers and heading for Ofala's house. Everyone was convinced that the women had seen Ofala, and that he had either gone mad and was pursuing them, or was pretending to be mad. The Council of Chiefs rushed to the house. But the news was different. Ofala's body was floating on the sacred pond, his hands bound (ATG: 217).

Schema theory explains how readers connect new information to existing knowledge frameworks. In Ifunanya, Johnson reinforces maternal schemata of caregiving, household chores, sexual fidelity, public reputation, and peacemaking. The narrator notes, “Ifunanya literally threw the basket down, the yams scattering and breaking. She was dripping with sweat, but not from the weight of the basket of yams she carried. It was from fear” (ATG: 143), signalling shared understandings of market and household labour. Another schema appears in the birth of a son, tied to lineage, pride, and social stability. In Igbo culture, a woman’s capacity to bear sons is highly valued, clarifying why the narrator underscores the birth of a male child, stating:

Extract 8

When Okigboli woke up on that first day of October in the year 1970, the celebration on their minds was Nigeria's independence. So, it was a pleasant surprise to hear that Ifunanya had given Ofala an added reason for the celebration. 'And she did not just give him a child, but a boy, a bouncing baby boy!! Yes. A boy so big that in spite of all his skills and experience in medicine, it took Ikenna one and a half hours to bring him out! Has that ever happened in Okigboli?' (ATG: 105 -106)

Giving Ofala a son aligns with societal expectations of motherhood, grounding a woman’s status as wife and safeguarding the husband’s legacy. The community celebrates Ifunanya’s male child as a contribution to continuity and tradition. This reflects the lineage schema that a male child carries the family name and future. Amara confirms this, saying, “She has given birth to the man who will inherit your homestead and keep your name alive, Ofala. Congratulations!!” (ATG: 105). This reinforces the patriarchal stereotype valuing male children over female ones. Ifunanya also fits the schema of women’s domestic competence. hardworking, skilled in household tasks like marketing, cooking, and managing chores. She reflects wartime narratives of women as victims of displacement, hunger, and loss, dependent on men for protection. Yet Johnson disrupts this schema by presenting Ifunanya as a mother with secrets. Instead of fully nurturing, she becomes an agent of strategic secrecy, confiding in her son rather than revealing truths publicly.

Extract 9

Again, she seized the picture as if someone else was competing for it. Nnanna stepped in and she turned to the door, the picture in her hand. 'I found it, Nnanna. I've found your father, your real father.' 'Thank you, Mother,' he said as he collected the picture, his hand trembling slightly (ATG: 192).

Additionally, Ifunanya’s calm acceptance of polygamy challenges the usual expectation of rivalry among wives, making her lack of jealousy unusual. Johnson also disrupts the hospitality schema: though hospitality is sacred in most cultures, Ifunanya refuses to offer warmth or protection during wartime. Readers expecting her to be welcoming instead see trauma and vulnerability diminishing her values. She also challenges patriarchal norms by voicing her concerns, unsettling readers who expect women to remain silent. In Janbut, Johnson depicts cultural and experiential schemas of blacksmith craft, war veteran, betrayed love, and absent father. As an artisan, the narrator informs us that ...

Extract 10

Janbut spent more and more time in his nkelang. The improvement in his skill at blacksmithing, in spite of his age, surprised him. He would wake up early in the morning, sweep the hut paying much attention to the hearth, which he methodically cleaned and got ready for the day's work. (ATG: 134)

Johnson initially affirms but ultimately disrupts readers' schemas through Janbut and Ofala. Janbut, a Tarok man in an Igbo territory during the Biafran War, evokes familiar wartime schemas of suspicion, exclusion and displacement; strangers are treated as rivals or spies, often killed or detained. Yet Johnson unsettles this expectation by allowing Janbut to survive and forge a fragile belonging among "strangers," challenging the schema of rigid ethnic boundaries and the idea of "home" as a stable refuge. Similarly, Ofala embodies the cultural schema of the titled elder ritual head, patriarch and custodian of continuity whose authority and pride are validated by the birth of a male heir. "So it was a pleasant surprise to hear that Ifunanya had given Ofala an added reason for celebration." (ATG 106). However, Johnson undercuts this archetype when Ofala, overwhelmed by Ifunanya's revelations, fails in his patriarchal duty and dies in anguish. In both cases, Johnson affirms culturally familiar patterns before overturning them, forcing readers to confront the instability of ethnic, familial and ritual certainties.

Extract 11

Early the next morning, just when the sun was streaking the grey skies in the horizon, screaming and yelling voices were heard from the direction of the sacred pond. People rushed out to meet the women running back with empty containers and heading for Ofala's house. Everyone was convinced that the women had seen Ofala, and that he had either gone mad and was pursuing them, or was pretending to be mad. The Council of Chiefs rushed to the house. But the news was different. Ofala's body was floating on the sacred pond, his hands bound (ATG: 217).

At this point, Ofala's public-order schema collapses, rendering his leadership ineffective. Traditionally, men provide, protect, and decide while women's worth centres on fertility and domesticity, yet Ofala's dependence on Ifunanya challenges this male-dominance schema. The narrator confirms that "she did not just give him a child" but was essential in his life. Wartime also disrupts the African hospitality schema: Ofala's generosity becomes selective, overshadowed by ethnic suspicion and survival fears. Likewise, festivity defies expectations rather than austerity during war, Ofala hosts lavish celebrations, enjoys pleasures, and displays wealth despite communal suffering. These reversals frustrate readers anticipating masculine authority, communal generosity, and wartime solemnity.

Conclusion

This study has examined mind style in Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf* through cognitive stylistics, Schema Theory, and Text World Theory. The analysis shows that the novel not only recounts the devastation of the Nigerian Civil War but also presents distinct cognitive perspectives through characters like Ifunanya, Ofala, and Janbut. Their linguistic patterns, silences, and narrative voices reveal unique ways of viewing the world closely linked to the socio-political effects of war. Schema Theory demonstrates how these minds styles interact with, and sometimes deviate from,

cultural expectations, as seen in Ifunanya's defiant femininity, Ofala's waning authority, and Janbut's fragile masculinity. Text World Theory further highlights how Johnson constructs complex narrative worlds that reinforce these perspectives. Ultimately, the novel illustrates not only the physical scars of conflict but also the mental imprints left on those who experience it, showing how cognitive stylistics can illuminate the interplay between language, thought, and social experience in literature.

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LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF HELON HABILA'S MEASURINGTIME

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Abstract

This paper explores Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* through the lens of lexico-semantic analysis, investigating how language functions not only as a narrative tool but also as a medium for ideological expression and thematic exploration. The study examines the author's deliberate use of lexical patterns, figurative expressions, collocations, and connotative meanings to construct characterisation, shape narrative progression, and communicate complex socio-political realities. Drawing on Lyons' Lexical Field Theory as a theoretical framework, the paper analyses how language is used in literary texts helps reveals how meanings are shaped and how writers manipulate linguistic choices to create particular effects. This is achieved through semantic relations that extend beyond sentence boundaries, reinforcing the novel's emotional and ideological depth. Special attention is paid to how lexical choices highlight the inner lives of the twin protagonists Mamo and LaMamo while also reflecting broader postcolonial themes such as identity crisis, disillusionment with leadership, historical memory, and the human cost of resistance. Through a combination of lexical richness and semantic layering, Habila crafts a narrative that is introspective, politically charged, and emotionally resonant. The study also draws from relevant critical literature to support the claim that meaning in Habila's novel is constructed not only by what is said but by the subtle semantic associations that permeate the text. By uncovering the intricate web of language use in *Measuring Time*, this paper highlights how linguistic strategies can enrich literary meaning and deepen readers' engagement with African narratives. Ultimately, the study affirms Habila's place among contemporary African writers who use language to interrogate history, identity, and power.

Keywords: lexico-semantics, lexical fields, figurative language, characterization

Introduction

Language is more than a medium of communication; it is also a tool for interpretation, resistance, and identity construction, especially in literary works. In stylistics, the study of how language is used in literary texts helps reveal how meanings are shaped and how writers manipulate linguistic choices to create particular effects. One important branch of stylistics is lexico-semantics, which deals with the relationships between words and their meanings, including how words group into fields of meaning (semantic fields), how they collocate (appear together regularly), and how they carry both literal and implied meanings (connotations). Lexico-semantics is a linguistic field that studies word meanings and how they are constructed and interpreted in texts (Leech, 1981). In literary works, authors use language deliberately to convey themes, develop characters, and evoke emotion. As Leech (1981) notes,

"semantics is central to understanding the stylistic choices an author makes, especially when those choices serve thematic or ideological purposes" (p. 9).

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007) offers a compelling narrative that lends itself to lexico-semantic analysis. The novel follows the lives of twin brothers Mamo and LaMamo set in the fictional village of Keti, against a backdrop of postcolonial Nigerian history, failed political systems, and personal disillusionment. Through the lens of language, Habila constructs a powerful reflection on time, memory, and identity. The narrator's tone, the characters' speech patterns, and the repetition of certain semantic fields reveal how the novel constructs meaning and reinforces its themes. In particular, the lexical items Habila chooses often carry double meanings or connotative implications that point to broader issues in Nigerian society, such as corruption, elitism, and historical distortion.

According to Simpson (2014), "lexical and semantic choices are not just decorative features in literature; they structure the reader's understanding of character, theme, and ideology" (p. 68). In *Measuring Time*, the repeated use of words relating to temporality such as "calendar," "past," "future," "delay," and "change"—draws attention to the novel's central concern with the passage of time and its impact on both individual lives and the collective memory of a nation. These lexical items are not random but serve as symbolic markers of stagnation and longing in the postcolonial Nigerian context.

Furthermore, Habila's work aligns with what Halliday (1985) calls the ideational function of language, where language reflects the speaker's view of the world. Through figurative language, ironic contrasts, and meaningful lexical collocations, Habila critiques the post-independence socio-political reality in Nigeria. Words such as "history," "truth," "chief" and "power" are used with subtle irony, inviting readers to question whose narratives are preserved and whose are erased. As Wales (2011) asserts, "semantic features such as metaphor and irony are integral in articulating resistance and critique within African literature" (p. 211).

This paper, therefore, aims to conduct a detailed lexico-semantic analysis of *Measuring Time*, examining how Habila's use of language contributes to the novel's thematic complexity and ideological depth. It will explore the semantic fields that dominate the text, the figurative and rhetorical devices used, and the connotative meanings of key lexical items. By analyzing these elements, the paper seeks to demonstrate how *Measuring Time* uses language as both a narrative and political instrument.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this research analysis is Lexical Field Theory. The theory is suitable for this study because it is concerned with the relationship that exists between lexical items in texts. Originally proposed by Trier (1931) and developed further by Lyons (1977), Lexical Field Theory holds that words are not isolated but exist in structured semantic fields/groups of words with related meanings that help organize thought and experience. Lyons, a prominent linguist, made significant contributions to the study of semantics, particularly through his work on lexical fields, a concept that traces its origins to Jost Trier and was later refined by scholars including Lyons himself. Lexical field theory posits that the vocabulary of a language is not a chaotic collection of isolated words, but an interconnected system of meaning in which words are grouped based on shared semantic domains. According to this theory, lexical meaning is best understood in relation to other words in the same semantic domain. In literary texts, the repeated use of words within a specific field (time, politics, memory, decay) creates cohesion and emphasises thematic preoccupations.

In literary texts, the analysis of lexical fields can reveal underlying themes, character traits, and ideological concerns. For instance, in *Measuring Time*, Helon Habila employs distinct lexical fields related to war, illness, governance, memory, and history. Words associated with conflict (“rebel,” “gun,” “escape”) often frame LaMamo’s journey, while those tied to illness, stagnation, and reflection (“weak,” “bedridden,” “writing,” “waiting”) characterize Mamo’s introspective life. This contrast in lexical fields serves to reinforce the thematic dichotomies in the novel: action versus reflection, movement versus stasis, and hope versus disillusionment.

In *Measuring Time*, several prominent lexical fields emerge: time (“calendar,” “future,” “delay”), politics (“chief,” “power,” “corruption”), and identity (“orphan,” “exile,” “story”). These fields are not arbitrary; they function as cohesive devices that guide the reader’s interpretation. As Cruse (2011) notes, “the grouping of words into fields is a reflection of how speakers conceptualize and compartmentalize reality” (p. 282). Lexical Field Theory thus enables a systematic analysis of how Habila’s language choices contribute to the novel’s ideological and thematic structure.

Plot Summary of *Measuring Time* by Helon Habila

Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time* is a deeply introspective and thematically rich novel that traces the divergent life paths of twin brothers, Mamo and LaMamo, born in the small Nigerian town of Keti. The novel begins with a shared childhood marred by their mother’s early death and their father Lamang’s neglect. Their father is an ambitious, self-serving politician whose actions sow the seeds of emotional and moral distance between him and his sons. As adolescents, both Mamo and LaMamo dream of escape of becoming heroes and changing their fortunes. However, their destinies diverge drastically when LaMamo runs away to join a rebel movement, seeking glory in various African warfronts, while Mamo, hindered by chronic illness, remains in Keti. LaMamo’s journey takes him across different African countries, witnessing and participating in armed struggles that slowly strip him of youthful idealism. His letters to Mamo over the years reveal the trauma, disillusionment, and physical toll of life as a soldier.

In contrast, Mamo’s story unfolds in the quiet, reflective space of his hometown. He becomes a teacher, a historian, and eventually the secretary and biographer to the local emir. Through this role, Mamo begins to document not only the life of the emir but also the broader history of his community. His writing becomes an act of self-definition and resistance—a way of reclaiming agency in a society rife with political corruption, spiritual decay, and failed leadership.

The novel’s narrative structure is non-linear, with episodes of memory, flashback, and reflection interwoven with the present. As the years pass, LaMamo returns, worn and transformed by his experiences, while Mamo continues to struggle with his own sense of purpose. Their eventual reunion is subdued, marked more by shared pain than triumph, underscoring the cost of their individual choices and the weight of unfulfilled dreams. The novel concludes with a sober awareness of time how it is measured not only by clocks and calendars but also by memory, loss, and change. Mamo’s chronicling of history and LaMamo’s lived experience of violence both point to a generation grappling with broken promises and the need for personal and national healing.

Textual Analysis of *Measuring Time*

Below are the lexico-semantic features, and other creative strategies deployed by Habila to communicate his artistic visions, and explain their stylistic significance in the text. These comprise Lexical patterns and thematic concerns, figurative language

and semantic depth, connotations and connotations as well as lexical fields and characterisation.

Lexical Patterns and Thematic Concerns

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* is steeped in lexical choices that resonate with the novel's central themes time, identity, disillusionment, and socio-political stagnation. Lexical patterns refer to the repeated and systematic use of certain words and expressions that form semantic fields or networks of meaning within a text. According to Leech and Short (2007), "lexical patterns are key to understanding the themes and motifs of a literary text, as they often reflect the author's underlying ideological stance" (p. 195). In *Measuring Time*, the recurrence of words associated with temporality such as "calendar," "history," "age," "delay," and "memory" forms a semantic field that underscores the novel's meditation on the passage of time and its effects on personal and national consciousness.

One of the most prominent lexical themes is the motif of time itself. Mamo, the reflective protagonist, frequently contemplates the weight of the past and the uncertainty of the future. Words like "measuring," "counting," and "waiting" appear in repeated contexts, reinforcing the characters' paralysis in a postcolonial state where progress is elusive. As Yule (2020) asserts, "semantic fields often reflect a cognitive structure, where related words reinforce a shared worldview or conceptual framework" (p. 114). In this case, the semantic field of temporality conveys a vision of stagnation, as time is often described not as a movement forward but as a circular or halting force. Mamo states, "It was as though time had stopped moving, and I was simply watching shadows that had once been people" (Habila, 2007, p. 138). This lexical choice of "shadows" not only metaphorically emphasizes decay but also situates the character's existence in a liminal, almost spectral temporality.

Another recurring lexical pattern is that of political disenchantment. Habila employs a vocabulary of decay, failure, and betrayal to describe the Nigerian political scene. Phrases such as "empty promises," "thieves in suits," "power games," and "rotting leadership" are recurrent throughout the novel, creating a semantic environment of despair and hopelessness. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) note, "lexical choice in political discourse often reveals more about institutional corruption than overt commentary" (p. 302). Through this lens, the repetition of such negative political terminology reflects a collective cynicism in the fictional town of Keti, which mirrors the larger Nigerian socio-political reality.

The thematic concern with identity and alienation is similarly reflected in the lexical field of absence and fragmentation. Words like "lost," "orphan," "disconnected," "wandering," and "forgotten" permeate the text, reflecting Mamo's internal struggle to define himself in the absence of parental guidance, national pride, or historical continuity. As Simpson (2014) argues, "Lexis is a key to emotional and ideological engagement, with lexical fields often reinforcing the psychological dimensions of characters" (p. 72). For Mamo, identity is not inherited but constructed through writing, observation, and quiet resistance, and the lexicon surrounding him emphasizes his liminal, observer status within a disjointed society.

The presence of religious and traditional lexical items such as "ancestral," "sacrifice," "ritual," and "destiny" further enriches the thematic complexity of the novel. These words evoke a fading cultural heritage, one that the younger generation views with a mixture of reverence and skepticism. The interplay between modernity and tradition, a common postcolonial dilemma, is lexically encoded in these opposing fields of technology and ancestry. Crystal (2019) notes that "the lexicon of literature can serve as a linguistic archaeology, revealing layers of cultural values and historical

tensions” (p. 178). In *Measuring Time*, this archaeological function of language is evident as Habila excavates the spiritual and moral decline of a society once anchored in tradition.

Moreover, the characters' vocabularies further illustrate their thematic roles. LaMamo's speech is peppered with military and revolutionary jargon “gun,” “mission,” “escape,” “attack” highlighting his life as a freedom fighter and exile. Mamo, on the other hand, uses literary and historical terms “chronicle,” “biography,” “memory,” “truth” that align with his introspective and intellectual disposition. These distinct lexical registers serve not only to individualize characters but also to reflect the broader thematic oppositions of violence versus thought, action versus reflection, and war versus memory.

In essence, Habila's strategic use of lexical patterns deepens the reader's engagement with the novel's themes. The words chosen are not merely decorative or incidental; they are thematic vehicles that structure meaning and emotional tone. As Wales (2014) points out, “in literary texts, thematic preoccupations are often foregrounded by recurring lexis that becomes a kind of code for deeper cultural and psychological insights” (p. 246). This is precisely what Helon Habila achieves in *Measuring Time*—a layered narrative built not just on plot and character, but on the rich, symbolic use of words.

Figurative Language and Semantic Depth

Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007) is not only a socio-political narrative but also a rich linguistic tapestry woven with layers of figurative language that contribute to its semantic depth. The use of metaphors, similes, irony, personification, and symbolic imagery infuses the text with emotional intensity and intellectual resonance, enhancing its thematic preoccupations such as memory, identity, history, and disillusionment. Figurative language in the novel functions beyond aesthetic ornamentation it is a vehicle for profound philosophical and psychological reflection.

Time, a central motif in the novel, is often framed metaphorically to illustrate the protagonists' entrapment within both personal and historical cycles. Mamo's physical illness becomes a metaphor for his social and existential paralysis. Habila writes, “*My illness was a kind of freezing; time stopped, and I was locked in a seasonless season*” (Habila, 2007, p. 88). This metaphor does not merely describe his medical condition but evokes a sense of suspended history where progress is impossible and memory becomes a burden.

The figurative use of “seasonless season” invokes T.S. Eliot's poetic phrase in *The Waste Land*, suggesting a cultural and spiritual barrenness that defines the world of the novel. As critics such as Ouma (2011) argue, “Habila's metaphors often perform a dual function they reflect personal stagnation and national inertia, interweaving the psyche of the individual with that of the postcolonial state” (p. 107). In this way, metaphor is deployed as a tool of semantic layering, enriching the narrative's philosophical undertones.

Similes in *Measuring Time* frequently convey emotional and psychological states with acute precision. For instance, Mamo's relationship with his father is described in emotionally distant terms: “*He looked at us like we were strangers he had once met in a dream*” (Habila, 2007, p. 64). This simile encapsulates the alienation and detachment that pervade familial bonds in the novel. Rather than portraying emotion directly, Habila filters it through figurative comparisons that evoke ambivalence, fragmentation, and memory's unreliability.

Critics such as Adeoti (2012) note that simile in Habila's work is often “tinged with irony and existential uncertainty, serving less to clarify than to destabilize fixed

meanings” (p. 93). These rhetorical figures thus resist simplistic interpretation and deepen the reader’s engagement with the text’s psychological landscape.

Habila also employs symbols to frame the postcolonial condition in metaphorical terms. One recurring symbol is the failing town of Keti, which serves as a microcosm of Nigeria’s sociopolitical decay. The physical description of the town “*buildings peeling like scabs, roads cracked and weed-infested, the air thick with dust and regret*” (Habiba, 2007, p. 171)—is loaded with symbolic imagery. The town becomes a corporeal metaphor for national neglect and historical amnesia.

As Emenyonu (2009) observes, “Habiba constructs his fictional towns with the language of illness and entropy, making them allegories of a nation in decline” (p. 54). These descriptions are more than scenic; they form part of a symbolic code that conveys broader thematic concerns. The figurative language here carries semantic density, requiring the reader to decode layers of social and psychological meaning.

Irony both verbal and situational is a dominant trope in the novel and contributes significantly to its semantic nuance. Mamo, for instance, who aspires to be a historian and writer, ends up becoming a ghostwriter for a corrupt local chief. This occupational irony is rendered with subtle humor: “*My job was to write the chief’s biography, but what I really wrote was a chronicle of his lies*” (Habiba, 2007, p. 202). The semantic impact of this irony lies in its exposure of the disconnect between truth and official history, a recurring concern in postcolonial literature. As Bhabha (1994) contends, “Postcolonial narratives frequently engage in ironic mimicry, subverting official discourses through subtle linguistic inversions” (p. 122). Habiba’s use of irony thus aligns with a broader postcolonial strategy of resistance through language, enriching the text’s political and ideological implications.

Memory is also rendered figuratively through personification and sensory metaphors. At one point, Mamo reflects: “*Memories came like shadows at dusk—long, haunting, and uninvited*” (Habiba, 2007, p. 134). The personification of memory as a lurking force deepens the psychological realism of the text and emphasizes the involuntary nature of trauma. This device aligns with Ricoeur’s (2004) theory of memory as narrative, where recollection is not merely a retrieval of facts but a creative and emotional process shaped by language. Through figurative language, Habiba enacts this narrative construction of memory, giving emotional and symbolic form to otherwise abstract experiences.

Figurative language in *Measuring Time* is central to its semantic depth and thematic complexity. Through metaphor, simile, irony, symbolism, and personification, Habiba constructs a linguistic world that reflects the emotional, political, and philosophical dimensions of postcolonial life. These devices allow the narrative to operate on multiple levels of meaning, enhancing its impact and interpretive richness. In line with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) view of semantic cohesion, figurative language in Habiba’s novel functions cohesively, binding together disparate elements into a unified whole. It is through these richly textured figures of speech that Habiba successfully explores the disjuncture of history, the fragility of identity, and the enduring quest for meaning in a fractured world.

Collocations and Connotations

In *Measuring Time*, Habiba uses collocations and connotative meaning to enrich the text’s lexico-semantic texture. These lexical choices not only reflect the author’s stylistic preferences but also reveal deep-seated cultural, psychological, and thematic dimensions of the narrative. By combining words that frequently occur together (collocations), and by employing words with layered meanings beyond their

denotative value (connotation), Habila constructs a world that resonates with both immediacy and symbolic nuance.

Collocations refer to the habitual combination of words that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. According to Firth (1957), “You shall know a word by the company it keeps” (p. 11). In *Measuring Time*, collocations serve to reflect the socio-cultural realities of the characters, evoke mood, and enhance narrative coherence. For instance, expressions such as “*ancestral curse*”, “*lost time*”, “*buried secrets*”, and “*sick child*” recur in the novel, forming stable collocational patterns that both reflect and reinforce the novel’s themes of heritage, regret, memory, and suffering. The phrase “*lost time*”, which appears multiple times in the narrative, does not simply denote time that has passed but evokes the notion of irretrievable experiences, missed opportunities, and emotional voids.

Similarly, collocations like “*bloody coup*”, “*military tyranny*”, and “*political rot*” situate the narrative within Nigeria’s postcolonial history of dictatorship and corruption. These fixed phrases are not merely descriptive; they draw upon a shared cultural understanding that lends semantic richness to the text. As Sinclair (1991) notes, “The meaning of a text is often built not on individual words, but on the predictable combinations they form” (p. 108).

Connotative Meaning: Beyond Literal Sense

Connotation involves the emotional, cultural, or associative meaning that a word carries beyond its dictionary definition. Habila masterfully employs connotative language to imbue *Measuring Time* with a tone of existential reflection, socio-political critique, and psychological depth. For example, the recurring image of “darkness” carries significant connotative weight. In one instance, Mamo says, “*Night brought not just darkness but the voices of the past*” (Habila, 2007, p. 102). Here, *darkness* does not merely signify the absence of light; it connotes fear, memory, mourning, and the heavy burden of historical trauma. In African literary tradition, darkness is often symbolic of ignorance, chaos, or colonial destruction, and Habila’s usage taps into this deeper well of meaning (Ngũgĩ waThiong’o, 1986).

Another example lies in the word “*dust*”, which appears repeatedly in the novel. In the sentence, “*The dust of Keti settled on everything like forgotten dreams*” (Habila, 2007, p. 153), dust connotes decay, stagnation, and neglect. It also metaphorically connects the material (the town’s dilapidation) with the psychological (forgotten dreams), thus extending the lexical field to include emotional resonance.

Words like “*father*”, “*home*”, and “*blood*” are also loaded with connotation in *Measuring Time*. While these words have neutral denotations, their usage in the novel is often charged with emotional conflict, betrayal, or loss. For example, Mamo’s concept of “father” is filled with ambiguity and pain. Though the word may denote a parental figure, it also connotes abandonment, hypocrisy, and failed expectations in his context. As Leech (1974) explains, “Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content” (p. 14). Habila’s word choices consistently reflect this layering of meanings, inviting readers to look beneath the surface of language to discover deeper symbolic or emotional truths.

Combining Collocation and Connotation

Habila often blends collocational phrases with connotative meaning to produce semantically rich expressions. Take for instance the phrase “*weighed down by silence*” (Habila, 2007, p. 89). While “weighed down” is a familiar collocation (often with burdens or responsibilities), its combination with “silence” introduces an emotionally potent image of silence as a burden, a kind of communicative or psychological

oppression. This phrase links language, or its absence, with the theme of emotional repression and social disconnection.

Similarly, the expression “*ghosts of the past*” (p. 45) is a metaphorical collocation whose connotative impact lies in its suggestion of unresolved history, trauma, and personal regret. Such combinations lend the narrative its emotional gravity and philosophical complexity, positioning language as both reflective and constitutive of human experience.

Scholars have noted Habila’s strategic use of language as integral to his style and thematic development. Ouma (2011) argues that *Measuring Time* “relies heavily on the expressive potential of language, especially through collocational patterns and connotative layering, to articulate the protagonist’s inner turmoil and Nigeria’s historical fragmentation” (p. 109). This linguistic strategy, he continues, makes the novel not just a story, but also a meditation on the act of telling, remembering, and writing. Furthermore, lexical theorists such as Carter and McCarthy (1988) stress that the interplay between collocation and connotation is a key source of semantic density in literary texts. This is clearly evident in *Measuring Time*, where language carries both narrative and symbolic weight.

Lexical Fields and Characterisation

In *Measuring Time*, Helon Habila employs lexical fields semantically related clusters of vocabulary to build multidimensional characters and to foreground their emotional and psychological states. Through the strategic use of these lexical groupings, Habila provides insight into individual identities, moral contradictions, and social roles. The lexical fields associated with each character function not only as descriptive tools but also as symbolic markers of internal conflicts and thematic concerns.

A lexical field is a set of words grouped by meaning referring to a specific subject. As Lyons (1977) defines, a lexical field is “a group of words with interrelated meanings, forming a system or subsystem within the lexicon” (p. 278). In literary analysis, identifying lexical fields helps to uncover patterns in a character’s speech, thought, and narrative presentation. These patterns often highlight ideological tensions, emotional states, and social identities.

The character of Mamo, the sickly and reflective twin, is characterized through a lexical field centered on illness, isolation, and intellectualism. Words such as *fever, weakness, frailty, blood, confinement, silence, and asthma* populate his narrative space, portraying him as physically vulnerable but intellectually robust. Habila uses this lexical group to emphasize Mamo’s marginalization and philosophical depth. For instance, when describing Mamo’s chronic illness, Habila writes: “*His chest heaved as if carrying the weight of years of suffering, his breathing shallow, his skin pale like ash*” (Habila, 2007, p. 34). This cluster of words belongs to the semantic field of disease and exhaustion, reinforcing the image of a body in constant struggle. But this physical fragility is juxtaposed with another field the language of knowledge and introspection: *reading, reflection, journal, words, thoughts, history, writing*. This contrast foregrounds Mamo’s resilience and establishes him as an observant chronicler of his time.

As Ouma (2011) observes, Mamo’s lexical associations “construct a portrait of the intellectual who is burdened by both personal and national histories a figure suspended between memory and resistance” (p. 108). Thus, lexical fields become instruments of characterisation, enhancing the complexity of Mamo’s identity.

In contrast, LaMamo the more physically robust twin is characterized through a lexical field of violence, war, and movement. Words such as *gun, battlefield, running,*

bloodshed, exile, refugee, desert, and rebellion are frequently associated with his storyline. These terms sketch LaMamo as a character in motion, shaped by conflict and survival. His involvement in warfare across Africa positions him within a broader postcolonial landscape of displacement and political instability. For example, when LaMamo recounts his experience in Chad, he states: “*There were bodies strewn across the sand like forgotten prayers, the sun bleaching out their faces, the wind carrying the stench of war*” (Habila, 2007, p. 157). The words in this passage belong to the lexical field of death and conflict, illustrating the moral disintegration and emotional trauma he endures.

Habila also uses lexical fields to code secondary characters. The father, Lamang, is enmeshed in a field of political ambition and moral decay, marked by terms like *campaign, speech, betrayal, bribe, hypocrisy, and failure*. His rhetoric is often inflated and performative, reinforcing his disconnection from genuine leadership. Aunt Marina’s character, on the other hand, is coded with terms related to care, secrecy, and endurance: *healing, herbs, silence, waiting, prayer*. These words align her with the traditional feminine role of nurturer, yet also suggest emotional repression and quiet resistance.

Character Juxtaposition through Lexical Fields

Habila’s twin characters are thus differentiated and developed through divergent lexical fields. Where Mamo’s world is one of books, illness, and contemplation, LaMamo’s is defined by guns, deserts, and rebellion. This contrast reflects the thematic dualism of *reflection versus action, memory versus forgetting, and stillness versus movement* that runs through the novel. Moreover, the convergence of their worlds when LaMamo returns and Mamo begins to write his brother’s story—represents a fusion of these lexical fields. The merging of terms from both war and writing reflects the broader project of narrative healing and national reckoning. As Habila writes: “Through writing, Mamo began to feel LaMamo’s pain, and in his pain, he discovered his own voice” (Habila, 2007, p. 243). Here, the lexical fields intersect to signal transformation.

Conclusion

Habila’s *Measuring Time* is a lexically rich and semantically layered novel that uses language not merely as a vehicle for storytelling but as a dynamic instrument of ideological and emotional expression. Through his deliberate and nuanced manipulation of lexical items such as metaphor, collocation, connotation, and lexical fields Habila constructs a narrative that is deeply reflective, thematically complex, and socially engaged. His lexical patterns allow for a multidimensional exploration of pressing concerns such as identity, memory, tradition, time, governance, and the human struggle for meaning within postcolonial African realities. This study has shown that *Measuring Time* transcends surface-level narrative to establish a sophisticated relationship between language and meaning. The characters are not only shaped by their experiences but also by the words that frame those experiences. For instance, the contrasting lexical fields surrounding Mamo and LaMamo reveal their divergent paths and internal struggles, while their convergence suggests the possibility of healing and synthesis. Similarly, the use of figurative language and semantic contrast imbues the novel with symbolic depth and interpretative richness. Furthermore, the semantic layering in the novel challenges readers to engage critically with the socio-political context of Nigeria and the broader African continent. Habila’s lexical choices often point to corruption, failed leadership, historical disillusionment, and moral decay, yet he does so without overt didacticism. Instead, the meanings emerge subtly through his diction and style what is said and, equally, what is left

unsaid. As such, his language becomes a site for both resistance and remembrance, crafting a narrative space where personal trauma intersects with national history.

Ultimately, a lexico-semantic analysis of *Measuring Time* underscores the centrality of language in the construction of meaning in literary texts. It affirms that meaning in literature is not only found in what is narrated, but in how it is narrated—through the intricate web of word choices, associations, and textual structures. This reinforces Habila's stature as a stylistically innovative and thematically engaged writer, one whose work deserves continued critical attention within African literary studies. Therefore, *Measuring Time* exemplifies the power of language to articulate individual and collective memory, to question power structures, and to offer subtle yet profound critiques of society. It is a novel that rewards close linguistic and semantic analysis, offering layers of meaning that reflect both the personal and the political. Through its rich lexico-semantic fabric, the novel not only tells a story it invites the reader to participate in the making of meaning itself.

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SALIENCE AND ERASURE AS ECOSTYLISTIC DEVICES IN HELON HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER*

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Abstract

In Nigeria's Niger Delta, where oil drilling has caused significant harm to the environment and communities, Helon Habila's 2010 novel *Oil on Water* stands out as an important response. This study examines the book through the lens of ecolinguistics, specifically using Arran Stibbe's (2015) ideas of salience (what is highlighted) and erasure (what is hidden). The goal is to understand how Habila's writing highlights the severe environmental damage happening in the Niger Delta, alongside the suffering of people affected by oil extraction. The analysis focuses on Habila's use of vivid imagery, powerful metaphors, and broken narrative styles to illustrate the impact of this exploitation and the silences created by companies and the government. By examining ten excerpts, this paper demonstrates how the novel expresses the hidden realities of those harmed by oil extraction, transforming overlooked victims into central elements of the urgent ecological narrative. Ultimately, this research positions *Oil on Water* as a significant voice against harmful practices and supports the idea that literature can challenge damaging ideologies, striving for justice and sustainability.

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, Ecostylistics, Salience, Erasure.

Introduction

The Niger Delta, located in the southern part of Nigeria, is a large wetland area home to diverse wildlife and rich cultural traditions. The Ijaw, Ogoni, and Urhobo communities have thrived here through fishing, farming, and foraging. However, since oil was discovered in 1956, this area has faced serious problems, including environmental destruction, corporate exploitation, and social division. The consequences of oil extraction, such as gas flaring, pipeline spills, and the loss of vital mangrove forests, have turned the Delta into a 'sacrifice zone,' where people and land alike suffer for global energy demands. The pollution has made soils unproductive and fish populations collapse.

The narratives around this disaster are often misleading. Corporations like Shell and government reports tend to downplay or obscure the destruction, using euphemistic language that minimizes the real suffering of affected people. In this context, literature plays a crucial role in revealing the truth. Habila's *Oil on Water* follows journalists Rufus and Zaq as they navigate the Delta's waterways searching for a kidnapped expatriate, uncovering the wider ecological and human tragedies along the way. The novel goes beyond being just an action story to examine the complex relationships of power, profit, and silence.

This study addresses how powerful entities make the Delta's struggles invisible and how fiction can bring those struggles to light. Using Stibbe's insights on salience and erasure, I will analyse Habila's writing techniques, asking how he emphasises environmental degradation and human suffering in the Niger Delta and how his storytelling reveals the erasure tactics used by capitalist regimes. This research is important for both literary criticism and ecolinguistics. It shows how literature can voice ecological concerns and advocate for justice in a world where the Delta's issues

reflect larger global injustices. As of 2025, the crisis continues, with ongoing oil spills, forced relocations of communities, and unresolved health issues persisting in the region.

Empirical Review

The scholarly engagement with Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* has evolved significantly since its publication in 2010, mirroring the growing global and academic concern with environmental degradation, petro-capitalism, and the narratives that either illuminate or obscure these crises. A thorough chronological survey of this critical landscape reveals a trajectory from initial thematic and postcolonial readings towards more nuanced, interdisciplinary analyses that integrate ecocriticism, stylistics, and the specific socio-political context of the Niger Delta.

The foundational critical work that pre-dates and provides essential context for understanding *Oil on Water* is Rob Nixon's seminal *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). Although not exclusively about Habila, Nixon's conceptualisation of "slow violence" a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a delayed destruction dispersed across time and space, provided an indispensable theoretical lens for early reviewers and scholars. Nixon's framework perfectly articulated the novel's central concern: the attritional devastation of the Niger Delta's ecosystem and the insidious, often invisible, erosion of its people's health and culture. This concept became a critical touchstone for interpreting the novel's deliberate pacing and its focus on the lingering, rather than the instantaneous, effects of oil pollution.

In 2012, Tanure Ojaide, a renowned poet and scholar from the Niger Delta region itself, published a pivotal article, "The Niger Delta and the Literature of Self-Assertion." Ojaide situated Habila's novel within a longer tradition of literary resistance emanating from the Delta, including the work of authors like Ken Saro-Wiwa. He argued that *Oil on Water*, while a work of fiction, functions as a potent act of "self-assertion" against the geopolitical and economic forces that have marginalised the region. Ojaide's analysis focused on the novel's thematic depth, its portrayal of the conflict between local communities and multinational corporations, and its role in projecting the Delta's plight onto a global literary stage, establishing it as a key text in the canon of postcolonial environmental literature.

The year 2013 saw a shift towards more character and ethics-driven critiques. Charles Addei's work, "Ethics of Representation in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," delved into the moral ambiguities faced by the protagonist journalists, Rufus and Zaq. Addei questioned the ethics of storytelling itself in a zone of conflict, exploring whether the journalists and by extension, Habila are observers, participants, or exploiters of the suffering they document. This analysis, mere polemic" is slightly informal. Better: "...as simply a polemic." introducing important questions about voyeurism, complicity, and the responsibilities of the intellectual in representing trauma.

Building on this, Chielozona Eze's 2014 article, "Ethics and Narrative in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," further dissected the novel's narrative structure. Eze argued that the fragmented, non-linear journey of the protagonists mirrors the disrupted and contaminated landscape they traverse. He posited that Habila's ethical commitment is embedded in his stylistic choices; the convoluted plot and the constant sense of disorientation are formal reflections of the social and environmental chaos caused by the oil industry. This marked an early, though not yet fully developed, critical interest in the relationship between the novel's form and its ecological message. A significant expansion of the novel's comparative context arrived in 2015 with Scott Slovic's interdisciplinary work on environmental rhetoric. In his essay, "*Numeracy and*

Narrative: A Note on the Rhetoric of Quantification in Environmental Discourse," Slovic provided a crucial lens for reading Habila's techniques. While not exclusively focused on *Oil on Water*, his analysis of how raw data (For example., spill statistics, death tolls) fails to convey human and ecological suffering without narrative framing offered a new way to understand Habila's project. Slovic's ideas suggested that the novel acts as a necessary narrative counterweight to the dehumanising "numeracy" of corporate and government reports, a theme that would later dovetail with Stibbe's concept of erasure.

The year 2016 was particularly rich for ecocritical readings of the novel. Myra Caminero-Santangelo, in her book *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, dedicated a chapter to placing *Oil on Water* in dialogue with other African "petro-texts." She analysed it as a profound exploration of the "resource curse," illustrating how the promise of oil wealth results instead in systemic poverty, violence, and ecological ruin. Her political ecology approach highlighted the novel's critique of the Nigerian state's collusion with foreign capital and its devastating consequences for local governance and community cohesion.

Also in 2016, Emad Mirmotahari's article, "The Spectral Oil of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," offered a unique psychoanalytic and gothic interpretation. Mirmotahari argued that oil in the novel is not merely a physical substance but a spectral, almost supernatural force that haunts every aspect of life. It permeates the water, the air, the food, and even the dreams and memories of the characters, creating a pervasive atmosphere of uncanny dread. This reading emphasised the psychological and cultural toxicity of oil extraction, suggesting a spiritual and existential corruption directly resulting from ecological violence.

The critical conversation expanded into the realm of the Anthropocene in 2017 with Sharae Deckard's contribution, "'And the sea gives up its dead': Petro-violence and the world-ocean in the Nigerian novel." Deckard situated *Oil on Water* within a global system of "petro-violence" and the capitalocene, arguing that the Niger Delta is a paradigmatic example of how frontier zones are sacrificed for global energy consumption. Her analysis connected the localised pollution of the Delta's waterways to the worldwide metabolic rift of the ocean, positioning Habila's work as a crucial node in understanding the world-ecological dimensions of the oil industry.

In 2018, Erin James's article, "The Aesthetics of Contamination in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," brought a sharper focus to Habila's literary style. James meticulously analysed how Habila uses language to make the contamination sensually real for the reader. She examined his use of synesthetic imagery (describing the smell of oil as a taste, the sight of pollution as a sound) and his creation of a pervasive aesthetic where beauty and horror are inextricably fused, as in the famously haunting image of water "rainbowed with oil." This work was a significant step towards a dedicated stylistic analysis, though it remained within a primarily ecocritical rather than a linguistic framework.

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in applying precise linguistic models to the text. While not yet utilising Stibbe's framework, studies like Ikyoive's (n.d.) "A Critical Stylistic Study of the Nominal Group in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*" demonstrate this shift. This unpublished thesis examines how noun phrases and descriptive choices construct a specific ideological perspective of the environment, moving analysis firmly into the domain of linguistic patterning and its ideological effects. The most current scholarship, as of 2024 and early 2025, shows a direct engagement with ecolinguistics and ecostylistics. Research by Utoh-Ozumba ("The

Capitalocene versus Indigenous Eco-Justice," 2024), Sitorus et al. ("The Pragmatics of Ecological Advocacy," 2024), Ojo ("Exploring Environmental Consciousness," 2025), and Aba et al. ("An Ecostylistic Approach," 2024) all explicitly position the novel within ecological-linguistic debates. These studies examine how language choices advocate for environmental justice, challenge anthropocentrism, and give voice to non-human nature. Okpo's 2023 work, "Eco-Existential Dialectics," further bridges philosophy and ecology, exploring the existential crisis prompted by environmental collapse.

However, despite this wealth of ecocritical and increasingly stylistic scholarship, a dedicated and sustained ecostylistic analysis applying Arran Stibbe's (2015) specific framework of stories-we-live-by, particularly the dyad of salience and erasure, remains a identifiable gap. Previous studies have touched on related concepts; James on aesthetic representation, Eze on narrative disruption, Slovic on rhetorical quantification but none have systematically used Stibbe's model to interrogate how Habila's language strategically makes visible what powerful interests obscure and, conversely, how it exposes the mechanisms of that obscuration. This research seeks to fill that precise void. It synthesises the insights of the existing chronological tradition from Nixon's slow violence to James's aesthetics of contamination and channels them through a rigorous ecolinguistic lens to demonstrate how *Oil on Water* is not just about ecological resistance but is itself a performative act of linguistic resistance against erasure.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on ecolinguistics, particularly Stibbe's ideas from *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By* (2015). Stibbe encourages looking beyond a simple analysis of environmental texts to understand the deeper stories told through language that shape our views and behaviors concerning the environment. These stories can either reinforce harmful hierarchies or promote a more equitable and reciprocal relationship with nature.

Key to this analysis are the ideas of salience and erasure. Salience brings attention to often-overlooked aspects through vivid language such as describing the suffering caused by polluted waterways or the beauty of a forest being destroyed. Conversely, erasure involves ignoring or downplaying important issues, often through vague or passive language that obscures responsibility, allowing harmful practices to continue. The salience-erasure dynamic is evident in *Oil on Water*, where Rufus and Zaq seek to unveil hidden truths in a landscape rendered silent by the oil industry. Habila's use of striking imagery and sensory details serves to counter erasure, giving voice to the marginalised and challenging dominant narratives that aim to minimise the ecological crisis.

Methodology

This research employs qualitative methods, using a close reading approach guided by Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework. The study focuses exclusively on Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), analysed through multiple readings highlighting instances of salience and erasure. Twenty excerpts were carefully selected based on their representational strength, with five illustrating salience and five revealing erasure. The selected passages cover a range of plot points, perspectives, and eco-themed motifs to provide a comprehensive view of the novel.

The analysis examines various linguistic features, such as word choices that evoke pollution, metaphorical relationships illustrating contamination, sensory descriptions of the environment, and narrative gaps reflecting corporate silence. Moving beyond a simple enumeration, the study investigates how these elements come

together to challenge dominant narratives. This holistic provide insights into how the text advocates ecological justice

Data analysis and discussion

This section presents a detailed ecostylistic analysis of ten carefully selected excerpts from Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, interrogating them through the dual lens of Arran Stibbe's (2015) concepts of salience and erasure. The analysis moves beyond mere description to demonstrate how Habila's linguistic and narrative choices perform a crucial ideological function: they actively resist the systemic obscuration orchestrated by petro-capitalist forces and make perceptible the slow, attritional violence inflicted upon the Niger Delta's human and non-human world. This interplay between making visible (salience) and exposing the mechanisms of invisibility (erasure) positions the novel as a potent form of ecological counter-discourse.

The poetics of salience: Making the unseen unignorable

Salience in ecolinguistics refers to the use of language to bring aspects of the ecological world into sharp focus, often those that dominant discourses overlook (Stibbe, 2015, p. 72). Habila employs a range of stylistic devices; vivid imagery, sensory saturation, and potent metaphor to achieve this, forcing the reader to confront the visceral reality of environmental degradation.

The novel's opening immediately establishes a world where nature's fundamental qualities have been perverted: "The sky was wide and above us, but it was never blue; it was a dull, oppressive grey during the day, and a glowing, smoky orange at night from the endless gas flares" (Habila, 2010, p. 3). This description does more than set a scene; it enacts a form of ecological salience. The negation of the archetypal "blue" sky and its replacement with a synesthetic palette of "glowing, smoky orange" makes the pervasive pollution sensually immediate. As Erin James (2018) argues in her analysis of the novel's "aesthetics of contamination," Habila's language "makes the contamination sensually real" (p. 328), forcing a recognition of the environment's altered state as a permanent, inescapable condition. This stands in stark opposition to corporate reports that might quantify gas flaring in cubic meters but erase its experiential and aesthetic impact on daily life.

Perhaps the most cited and powerful instance of salient imagery is the description of the polluted waterways: "The water was rainbowed with oil" (Habila, 2010, p. 56). This phrase is a masterstroke of ecostylistic salience. The verb "rainbowed" hijacks a natural symbol of beauty, hope, and divine promise and perverts it into a sign of toxicity and death. This creates a jarring cognitive dissonance for the reader, mirroring the dissonance experienced by the characters who must navigate a world where life-giving water has become a medium of poison. This technique aligns with Stibbe's (2015) notion of challenging the "stories-we-live-by," specifically the industrial narrative that equates progress with beauty and wealth. Habila exposes this as a deadly illusion, making the deceptive allure of oil salient to critique it.

The salience extends to the devastating impact on non-human life, giving voice to the ecological "other" that is routinely erased in economic calculus. The narrator observes, "Fish, birds, animals—they lay decomposing, drowned in oil, their mouths agape in a final, silent protest" (Habila, 2010, p. 80). The personification of the animals, their "silent protest," is a crucial stylistic move. It counters what Scott Slovic (2015) identifies as the "rhetoric of quantification," where death tolls become sanitised statistics. By rendering their deaths in such visceral, almost agential terms, Habila forces an ethical recognition of their suffering, making it impossible to dismiss as collateral damage. This aligns with the project of ecological advocacy, which seeks to extend ethical consideration beyond the human (Utoh-Ozumba, 2024, p. 125).

Finally, the human cost is rendered with unflinching salience. Describing a community afflicted by pollution, Habila writes, "Their skins were covered in sores, and their children coughed like old men, their lungs corroded by the air they breathed" (2010, p. 148). The simile "coughed like old men" is particularly effective. It saliently illustrates the phenomenon of "slow violence" described by Rob Nixon (2011); a violence that "occurs gradually and out of sight," disproportionately affecting the poor and powerless (p. 2). The comparison compresses time, showing how industrial pollution robs the young of their health and future, making the delayed consequences of environmental violence immediately perceptible.

Unveiling erasure: Exposing the rhetoric of absence

If salience makes the ecological crisis visible, Habila's portrayal of erasure exposes the linguistic and narrative strategies used to hide it. Stibbe (2015) defines erasure as the process by which "aspects of the world are excluded from attention" through language, often through omission, passive voice, abstraction, or euphemism (p. 94). Habila doesn't just describe the Delta's reality; he dramatises the very process of its being erased.

A key technique is the use of narrative gaps and ellipses to represent the unsaid and the obscured. When confronted with official explanations for the pollution, the narrator states: "They show you papers, figures... but the water is still poison" (Habila, 2010, p. 189). The ellipsis (...) is a powerful stylistic marker of erasure. It represents the gap between the abstract, numerical reality presented by corporate and government entities ("papers, figures") and the tangible, lethal reality experienced by the people ("poison"). This directly illustrates Slovic's (2015) argument about the inadequacy of "numeracy" alone to convey suffering. Habila uses the literary device of the gap to show what those official documents systematically erase: the lived experience of ecological harm.

Erasure is also executed through the literal disappearance of communities, narrated in a way that highlights the anonymity of the force responsible: "It was as if the village and its people had been lifted off the face of the earth by a giant hand" (Habila, 2010, p. 173). The passive construction ("had been lifted") and the vague, almost mythological agent ("a giant hand") are classic tools of erasure. This phrasing obscures accountability, whether attributing the destruction to a faceless divine intervention or, more pointedly, to the equally faceless might of a corporation. As Chielozona Eze (2014) notes, the novel's fragmented narrative mirrors a "disrupted and contaminated landscape" (p. 98). Here, the stylistic choice of passive voice formally replicates the social and political disruption that severs people from their land without a trace or a named perpetrator.

Another profound example occurs in the aftermath of violence: "The water turned red. Blood, it was blood" (Habila, 2010, p. 160). The first sentence is a stark, passive observation; an erasure of agency that mimics how official accounts might report an incident without assigning cause or blame. However, the immediate, repetitive affirmation in the second sentence, "Blood, it was blood", acts as a corrective salience. It is the narrator refusing the erasure, insisting on naming the horrifying reality and forcing it into the foreground. This dual movement, first displaying the mechanism of erasure, then countering it, is central to Habila's method. It shows how silence and obfuscation are actively imposed and must be actively resisted.

Interplay: The novel as counter-narrative

The sustained interplay between salience and erasure throughout *Oil on Water* elevates it from a mere depiction of ecological disaster to a sophisticated act of linguistic resistance. Habila's ecostylistic choices create a world where the environment is not a backdrop but an active, suffering character whose degradation is felt sensorially and emotionally. Simultaneously, he exposes the hollow language and narrative voids that powerful interests use to mask this reality.

This technique fundamentally challenges what Stibbe (2015) would call the "ideology of unecological stories," particularly the capitalist narrative that frames the Niger Delta purely as a resource reservoir, erasing its identity as a living, cultural, and ecological homeland (p. 151). By making the consequences of this ideology salient and by formally replicating the mechanisms of its erasure, Habila's novel performs the very work of ecological advocacy that scholars like Utoh-Ozumba (2024) and Sitorus et al. (2024) identify.

Conclusion

The data analysis reveals that Habila's stylistic mastery is instrumental in constructing what Nixon (2011) calls a "narrative imagination" adequate to the slow violence of the Anthropocene (p. 15). Through salient, haunting imagery and a meta-commentary on erasure, *Oil on Water* does not just tell a story about ecological crisis; it uses the very fabric of language to repair the representational gaps created by that crisis, insisting on remembrance, recognition, and ultimately, justice for the seen and the unseen victims of the Niger Delta.

Using an ecostylistic perspective, *Oil on Water* reveals Habila's powerful narrative strategies to confront ecological and social neglect. The study of salience and erasure underscores how Habila captures the dire consequences of environmental degradation on both the land and its people. By revealing the hidden wounds of the Niger Delta, he positions his work as both literature and ecological advocacy. This research affirms *Oil on Water* as a critical work that challenges dominant narratives of unchecked exploitation. It encourages further exploration of similar texts globally, examining how literary devices can contest harmful ecological ideologies. As the environmental crises continue, literary works like Habila's remain crucial in advocating for justice and remembrance.

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ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS IN THE DISCOURSE OF POLITICAL APOLOGIES IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOSEMANTIC STUDY

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Abstract

In Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape, ethnic and religious affiliations significantly influence public discussions, especially regarding political apologies. These apologies act as vital tools for conflict resolution, rebuilding trust, and affirming authority in a diverse yet divided nation. This research examines how ethnic and religious sentiments are woven into political apologies and their role in either worsening or easing societal divisions, particularly after Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. Analysing political apologies sheds light on how leaders address identity-based grievances related to perceived injustices and violence that deepen ethnic and religious tensions. The study aims to identify language patterns in apologies that reveal ethnic biases or religious appeasement, assess their effects on public perception and peace efforts, and suggest ways to promote fairer political dialogue. Using a sociosemantic framework, this qualitative discourse analysis reviews excerpts from five reputable online news articles, including Premium Times and Vanguard, from 2018 to 2022. These articles feature Nigerian leaders' expressions of remorse regarding ethnic displacements, historical injustices, and interfaith conflicts. Results show that, although apologies often use strategies like expressing regret and admitting fault to foster inclusivity, they also expose underlying ethnic or religious biases. For example, shared heritage may be invoked to deflect criticism but often overlook deep-seated prejudices. This research enhances discourse analysis by providing a detailed understanding of how political apologies connect to Nigeria's ethno-religious issues, offering helpful recommendations for policymakers to develop narratives that promote national unity and prevent conflicts. Overall, this study highlights the importance of sociosemantic methods in analysing power-related discourse in fragile democracies like Nigeria.

Keywords: Political apologies, ethnic sentiments, religious discourse, sociosemantic analysis

Introduction

Nigeria's political landscape has long been a stage where ethnic and religious identities clash, often sparking conflicts that necessitate public apologies from political actors. Since the end of military rule in 1999 and the return to democratic governance, the country has faced numerous violent outbreaks driven by deep-seated ethnic rivalries, such as those between the Tiv and Jukun, as well as profound religious divides, especially between Christians and Muslims in the northern and central regions (Ibrahim, 2020; Salawu, 2010). These issues are further complicated by historical grievances, notably the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential elections, which significantly heightened ethnic mistrust, particularly within the Yoruba community and beyond (Abubakre, 2018; Vaughan, 2016). The discourse surrounding political apologies in these contexts reveals not merely acts of regret but complex layers of

social meaning that both reflect and actively influence societal divisions (Aluya & Uduma, 2024; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Political apologies typically follow actions perceived as discriminatory, such as expulsions targeting specific ethnic groups or statements that offend religious sentiments (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016; Marshall, 2020). These acts of contrition highlight a broader issue of exclusion rooted in identity politics, creating a destructive cycle where the neglect of these core sentiments leads to further unrest, thereby undermining efforts toward national unity (Obodowhuo, 2023; Paul-Ikechukwu & Clara, 2015). This study, therefore, aims to explore how the language of such apologies encodes ethnic and religious biases, seeking to identify pathways toward more sincere and effective reconciliation. By analysing the semantic structures and societal impacts of these discourses through a sociosemantic lens, it becomes evident that apologies can function as instruments for either unity or further division, contingent on their alignment with broader, more inclusive narratives (Halliday, 1978; Aluya & Iangba, 2025).

The significance of this research lies in its critical examination of how political language can perpetuate inequality in a fragile, multi-ethnic democracy like Nigeria. It provides a structured framework to evaluate leaders' accountability and promotes the development of a political dialogue that transcends parochial ethnic and religious boundaries in the pursuit of a more stable and lasting peace (Tuki, 2024; Yagboyaju, 2017).

Empirical Review

Research on ethnic and religious sentiments in Nigerian political discourse, especially regarding apologies, reveals a wide range of studies that recognise how language shapes identity and power, with different focuses on specific contexts or ideas. Early research laid the foundation for understanding how ethnic identities influence political communication. For example, Salawu (2010) examined ethno-religious conflicts, suggesting that leaders utilise group identities to garner support, often requiring post-conflict apologies to rebuild trust. This is supported by Paul-Ikechukwu and Clara (2015), who explored the intersection of religion and politics, finding that apologies following riots sometimes deepen group divisions rather than heal them. Adding depth, Çancı and Odukoya (2016) analysed religious language in speeches, highlighting that apologies for sacrilege or violence may conceal biases favouring dominant faiths. Their work moves beyond ethnic issues to include faith-based considerations. Vaughan (2016) addressed ethnic conflicts within federal systems and criticised political apologies for often overlooking core injustices, aligning with this study's focus on sociosemantic gaps. Conversely, Yagboyaju (2017) studied apologies for resource disputes in the Niger Delta, emphasising the importance of including such issues in broader national conversations. Recent studies, such as Abubakre (2018), have investigated apologies for historical injustices, revealing similarities between past and current ethnic struggles. Emoghene and Okolie (2020) examined religious sentiments in media apologies from a sociosemantic perspective, although they focused on media narratives rather than official statements. Marshall (2020) questioned the sincerity of apologies during ethno-religious crises, such as Jos, advocating for a deeper contextual understanding that aligns with this study's sociosemantic approach, centred on interconnections. Akah and Ajah (2020) explored Yoruba-Igbo political tensions related to expulsions, highlighting ethnic bias in stories of redemption, but did not thoroughly address religious issues – an aspect this research aims to investigate.

Recent studies, such as Eze (2021), have examined post-2015 election apologies, criticising them for concealing ethnic bias, which aligns with this study's detailed approach. Wachukwu (2021) concentrated on Boko Haram apologies, emphasising the role of religious extremism in shaping discourse, particularly anti-terror narratives. Okibe (2022) explored gender issues within ethno-religious conflicts, broadening identity debates through a feminist perspective, encouraging more comprehensive frameworks in this research. Scholars such as Obodowhuo (2023) have studied conflicts in central Nigeria, identifying patterns in apology discourses that perpetuate tensions, like the Tiv-Jukun conflict, which supports this study's sociosemantic focus. Tuki (2024) analysed global political apologies with African case studies, criticising their effectiveness in reconciliation, which aligns with this study's Nigerian context. Ibrahim and Shehu (2024) examined government apologies post-authoritarian regimes, focusing on accountability and uncertainty, stressing the need for a deeper analysis of meaning. Overall, these studies underscore the significance of apology discourse while differing in scope, and this research enhances understanding by systematically analysing ethnic and religious intersections through a sociosemantic lens, addressing gaps in integration and practical application.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this sociosemantic examination of ethnic and religious sentiments in Nigerian political apologies draws heavily from the sociosemantic perspective articulated by Halliday (1978) and developed in contemporary works such as van Leeuwen (2008). This framework views language as a social construct deeply embedded within cultural and ideological contexts. Within Nigeria's pluralistic landscape, this approach is pivotal in unpacking how apologies encode ethnic and religious sentiments through lexical choices such as expressions of regret, accountability, and unity that mirror societal power dynamics. For instance, apologies might invoke familial metaphors to signal ethnic solidarity, as seen in appeals to shared community ties. At the same time, religious undertones manifest in calls for forgiveness based on Christian or Islamic frameworks, illustrating how language choices construct social realities (Aluya & Jashina, 2025). This sociosemantic lens seeks to elucidate how meanings are not static but are co-produced in social interactions, positioning political apologies as venues for negotiating identity and power within Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious fabric. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics highlights three meta-functions: the ideational (depicting reality), the interpersonal (constructing social relationships), and the textual (organising coherent discourse). In the context of apologies, these functions facilitate a nuanced understanding of how ethnic biases are ideationally realised through language choices favouring particular groups. In contrast, religious sentiments construct interpersonal relations through shared faith narratives that may marginalise others (Aluya & Iangba, 2025). Van Leeuwen's extensions to social semiotics broaden this framework to encompass non-verbal aspects, although this study maintains a strong focus on linguistic discourse. Notably, political apologies employ recontextualisation, transforming social actions into linguistic expressions, to mitigate ethnic or religious grievances while frequently masking persistent power imbalances.

In the Nigerian context, emerging studies highlight how sociosemantic variations in apologies incorporate English alongside indigenous languages to convey ethnic nuances, aligning with this framework's emphasis on contextual meaning-making. Recent adaptations emphasise distinctions in Nigerian English, where ethnic implications often permeate discourse in attempts to mitigate face-threatening acts amid religious tensions. Van Leeuwen's socio-cognitive perspective opens avenues for

analysing mental models of ethnic dominance or religious supremacy, evident in apologies following ethno-religious violence, where linguistic choices obscure accountability.

Adaptations of sociosemantic analysis into African contexts illustrate the fluidity of meaning in Nigerian political apologies (for instance, the choice of “misunderstanding” over “mistake”) that dilute ethnic accountability; a trend this study aims to navigate through its synthesis of qualitative inquiries.

Methodology

This research design is qualitative and employs discourse analysis to examine ethnic and religious sentiments embedded within Nigerian political apologies using a sociosemantic framework. Data collection involves selecting excerpts from two news articles that highlight significant past instances of apologies during ethno-religious disputes. The selected sources: Premium Times (2020 and 2025) and Vanguard (2018, 2022, and 2025), were purposively chosen because, as widely circulated national dailies, they provide accurate accounts that reflect both temporal variation and insights into Nigeria’s multi-ethnic compositions.

Data analysis and discussion

Data collection involves extracting complete articles from archival websites, focusing on verbatim apology statements and their surrounding contexts to capture subtle layers of meaning. The excerpts were carefully chosen: Excerpt 1 features Buhari's apology to Abiola's family; Excerpt 2 relates to South-South leaders' demand for an apology from the Presidency over a failed meeting; Excerpt 3 addresses religious sacrilege in Plateau; Excerpt 4 concerns the Igbo Coup and the call for apology and justice from Nigeria; Excerpt 5 involves Nnamdi Kanu's regret over an outburst and his apology to Judge Nyako. The analysis employs a sociosemantic perspective, coding for meaning-making strategies (such as expressions of regret) and social implications (such as ethnic considerations), using thematic categorisation to connect language choices to broader sentiments. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how apologies function within Nigeria’s divided society. This section examines five selected excerpts from online news articles, utilising a sociosemantic framework to investigate how ethnic and religious sentiments shape political apologies in Nigeria. The analysis of excerpts from Premium Times and Vanguard reveals patterns in which apologies express sorrow, but paradoxically also reinforce divisions.

Excerpt 1

June 12, Buhari tender’s apology to Abiola's family (Johnbosco Agbakwuru - June 12, 2018: Vanguard)

In this excerpt, President Muhammadu Buhari’s apology to the family of Moshood Abiola stands out as a critically important moment in the wider story of political apologies in Nigeria. It takes place against the historic backdrop of the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, widely regarded as one of the fairest and most transparent elections in Nigeria’s history. The profound sense of loss felt by many Nigerians, especially within the Yoruba community, provides a vital perspective through which to analyse Buhari's words. Rather than merely functioning as a formal admission of mistakes, this apology aims to heal the long-standing divisions rooted in the historical grievances surrounding that election — an event that has shaped inter-ethnic relations and attitudes across the country.

The language used in Buhari's apology, especially terms like “apology” and “right the wrongs,” conveys a formal acknowledgement of past injustices. This choice of words

is vital for framing an apology, as it indicates not only recognition but also a willingness to undertake corrective actions. The phrase “right the wrongs” functions as a powerful symbol of intent, suggesting a desire for remedial measures that connect with the context of Abiola’s disenfranchisement and the unrest that followed. On a sociosemantic level, these terms carry meanings that extend beyond simple regret; they imply a commitment to remember and possibly enable reparative justice — a crucial part of reconciliation in a society that remains divided. However, it is important to scrutinise the nuances of the subsequent call for “unity and national cohesion” that Buhari advances. While these appeals seem well-intentioned and place the apology within a hopeful vision of a united Nigeria, they may also risk minimising the specific historical grievances that warrant such a public expression of remorse. By framing his apology within a broader appeal for unity, Buhari appears to sidestep the particular and community-specific impacts of the 1993 election's annulment — an event that significantly affected various ethnic groups, especially the Yoruba, whose identity is closely linked to this event. Relying on abstract notions of unity may unintentionally dilute the emotional significance attached to the names and faces of those specifically harmed by political decisions of the past.

Furthermore, Buhari’s language reflects a certain neutrality that glosses over critical north-south divisions in Nigeria. Although Buhari aims to present a collective reconciliation story, this approach might lead to assumptions of a unified Nigerian identity, overlooking the diverse experiences of suffering and loss articulated by different ethnic groups. His pursuit of unity could be viewed as a politically safe route that seeks to appease all sides, but it also risks alienating communities like the Yoruba, who seek recognition of their unique historical struggles. Therefore, the call for unity is well-intentioned but inherently complex, casting doubt on the sincerity of Buhari’s apology as a whole. The distinction between “performative versus transformative” actions in this context is crucial. Some critics might see Buhari’s apology as more performative than genuine, suggesting it aims to project an image of a leader concerned about past crises without implementing meaningful policy changes that embody real justice and reckoning for those impacted. This view arises from some communities’ perception that systemic injustices remain unexamined and unaddressed, making the apology seem superficial amid ongoing grievances.

Moreover, the timing and circumstances of the apology warrant careful examination. Delivered in 2018, Buhari’s public expression of regret can be seen as a strategic political move ahead of the upcoming general elections. The timing of the apology has led some scholars and commentators to question its sincerity with some wondering whether the gesture was mainly aimed at garnering support among Yoruba voters or if it genuinely reflected a commitment to addressing historical injustices. This creates a paradox where an apology meant to foster healing could be viewed as motivated by political expediency, thus complicating its acceptance among the community it seeks to comfort. The sociosemantic context is also significant when considering reactions from the public and political leaders to Buhari’s apology. The collective memory of the June 12 election remains a potent symbol of lost democracy and ongoing struggles over power and representation in Nigerian politics. Public reactions might indicate a desire for more than just words, demonstrating an urgent need for actions that genuinely transform the socio-political landscape and tackle persistent inequalities.

Recognising that language shapes social reality is essential in this analysis. Buhari’s apology, while expressed in words that suggest collective healing, also serves as a reminder of the divisions within Nigeria’s fabric that such gestures cannot entirely

mend. Acts of leadership like this must navigate the challenging terrain where personal responsibility intersects with collective sentiment, especially in a context marked by historical injustices and ongoing resentment. Buhari's apology to the Abiola family is a significant chapter in Nigerian political discourse. While it conveys regret and calls for unity, it also risks obscuring the rich diversity of individual and community experiences of marginalisation and loss that require acknowledgment and accountability. This analysis highlights the complex nature of political apologies, which can act both as powerful tools for reconciliation and as symbols of the difficulty in genuinely addressing layered socio-political grievances within Nigeria's diverse landscape. The success of such apologies depends not only on their intention but also, more importantly, on how they are translated into actions that reflect the realities faced by all Nigerians, fostering an inclusive and genuinely transformative unity.

Excerpt 2

South-South leaders demand apology from Presidency over botched meeting (November 17, 2020 - Premium Times)

This excerpt, "South-South leaders demand apology from Presidency over botched meeting," signifies a crucial point of contention within Nigeria's political sphere, especially regarding regional grievances that resonate strongly with expressions of disenfranchisement prevalent in the South-South geopolitical zone. It highlights ongoing tensions between regional leaders and the federal government, emphasising how political apologies, or the absence of them, serve as key indicators of trust and legitimacy in Nigeria's complex democracy. The phrase "demand apology" conveys a sense of urgency and assertion in the political language of South-South leaders. The word "demand" is significant; it implies an assertion of power and agency. These leaders are not simply requesting an apology but are actively claiming their rights as stakeholders in the Nigerian project. This demand underscores a performative element of identity politics, where apologies are not merely expressions of regret but also acts of political strategy used to negotiate power relations. In a context where historical injustices have often led to violent clashes, frequently driven by economic disenfranchisement, particularly in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, the call for an apology becomes a mechanism for affirming regional identity and addressing perceived marginalisation from the central government.

Furthermore, the concept of a "botched meeting" carries implications that reach deep into Nigeria's socio-political fabric. This phrase reflects underlying themes of mistrust and dysfunction within the political systems designed to govern such a diverse nation. It signifies a failure not merely in logistics or scheduling but also in recognising the psychosocial aspects of ethnic and regional interactions within governance. The leaders' demand highlights a vital need for accountability, echoing the grievances of many communities who feel consistently sidelined in national discussions. This call for apology signifies a broader movement towards ensuring that regional aspirations are acknowledged by the central government, turning apologies into potential bridges over historical divides rather than mere symbols of past grievances. Additionally, the sentiment surrounding political apologies calls for a sociosemantic analysis that explores linguistic choices framing the discourse of power between the Presidency and regional actors. Examining the language used around the apology reveals how such expressions are often crafted in performative terms that aim to influence public perception. This exposes the tension between the rhetoric of accountability and the inherently political nature of apologies, which can be perceived

as insincere or motivated by the desire to placate unrest rather than an honest admission of fault.

The broader implications of this excerpt go beyond the South-South context, prompting reflection on Nigeria's fractured national identity. Political apologies in this case can be seen not only as acts of remorse but also as potential tools for addressing historical grievances and encouraging reconciliation among a diverse range of ethnic groups. The call for acknowledgement from the Presidency could initiate wider discussions within Nigeria's political landscape about the country's socio-economic inequalities and ethnic sentiments, paving the way for sincere initiatives to reduce tensions rooted in past injustices. In essence, Excerpt 2 encourages a detailed examination of how language related to political apologies can reveal, reflect, and even reinforce the underlying power dynamics in Nigeria. As regional factions raise their demands, political apologies take on multiple layers of meaning, exposing the complexities of identity politics, historical grievances, and the quest for genuine governance in a nation still grappling with the legacies of colonialism, ethnic conflict, and socio-economic disparities.

Excerpt 3

Pope: Lalong tenders unreserved apology to Catholic Bishops (Luminous Jannamike, Abuja - August 12, 2022: Vanguard)

The segment from Vanguard detailing Governor Simon Lalong's "unreserved apology" to Catholic Bishops encapsulates the nuanced interaction between political rhetoric, religious sentiments, and the ongoing pursuit of societal healing within Nigeria's complex landscape. At its core, Lalong's apology includes key linguistic elements that aim to evoke a sense of accountability and remorse. The term "unreserved" is particularly significant; it suggests a complete, unqualified acceptance of responsibility, marking a departure from the often-half-hearted apologies usually seen in political discourse. However, although this phrasing seeks to communicate sincerity, it also implies how power and authority interact within the religious framework of Nigerian society. The apology highlights the considerable influence that religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church, hold in the socio-political landscape. The need for Lalong to seek reconciliation with religious leaders indicates that political authority is closely linked to religious legitimacy in Nigeria.

Critically, the language used in Lalong's apology raises questions about the nature of "errors" in politics. By framing the incident as an "error," Lalong adopts a narrative approach that aims to minimise the seriousness of the mistake. This use of error-mitigation language is common in political contexts, where leaders try to downplay misjudgments to reduce public backlash. Such framing subtly suggests that the significance of the original remarks may be overshadowed by the apology, possibly masking the deeper socio-political consequences inherent in the relationship between state officials and religious authorities. Arguably, this apology fails to address the profound implications that the blasphemy allegations carry in a constitutionally secular but largely religious society. In the Nigerian context, not dealing with the potential mismatch between governance and religious expectations risks alienating religious supporters and continues the perception that political apologies are insincere or superficial.

Furthermore, the apology holds significant weight within Nigeria's diverse religious communities. While aimed at Catholic Bishops, it unintentionally highlights the discomfort present in Muslim-majority areas regarding perceived favouritism towards Christian religious figures. The acknowledgement of a "blasphemous" mistake

marks a turning point in Nigerian political discourse, where religious identities often become intertwined with ethno-political loyalties. This overlap can intensify existing tensions, especially when leaders are viewed as favouring one religious group over another. As a result, Lalong's public remorse might be seen not just as a gesture of reconciliation with the Catholic community but also as an invitation for increased scrutiny from Muslim constituents who may perceive his actions with suspicion. Additionally, this apology emphasises broader themes of accountability and governance amid ethno-religious disparities. In a nation grappling with inequality and marginalisation, it may prompt questions about who is accountable for political discourse and conduct, particularly when the sentiments of one group seem to take precedence over another's. The perceived elevation of a Catholic apology over grievances expressed by the Muslim community could deepen existing divides, prompting debate on the implications of such preferential treatment in the political environment.

Lalong's apology has the potential to heighten religious tension, highlighting Nigeria's delicate socio-political fabric, where interfaith efforts can unintentionally increase polarisation. Analyses of text and discourse show how mismanaged narratives in political apologies can have complex effects; the act of seeking forgiveness might both promote dialogue and deepen divisions. Cultural factors unique to Nigerian society may also influence how Lalong's apology is received. The interaction of religious and political issues reflects a broader story involving various stakeholders striving for recognition and representation. This is especially relevant given Nigeria's history, where apologies from political leaders are often linked with episodes of violence, upheaval, and marginalisation, shaping the political scene. Therefore, sympathy towards religious grievances must be exercised cautiously; while Lalong may aim to heal divides, the socio-political implications could trigger discord if not handled with care and insight.

Lalong's expression of remorse offers a key point for examining the broader debate about political apologies in a complex ethno-religious society like Nigeria. It highlights the sophisticated and often risky nature of political communication, where a leader's call for unity, presented as an apology, can be overshadowed by existing narratives of division. Unravelling the complex web of political apologetics shows the need for deeper understanding of the powerful dynamics involved. This includes recognising that political apologies are not just apologies; they can also act as agents of social change, resonating beyond the immediate context into wider societal themes of trust, recognition, and collective memory. Therefore, future political apologies must engage with these deeper meanings to promote genuine reconciliation and address the systemic issues underlying Nigeria's ethno-religious divisions.

Excerpt 4

**Igbo Coup: Group demands apology, justice from Nigeria (February 25, 2025:
Dennis Agbo - Vanguard)**

The excerpt "Igbo Coup: Group demands apology, justice from Nigeria" focuses on a key issue in Nigeria's complex political history, especially concerning the impacts of the Nigerian Civil War and its lasting effects. This plea captures the subtle aspects of collective memory, the politics of apology, and the tense relations between the Igbo ethnic group and the Nigerian state, pointing to the broader effects of historical grievances in today's political discussions. The phrase "demands apology, justice" is especially important in showing the complicated relationship between

acknowledgement and compensation. It highlights a common theme in politics where simple apologies are seen as insufficient responses to serious historical wrongs. The word “justice” indicates a wider range of accountability that goes beyond national expressions of regret, urging concrete actions to repair the injustices faced by the Igbo people during and after the civil war. This demand stems from a strong belief that recognising past injustices with formal apologies must be directly linked to genuine restitution efforts that tackle current social and political inequalities.

In the context of Nigeria's multicultural and multi-religious landscape, this demand also exemplifies the role of collective identity in shaping the narrative nature of political apologies. The language of apology here is not solely about reconciling with historical events but also about affirming the collective identity and agency of the Igbo people. This collective sentiment underscores a multifaceted struggle for recognition and equity within larger anthropological frameworks that often marginalise specific ethnic narratives, emphasising the enduring impacts of colonial legacies and systemic inequalities prevalent within Nigeria.

Moreover, the term “coup” is laden with historical implications, sparking a range of socio-political associations that recall memories of the 1966 coup and its consequences; events that continue to fuel inter-ethnic tension and distrust. The decision to frame the demand within this historical context prompts critical reflections on how narratives are constructed and interpreted within the socio-political landscape. Revisions or appeals to past political upheavals often serve to evoke emotional responses and reinforce in-group solidarity among the Igbo, potentially polarising relationships with other ethnic groups and the state. The use of such a strongly charged term also raises considerations of how political apologies can help address resentments embedded in the national consciousness while also risking deepening existing ethnic divides.

From a sociosemantic perspective, it is crucial to analyse the lexical choices embedded in this demand for apology. Here, the concepts of responsibility and culpability are intertwined with broader social and historical narratives that shape how these political interactions develop. The call for an apology after the coup highlights the ongoing struggle for historical justice within Nigerian society, framing the narrative of collective suffering as central to understanding contemporary political dynamics. It marks a moment of confrontation between state power and ethnic aspirations, with the potential for acknowledgment to act as a step towards healing and reconciliation. In essence, this excerpt serves as a poignant reminder of the emotionally charged political issues surrounding apologies and the related calls for justice. It highlights the complex interplay of identity, history, and power in shaping political debates in Nigeria, demonstrating how these elements converge to influence the effectiveness of political apologies in addressing past grievances and fostering national unity. Ultimately, Excerpt 4 illustrates these dynamics, emphasising the need for a careful approach to political apologies that considers Nigeria's diverse multi-ethnic society, encouraging more meaningful discussions about justice, reparations, and the ongoing struggle for collective healing in a country marked by centuries of complex interrelations.

Excerpt 5

Nnamdi Kanu regrets outburst, apologises to judge Nyako, prosecutor (March 21, 2025: Abiodun Sanusi - Premium Times)

The fifth excerpt, “Nnamdi Kanu regrets outburst, apologises to judge Nyako, prosecutor,” offers insight into the contentious interplay of political dissent, identity,

and authority within Nigeria, especially concerning the Biafran agitation led by Kanu, a prominent figure challenging the Nigerian state's status quo. This excerpt, while seemingly straightforward, is layered with complex implications surrounding themes of accountability, political identity, and the negotiation of power in a religiously and ethnically diverse environment. The phrase "regrets outburst" indicates a significant shift in Kanu's stance from defiance to remorse, highlighting the importance of public apologies in navigating politically sensitive issues. Kanu's public persona, deeply connected with the hopes and frustrations of a substantial segment of the Igbo population, requires a careful balance between maintaining a revolutionary image and recognising the authority structures of the Nigerian judiciary. This contrast reveals intricate power dynamics, where expressions of regret are not merely emotional releases but strategic actions aimed at mending fractured relationships with state institutions and the wider public.

From a sociosemantic perspective, Kanu's apology also raises an issue of agency. The act of apologising can be seen as both an acknowledgment of narrative agency and a possible relinquishing of it. While expressing regret is generally regarded as a way to reconcile differing perspectives, it also prompts questions about Kanu's role as a leader. Is he submitting to the very structures he has strongly opposed, or is this apology a strategic approach through which he aims to negotiate the ongoing tensions between ethnic and national identities? The inclusion of Kanu's sentiments within the political narrative surrounding judicial authority highlights the multiple layers of power dynamics inherent in political apologies, where the act of apologising must navigate a complex landscape of ethnic sentiments, public perceptions, and legal expectations.

Furthermore, the specificity of his apology "to judge Nyako, prosecutor" reflects a complex interaction of personal and institutional factors. The decision to focus on particular individuals rather than a collective group signifies an engagement with personal accountability that sharply contrasts with the broader discourse of collective identity often invoked in ethnic-focused political rhetoric. By directing his apology towards individuals symbolising state authority, Kanu navigates the delicate intersection of charisma, authority, and dissent. The personal nature of the apology humanises political discourse while also raising questions about the sincerity of such expressions when compared to ongoing socio-political strife. Moreover, analysing this excerpt through the lens of socio-semantics shows how linguistic expressions of regret can create narratives that either heal or deepen societal divisions. The language choices surrounding Kanu's apology might unintentionally reinforce ethnic divisions or help bridge them, highlighting how political language can either promote reconciliation or rejection. In this context, the apology goes beyond its primary purpose and becomes a dual-edged tool used by those in power. Its effectiveness depends on how well these expressions resonate with existing grievances among a population dealing with rapid political changes. Excerpt 5 explores the complexities involved in political apologies within Nigeria by comparing individual accountability to the collective goals of ethnic groups. Kanu's remorse highlights broader themes of power, identity, and societal perceptions that influence whether apologies can effectively promote political healing. This shift from an outburst to an apology encourages deeper reflection on the responsibilities of political leaders in mediating between diverse ethnic communities in a society dealing with its divided past. It shows how apologies can act as important channels for expression in the ongoing pursuit of unity, justice, equality, and inclusive governance.

Conclusion

This inquiry illuminates the complex interaction of ethnic and religious sentiments present in the discourse of political apologies in Nigeria. Using a sociosemantic perspective, the analysis shows that while apologies often express remorse and contrition, they can also reinforce divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Key findings highlight that faith-based leaders, such as Lalong's statements, emphasise ongoing religious tensions, creating barriers to true reconciliation. The nuanced approach to political apologies presented here highlights the importance of critically analysing the language used by political figures. It reveals that the success of apologies relies on their ability to recognise the specific grievances of different ethnic and religious groups. Additionally, political apologies should go beyond mere rhetoric and build stronger connections with affected communities by embracing principles of restorative justice. Future research could include cross-national studies that develop sociosemantic frameworks and empirically assess the effectiveness of apologies through public perception. Such studies would benefit from comparing political apologies across various cultural contexts to identify common patterns or significant differences in how they are created and received.

Recommendations for leaders include the need for clarity in language without euphemisms, as these can weaken accountability and cause misunderstandings. It is essential for apologies to be genuine and to recognise the historical context that has shaped current grievances. Policymakers are encouraged to incorporate communication training into governance practices to equip leaders with the skills needed to navigate complex socio-political landscapes while fostering healing. Furthermore, the media plays a vital role in promoting inclusive narratives that go beyond ethnic and religious divisions, thus supporting a culture of accountability and unity in Nigeria. Overall, the findings of this study add to the wider discussion on political apologies and their sociosemantic effects, offering a critical view on how language influences collective memory, identity, and social cohesion in Nigeria's diverse society. By addressing the intertwined nature of ethnic and religious sentiments in political discourse, this analysis highlights the importance of nuanced communication in advancing national unity and reconciliation.

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INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERDISCURSIVITY IN POLITICAL APOLOGIES: TRACING THE REUSE OF APOLOGY TROPES IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC HISTORY

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Abstract

This study examines the discursive strategies of political apologies within Nigeria's democratic landscape, utilising the theoretical lenses of intertextuality and interdiscursivity. The research is important as it moves beyond evaluating the sincerity of apologies to deconstructing their function as rhetorical tools that recycle historical tropes to achieve specific political ends. The primary objective is to trace how apology discourses are reused, recontextualised, and recalibrated across different political events, revealing a patterned performance that shapes public memory and political legitimacy. Employing critical discourse analysis, this paper analyses five media excerpts from *The Sun* and *The Guardian* newspapers, dated between April 2023 and April 2025. The findings reveal a persistent repertoire of apology tropes, including the 'legacy apology', the 'proxy apology', the 'nostalgic reconciliation apology', the 'rejected apology', and the 'bureaucratic error apology', which are intertextually linked to past grievances. The study contributes to the field by providing a nuanced framework for understanding Nigerian political discourse, demonstrating that apologies are not isolated speech acts but are deeply embedded in a complex web of historical, social, and political discourses that continually inform and reshape public sphere negotiations.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Interdiscursivity, Political Apologies, Democratic Discourse

Introduction

The political landscape of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, since its inception in 1999, has been persistently punctuated by moments of public contrition. In these instances, figures of authority from sitting presidents and government bodies to influential non-state actors issue apologies for a spectrum of failings, including historical injustices, electoral malfeasance, and governmental incompetence. While these utterances are often presented as singular acts of accountability and moral reckoning, their pervasive and patterned recurrence suggests a more strategic, discursive practice that demands critical examination beyond surface-level rhetoric. This study, therefore, posits that political apologies in Nigeria are not novel, sincere creations but are deeply intertextual and interdiscursive constructs. They are drawn from a limited, recycled repertoire of tropes that are strategically repurposed to navigate contemporary political crises, legitimise authority, or manage public dissent. The central problem this paper addresses is the mechanistic reuse of these apology narratives, arguing that understanding this repetition is crucial to deconstructing the mechanics of political legitimacy and public persuasion in Nigeria's complex, multi-ethnic democracy.

The aim of this research is to intensively trace the reuse and recontextualisation of apology tropes across key moments in recent Nigerian history. Its specific objectives

are to identify the core tropes employed, analyse their discursive structure through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and explicate their function within the broader socio-political power dynamics. The significance of this inquiry is twofold: it offers scholars of African political communication a nuanced analytical framework that moves beyond evaluating sincerity to deconstructing function, and it provides citizens with the critical discursive tools necessary to decode the performative nature of political rhetoric, thereby fostering a more demystified and engaged public sphere. To ground this investigation, it is essential to situate it within the extant scholarly landscape on political apologies, which, while vast, reveals significant contextual and theoretical gaps when applied to the Nigerian milieu. Foundational work by Tavuchis (1991) in *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* establishes apologies as remedial social rituals; whose efficacy is contingent upon the recognition of a breach and a demonstrable commitment to change. However, Tavuchis's framework is largely situated within Western, individual-centric contexts, necessitating a critical translation to environments like Nigeria, where the state-citizen relationship is historically fraught with distrust and the collective experience often overshadows the individual (Adebanwi, 2022).

Expanding the scope to the political realm, Nobles (2008), in *The Politics of Official Apologies*, provides an indispensable framework for analysing state-level apologies as calculated political acts rather than purely moral gestures. This is highly relevant to the Nigerian context, where apologies often emanate from presidential offices or government bodies. Yet, a gap emerges, as Nobles' focus is primarily on settled historical wrongs (For example, slavery, internment) in established democracies, which differs markedly from the ongoing, cyclical, and often unresolved nature of political grievances that characterise Nigeria's post-colonial experience (Maier, 2000; Smith, 2021).

More contemporary linguistic and pragmatic studies offer finer-grained tools for analysis. Kampf (2009), in exploring the discourse of minimising responsibility, provides a lens through which to view the non-apology apologies prevalent in Nigerian politics, where regret is expressed without acceptance of culpability. Similarly, the work of Harris, Grainger, and Mullany (2006) on the pragmatics of political apologies informs the micro-linguistic analysis required to dissect the structure of apologetic utterances. Within the specific Nigerian context, scholars have begun to lay the groundwork. Opeibi's (2009) application of discourse analysis to political campaign rhetoric demonstrates the potency of discursive studies in Nigeria, though it focuses on electoral campaigns rather than remedial discourse. More directly, Adetunji's (2009) work on intertextuality in corporate discourse provides a robust methodological precedent for applying this concept to Nigerian political texts, illustrating how discourses are woven together to construct identities.

Recent scholarship continues to build this picture. Smith (2021), in *The Performance of Regret in African Political Discourse*, argues compellingly that performative contrition is frequently a tool for political survival, a thesis with which this paper strongly aligns. However, Smith's work takes a broader continental view, leaving space for a deeper, more focused intertextual analysis of a single nation's discursive history. Furthermore, excellent recent studies like Eze's (2022) analysis of media framing of governmental accountability and Bello's (2023) examination of political rhetoric in the Fourth Republic treat apologies as incidental events within larger phenomena, rather than as a central, patterned, and strategic discursive practice in its own right.

This study therefore departs from and builds upon this existing body of research by synthesising the macro-level political theory of state apologies (Nobles, 2008) with the micro-level discourse analysis of apology pragmatics (Harris et al., 2006; Kampf, 2009) and the intertextual/interdiscursive framework championed by Fairclough (1992, 1995) and Blommaert (2005). It critically evaluates the literature to highlight a salient gap: while many studies note the occurrence of political apologies in Nigeria, few systematically trace the recurrence of specific discursive tropes across time, explicitly linking them to a theory of intertextual performance and power. This paper contends that it is precisely this repetition; this discursive recycling that reveals the most profound insights into the mechanics of political power, public memory, and the negotiation of legitimacy in Nigeria's evolving democracy. By examining apologies not as isolated events but as nodes in a vast network of historical and contemporary discourses, this research aims to illuminate the enduring patterns that shape political communication and public reception in Africa's most populous nation.

Theoretical framework

This research is grounded in the interconnected concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, mainly as developed within critical discourse analysis (CDA). Intertextuality, a term introduced by Kristeva (1986) based on Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, suggests that all texts are a mosaic of quotations; each text is an absorption and transformation of another. In the context of political apologies, this means that no apology exists in isolation. Every speech act is inherently linked to a web of previous apologies, historical narratives, media reports, and public expectations. When a Nigerian political leader offers an apology, that statement is not just about the immediate event but also evokes memories of past apologies, failures, and unfulfilled promises. This adds a complex layer of meaning where the new text is understood through the lens of the old.

Interdiscursivity, a concept further refined by Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995), extends this idea beyond specific texts to the mixing of different discourses, genres, and styles. Fairclough argues that part of the power of a text lies in its ability to draw upon and combine these different discursive elements. A political apology, for instance, is a genre that interdiscursively blends the moral discourse of repentance (borrowed from religious domains), the legalistic discourse of accountability, and the political discourse of public relations and legitimacy-building. In Nigeria, this blending is particularly potent, given the profound influence of religious rhetoric on public life and the enduring discourse of national unity.

This framework guides the analysis by providing the tools to deconstruct the sampled apologies. It demands that we ask not just "what is being said?" but "what previous texts and discourses are being invoked?" and "to what end?". It allows us to see an apology not as a solitary speech act but as a node in a vast network of discursive practices. For example, a contemporary apology for electoral fraud is intertextually linked to the annulment of the 1993 election and the various apologies or lack thereof that followed. It is interdiscursive insofar as it might employ the genre of a religious confession to address a political failure, thereby attempting to borrow the moral authority of the church to shore up diminishing political capital. This theoretical lens is therefore not merely an analytical add-on; it is essential for uncovering the deep structure and strategic function of political apologies, revealing them as calculated performances that reuse established tropes to navigate the perpetual crisis of legitimacy in Nigerian governance.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its methodological core, guided by the principles of Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The data for this analysis consists of five purposively selected media excerpts reporting on political apologies in Nigeria. The sources are two of Nigeria's foremost digital news platforms, The Sun and The Guardian, chosen for their national reach and established reputation. The excerpts were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, their publication within a concentrated recent timeframe (April 2023 to April 2025) to capture a contemporary snapshot, and their representation of different apology types from various actors (former presidents, religious figures, political candidates, and the government itself). The method of data collection involved a systematic search of the digital archives of both newspapers using keywords such as "apology," "sorry," "forgiveness," and "Nigerians" combined with "government," "president," or "politician." The five selected excerpts are: 1) "Nigerians to Buhari: Your apology for forgiveness worthless, not accepted" (The Sun, 30th April 2023); 2) "2023 elections: We're sorry, Fr. Mbaka apologises to Nigerians" (The Sun, 25th June 2023); 3) "Hashim lauds IBB's apology, calls for national reconciliation" (The Guardian, 26 Feb 2025); 4) "Natasha rejects forged apology, vows to expose political oppression" (The Guardian, 25 Mar 2025); and 5) "We're sorry for errors in federal appointments list - FG" (The Sun, 10th April 2025). The analytical approach involves a close textual analysis of the language used in the apologies and the surrounding media discourse, identifying intertextual references to past events and apologies. It then examines the discursive practice, how the texts are produced, circulated, and consumed. Finally, it situates this within the broader social practice of Nigerian politics, interpreting the findings in terms of power, ideology, and the ongoing struggle for democratic legitimacy.

Data analysis and discussion

This section presents an extensive analysis of the five selected excerpts, interrogating the manifestation of intertextuality and interdiscursivity within each case. The analysis reveals a patterned repertoire of apology tropes, each serving distinct political functions while being deeply embedded in Nigeria's historical discursive landscape.

Excerpt 1

"Nigerians to Buhari: Your apology for forgiveness worthless, not accepted" (The Sun, 30th April 2023)

This excerpt serves as a potent case study for applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to deconstruct the failure of a political apology. Moving beyond a descriptive account of the event, a CDA-informed analysis reveals this not as a simple rejection of an apology but as a discursive battleground where historical narrative, political power, and public agency are contested. This analysis is structured through Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework, examining the text's linguistic features, its discursive practice, and the broader social practices of power and legitimacy in Nigeria. At the level of text, the headline's lexical choices are immediately significant. The declaration of the apology as "worthless" is a powerful semantic framing that strips the speech act of any symbolic or remedial value. This is not a neutral report but an active judgement. The public reactions quoted within the article; phrases like "economic hardship," "insecurity," and "divisive policies" function as intertextual anchors. They do not merely list grievances; they actively reconstruct the entirety of Buhari's eight-year tenure as a pre-text, a corpus of failure against which his final utterance is

measured and found wanting. This exemplifies the CDA principle that texts are not isolated but are inherently dialogic, always in conversation with prior texts and social realities (Fairclough, 1992; Kristeva, 1986). The apology's vague phrasing, "forgive him for any wrong he must have done," employs what Kampf (2009) identifies as the discourse of minimising responsibility. The use of the conditional "must have done" and the non-specific "any wrong" avoids direct acknowledgment of particular failures, a linguistic strategy typical of the "non-apology apology" that seeks the form of contrition without its substantive, culpable content.

The dimension of discursive practice examines how this text is produced, disseminated, and consumed. The newspaper acts not as a passive recorder but as an active agent in framing the discourse. By selecting and amplifying specific, dismissive public reactions, the media practices what Fairclough (1995) would term a "circuit of discourse," where media representation shapes public perception, which in turn fuels further media commentary. The consumption of the apology by the public demonstrates a high degree of critical discursive literacy. The rejection is evidence of what Blommaert (2005) would describe as an intertextual competence; the Nigerian public, drawing on a historical repertoire of hollow political performances, is adept at decoding the gap between discursive form and political substance. They interpret the apology not as a sincere *Mea Culpa* (Tavuchis, 1991) but as a strategic act of legacy management, an attempt to "clear his conscience" rather than atone for documented wrongs.

This leads to the third dimension: social practice. The failure of Buhari's apology is ultimately a failure of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1992). The speech act attempts to blend the moral-religious discourse of repentance and forgiveness with the political discourse of leadership and accountability. However, in a socio-political context historically fraught with distrust between the state and its citizens (Adebanwi, 2022), this blending is rejected violently. The public's response asserts that the discourse of moral apology is only legitimate and effective after the discourse of effective governance has been fulfilled. The apology, therefore, becomes a site for the negotiation of political legitimacy. Its rejection is a powerful social act that denies the leader the ability to control the narrative of his legacy. As Nobles (2008) argues, official apologies are fundamentally political acts aimed at reshaping historical narratives and legitimising authority. In this case, the public, through the medium of the press, seizes that discursive power, issuing a final verdict that solidifies a legacy of failure rather than rehabilitating it.

In conclusion, a CDA analysis reveals that Excerpt 1 is far more than a story of a rejected apology. It is a demonstration of how intertextual references to past failures drain a present speech act of its power. It showcases a struggle over interdiscursive authority, where the public insists on the primacy of tangible governance over performative remorse. Ultimately, this case underscores that in Nigeria's democratic landscape, the efficacy of a political apology is contingent not on its linguistic form but on its alignment with a social reality experienced by the citizenry, revealing a profound crisis of legitimacy that no discursive performance can easily repair.

Excerpt 2

“2023 elections: We're sorry, Fr. Mbaka apologises to Nigerians”
(The Sun, 25th June 2023)

This excerpt presents a rich case for a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that moves beyond a superficial reading of contrition. This excerpt is not merely an account of an

apology but a complex intertextual and interdiscursive performance designed to repair the discursive authority of a influential figure operating at the nexus of religion and politics.

The power of this apology is fundamentally derived from its intertextuality. As Kristeva (1986) posits, texts are mosaics of quotations, and Fr. Mbaka's apology is incomprehensible without its precursor texts: his highly publicised pre-election sermons and prophecies fervently endorsing a specific political candidate. This apology exists in a direct dialogic relationship with those prior pronouncements; it is a responsive text that seeks to manage the discursive fallout of its antecedents. The apology's meaning is constructed not from its own words alone but from the public's memory of the failed prophecy it references. This exemplifies the CDA principle that discourse is historically situated and that every text is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the discourses that precede it (Fairclough, 1992). The apology is an attempt to control the narrative arc from endorsement to failure, framing it within a redemptive cycle of sin and repentance.

At the core of this performance is interdiscursivity; the blending of discourses from different social domains (Fairclough, 1995). Fr. Mbaka's act is a potent interdiscursive *mélange*. He employs the genre of confession and repentance ("We're sorry"), leveraging the moral weight and spiritual authority inherent in his role as a Catholic priest. This discourse frames the error not as a political miscalculation but as a spiritual failing requiring absolution. The subject of the apology is unequivocally political; an election endorsement. This situates the speech act within the discourse of power, influence, and partisan alignment. As a public figure whose prophecies are newsworthy, his apology is also a performance for media consumption, designed to manage his public image and credibility capital.

This strategic blending is a calculated effort to use the unquestionable moral authority of religious discourse to remediate a failure in the precarious realm of political discourse. However, from a CDA perspective, this is not a sincere fusion but a strategic appropriation. The function of the apology aligns with Kampf's (2009) analysis of "non-apology apologies" and discourses of minimization. By framing the issue within a religious paradigm of seeking forgiveness, Mbaka subtly sidesteps a direct acknowledgment of flawed political judgment or the tangible consequences of his endorsement. The apology becomes a vehicle for responsibility minimisation; the fault is spiritualized, thus evading a concrete accounting within the political domain where it originated. Therefore, the primary function of this speech act is not moral reckoning with the Nigerian electorate but credibility repair and the restoration of discursive authority. The apology is a tool for managing what Harris, Grainger, and Mullany (2006) would identify as a face-threatening act. Mbaka's credibility, the source of his influence, was damaged by the failed endorsement. By performing a public apology steeped in religious sincerity, he seeks to reclaim his position as a legitimate voice. This aligns with Blommaert's (2005) view that discourse is a form of power, and the ability to control a narrative, even one of failure is a key social resource. CDA analysis reveals Fr. Mbaka's apology as a deeply strategic interdiscursive performance. It is a proxy apology that uses the genre of religious contrition to address a political miscalculation, thereby attempting to borrow the immutable authority of the church to shore up his own diminished political capital. This case underscores that in Nigeria's discursive landscape, apologies are often less about accountability to the public and more about the perpetual maintenance of the apologist's own power and legitimacy within a competitive field of influence.

Excerpt 3

“Hashim lauds IBB's apology, calls for national reconciliation”
(The Guardian, 26 Feb 2025)

In examining Excerpt 3, “Hashim lauds IBB’s apology, calls for national reconciliation” (The Guardian, 26 Feb 2025), through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it becomes evident that the apology attributed to former military leader Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) operates as a sophisticated intertextual and interdiscursive construct. This is not merely an expression of regret but a strategically deployed discursive performance aimed at reshaping historical narratives and reconfiguring political legitimacy. The analysis here is structured around Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional framework, delving into the textual, discursive, and social practices that underpin this utterance.

At the textual level, the apology’s lexical and semantic choices are deeply significant. The invocation of “national reconciliation” serves as a potent intertextual anchor, explicitly linking IBB’s statement to broader discourses of transitional justice and historical reckoning, such as those associated with South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This linkage is not incidental; it is a deliberate rhetorical strategy to imbue the apology with a moral gravity that transcends its immediate context. However, as Fairclough (1992) argues, texts are inherently dialogic, and this apology engages in a complex dialogue with Nigeria’s contested past, particularly the annulment of the 1993 elections, a watershed moment in the nation’s democratic history. The vague phrasing typical of such nostalgic apologies, lacking specific acknowledgment of agency or detailed wrongdoing, aligns with Kampf’s (2009) concept of “minimising responsibility,” where linguistic vagueness serves to dilute culpability while maintaining the appearance of contrition.

Moving to the dimension of discursive practice, the production and circulation of this apology reveal its function as a tool of interdiscursive blending. The apology is not issued in isolation but is mediated through a commentator, Hashim, who lauds it and frames it within a call for unity. This mediation is crucial; it exemplifies what Fairclough (1995) describes as the “circuit of discourse,” where media representation amplifies and legitimises certain narratives while marginalising others. The apology interdiscursively merges the discourse of military authority with that of democratic reconciliation, a fusion that is inherently paradoxical. A former military ruler employing the language of democratic restoration represents a calculated effort to reconstruct IBB’s legacy from that of an autocrat to a national elder statesman. This aligns with Nobles’ (2008) assertion that official apologies are fundamentally political acts, designed to reshape historical narratives and legitimize authority retrospectively. At the level of social practice, the apology functions as a mechanism of power and ideological reconfiguration. Its timing, decades after the event, is particularly revealing. This belatedness is not a mark of sincerity but a strategic intervention in contemporary political discourse. By apologising for a historical failure, IBB implicitly critiques current governance failures, thereby positioning himself as a moral arbiter whose past errors have been redeemed through contrition. This is a clear instance of what Blommaert (2005) identifies as the power of discourse to control narratives and allocate social resources. The apology becomes a site of struggle over historical memory and political legitimacy. Its acceptance or rejection is less about the past than about the present-day utility of that past; a point underscored by Smith (2021), who argues that performative regret in African politics often serves as a tool for political survival and legacy management.

Furthermore, the public's reception of such an apology is likely to be mediated by what Adebani (2022) describes as a deep-seated distrust between the state and citizens in Nigeria. The intertextual competence of the Nigerian public, honed through repeated exposure to hollow political performances, enables a critical decoding of such gestures. The apology may be interpreted not as a genuine act of accountability but as an interdiscursive maneuver to symbolically rehabilitate a contentious figure without substantive restitution. This reinforces the CDA tenet that discourse is embedded in power relations and ideological contests (Fairclough, 1992). In conclusion, a critical analysis of Excerpt 3 reveals that IBB's apology is a nuanced intertextual and interdiscursive performance. It leverages historical grievances and reconciliation discourses to achieve contemporary political ends, exemplifying how apologies in Nigeria's democratic landscape are often less about moral reckoning and more about the perpetual negotiation of power and legitimacy. This case underscores the necessity of evaluating political apologies not through their professed sincerity but through their strategic function within broader socio-political practices.

Excerpt 4

“Natasha rejects forged apology, vows to expose political oppression”
(The Guardian, 25 Mar 2025)

In examining Excerpt 4, “Natasha rejects forged apology, vows to expose political oppression” (The Guardian, 25 Mar 2025), a critical discourse analysis (CDA) reveals a profound discursive power struggle, where apology is not a gesture of remorse but a weapon of political coercion. This case exemplifies what Fairclough (1992) identifies as the dialectical relationship between discourse and social power, where language is both shaped by and shapes power relations. The forged apology represents an intertextual fabrication; it is a discursive counterfeit designed to impose a narrative of defeat upon Natasha by forcibly inserting her into a genre of contrition she did not author. This act is not merely deceptive but constitutes what Blommaert (2005) describes as an attempt to “allocate symbolic resources” in this case, the power to define truth and assign guilt.

Intertextually, the forged text mimics established tropes of political apology, drawing on a recognisable repertoire of penitential discourse to lend itself a veneer of authenticity. However, its authority is immediately destabilised by Natasha's rejection, which creates a dialogic tension between two competing texts: one asserting submission, the other defiance. This intertextual conflict illustrates Kristeva's (1986) axiom that every text is a response to previous texts. Here, the rejection is a direct negation of the forged narrative, a discursive reclamation of agency. Natasha's response does not merely deny the apology but actively recontextualises it within a broader discourse of political oppression, thereby transforming the incident from a personal matter into a public meta-commentary on authoritarian tactics. Interdiscursively, the episode demonstrates a calculated blending of discourses. The forgery attempts to merge the moral discourse of apology with the coercive discourse of political intimidation, effectively weaponising remorse. In contrast, Natasha's rebuttal interdiscursively combines the discourse of human rights advocacy (“vows to expose political oppression”) with that of victimhood and resistance. This strategic fusion amplifies her position not merely as a candidate rejecting a falsehood but as a symbol of democratic resistance. Such a manoeuvre aligns with Fairclough's (1995) concept of “interdiscursive hybridity,” where the mixing of discourses can serve to challenge or reinforce power structures. In this case, Natasha's hybrid discourse

contests the state's narrative control and exposes the mechanisms of discursive domination.

The implications of this trope extend beyond the immediate event. It illuminates what Kampf (2009) might term a "non-apology" in its most sinister form; one that is not even issued by the subject but imposed upon them, void of any sincerity and purely instrumental. The public reception of such a gesture, mediated through Nigeria's historically grounded scepticism towards political rhetoric (Adebanwi, 2022), would likely decode it as an act of aggression rather than reconciliation. This case underscores Nobles' (2008) contention that apologies are fundamentally political acts, but here, the politics is adversarial. The apology becomes a battlefield where discursive legitimacy is fought over, and where the power to apologise is synonymous with the power to dominate. In conclusion, a critical analysis of Excerpt 4 through the lens of CDA reveals that the forged apology is a potent example of discursive violence. It highlights how intertextual and interdiscursive strategies are employed not to seek forgiveness but to assert control, manipulate public perception, and suppress dissent. This reinforces the need to analyse political apologies not as moral statements but as strategic moves within Nigeria's ongoing struggle for democratic authenticity.

Excerpt 5

"We're sorry for errors in federal appointments list - FG"
(The Sun, 10th April 2025)

This excerpt presents a seemingly innocuous instance of governmental contrition. However, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) reveals this "bureaucratic error apology" as a sophisticated discursive performance designed to manage public perception and insulate power from substantive accountability. This trope functions not as a genuine moral reckoning but as a strategic ritual that perpetuates a cycle of minimal responsibility, leveraging intertextual and interdiscursive strategies to achieve its political ends. At the textual level, the lexical choice of "errors" is a deliberate and potent semantic framing. This term operates within what Kampf (2009) identifies as a "discourse of minimising responsibility." By classifying the mistake as an "error," the Federal Government (FG) frames the issue within a technical and administrative register, implying a procedural lapse rather than a deliberate act of political patronage or ethno-regional bias accusations that are endemic in the Nigerian political landscape (Smith, 2021). The phrasing "we're sorry for errors" is a classic non-apology apology (Harris, Grainger, & Mullany, 2006); it accepts a vague, impersonal fault while evading any admission of intentionality, specific negligence, or the underlying systemic injustices that such "errors" often mask. The text's intertextuality is precise yet shallow: it creates a direct dialogic relationship solely with the flawed appointments list itself (Fairclough, 1992), consciously avoiding intertextual links to the broader, more damning historical discourse of systemic marginalisation and biased federal character implementation.

The dimension of discursive practice exposes this utterance as a calculated act of public relations damage control. The apology is produced and disseminated not as a voluntary act of transparency but as a necessary response to public scrutiny, likely following media exposure or social media backlash. This position the government in a reactive, rather than proactive, stance, a pattern that Fairclough (1995) would argue shapes a public perception of an institution that is perpetually correcting itself rather than operating with initial competence. The genre of the bureaucratic apology is interdiscursive par excellence; it strategically blends the discourse of public administration with its values of efficiency, accuracy, and transparency with the

discourse of corporate public relations. This blending is a power-laden manoeuvre. It allows the state to borrow the perceived neutrality and problem-solving ethos of technocratic language to symbolically resolve what is often a deeply political problem, thereby containing the crisis within a manageable framework of a "correctable error" rather than a "fundamental flaw" in governance.

Ultimately, at the level of social practice, this apology functions as a mechanism for maintaining the status quo of power relations. Its primary social function is not to restore public trust but to perform a ritual of accountability that is so minimal and technical that it demands no real political cost or structural change. The apology becomes what Blommaert (2005) would describe as a strategic allocation of symbolic resources; by offering this limited *mea culpa*, the government seeks to possess and control the narrative of the event, defining it as a closed issue of administrative oversight now resolved. This performative act is designed to pre-empt and disarm more serious accusations of corruption or ethno-religious favouritism. However, its efficacy is contingent on a citizenry wearied by what Adebani (2022) terms a "historically fraught distrust between the state and its citizens." The Nigerian public's intertextual competence, honed through repeated exposure to such hollow performances, likely decodes this not as sincerity but as a familiar, cynical tactic. The recurrence of this trope points to a systemic pathology where governance is discursively constructed through a cycle of error and minimal, perfunctory accountability, thereby perpetuating the very legitimacy deficits it aims to repair (Nobles, 2008). In this light, the bureaucratic error apology is revealed as a key discursive tool in the perpetual negotiation of political power in Nigeria, one that prioritises the appearance of order over the substance of just and competent governance.

Discussion of findings

The analysis of the five media excerpts reveals that political apologies in Nigeria are not spontaneous acts of contrition but are highly strategic, intertextual, and interdiscursive performances. They function as a limited, recycled currency in the economy of political legitimacy, deployed to achieve specific ends rather than to enact genuine moral reckoning. The findings critically extend the theoretical propositions of Fairclough (1992), Blommaert (2005), and Nobles (2008) by grounding them in the specific, fraught context of Nigeria's post-colonial democracy.

Firstly, the study identifies a persistent repertoire of apology tropes, each a calibrated response to a particular legitimacy deficit. The 'rejected apology' (Excerpt 1) and the 'forged apology' (Excerpt 4) are two sides of the same coin, representing a breakdown in the intended interdiscursive blend. In Buhari's case, the public's intertextual competence forged from a historical memory of unfulfilled promises (Adebani, 2022) enabled a critical decoding that rejected the fusion of moral and political discourse. The apology was measured against the pre-text of his administration's failures and found to be a performative attempt at legacy management, not a substantive act of accountability (Tavuchis, 1991; Kampf, 2009). Conversely, the forged apology is an act of discursive violence, an extreme form of what Kampf (2009) might term a 'non-apology', where the speech act is weaponised to impose a narrative of submission. It demonstrates that the power to author an apology is synonymous with the power to control public identity and narrative, a stark illustration of Blommaert's (2005) assertion that discourse is a key social resource.

Secondly, the analysis exposes the strategic function of interdiscursive blending as a primary tool for credibility repair. The 'proxy apology' (Excerpt 2) and the 'nostalgic reconciliation apology' (Excerpt 3) both leverage the moral authority of

non-political discourses to remediate political failures. Fr. Mbaka's apology is a quintessential example of this, blending religious discourse (confession, repentance) with political discourse (election endorsement) in a calculated manoeuvre to spiritualise a temporal miscalculation, thereby evading concrete political accountability. Similarly, IBB's belated apology interdiscursively merges the discourse of military authority with that of democratic transitional justice, a paradoxical fusion aimed at rehabilitating a contentious legacy and positioning him as a redeemed elder statesman (Nobles, 2008). This finding critically nuances Smith's (2021) thesis on performative regret, showing that in Nigeria, such performances are not merely for survival but are sophisticated attempts to transcend one's historical role by appropriating the discursive power of morally superior domains.

Finally, the 'bureaucratic error apology' (Excerpt 5) epitomises a systemic ritual that perpetuates a cycle of minimal accountability. By framing failures within a technical, administrative register, the state engages in a discourse of responsibility minimisation (Kampf, 2009) that effectively contains crises. This trope interdiscursively blends public administration language with corporate public relations, symbolically resolving deeply political problems of patronage and bias as mere "correctable errors." This performative ritual, as Fairclough (1995) would argue, shapes a public perception of an institution that is perpetually reactive rather than fundamentally competent. Its function is not to restore trust but to allocate symbolic resources (Blommaert, 2005) in a way that maintains the status quo, demanding no real political cost or structural change and thus perpetuating the very legitimacy deficits it aims to repair.

In essence, the recurrence of these tropes' points to a profound crisis of discursive legitimacy. The efficacy of an apology is contingent not on its linguistic construction but on its alignment with a social reality experienced by a critically literate public. The Nigerian populace, through repeated exposure, has developed a sophisticated intertextual competence that decodes the gap between discursive form and political substance. This forces political actors into an increasingly complex dance of interdiscursive appropriation, yet the findings suggest these strategies are often transparent and, as in Buhari's case, can spectacularly fail, revealing the limits of discursive power in the face of material governance failures.

Conclusion

This study has argued that political apologies in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are far from isolated speech acts; they are deeply embedded nodes within a vast, intertextual network of historical grievances, media discourses, and public memory. Utilising the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, the research has demonstrated that these utterances are strategic, patterned performances that draw from a limited repertoire of tropes to navigate the perpetual crisis of legitimacy that characterizes the Nigerian state. The central contribution of this work is its systematic unveiling of the mechanics of this discursive recycling. It moves beyond evaluating the sincerity of apologies, a pursuit often fraught with subjective impasse, to deconstruct their function. The analysis reveals that whether rejected, forged, proxy, nostalgic, or bureaucratic, each apology trope serves as a tool to achieve specific political ends: to manage legacies, repair credibility, rehabilitate contentious figures, weaponise narrative, or insulate power from substantive accountability. This finding firmly supports Nobles' (2008) contention that official apologies are fundamentally political acts, but it critically expands it by illustrating the complex interdiscursive strategies required to execute these acts in a context of deep public scepticism.

The implications of this research are twofold. Theoretically, it provides a nuanced, context-sensitive framework for analysing political discourse in post-colonial African states, where the state-citizen relationship is historically fraught and public memory is long. It affirms that CDA principles are not merely Western exports but are essential tools for unpacking the power dynamics in such environments. Practically, it offers citizens and media commentators a critical metalanguage for decoding political rhetoric, fostering a public sphere that is less susceptible to the mystifications of performative contrition.

Ultimately, this study concludes that the repetitive, tropological nature of political apologies in Nigeria is a symptom of an unresolved struggle for democratic authenticity. The apologies are not catalysts for change but are discursive placeholders for the substantive governance, accountability, and justice that remain elusive. Future research could productively explore the reception of these apologies through audience studies or trace the evolution of a specific trope across a longer historical arc, from the First Republic to the present. By continuing to interrogate the dialogue between text and power, scholarship can further illuminate the intricate dance of legitimacy that defines not only Nigerian politics but the broader African democratic experience.

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CONFLICTS AND MULTIPLE INTERPRETATION OF JUDGEMENTS IN THE NIGERIAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: DEALING WITH THE ABUSE OF ENGLISH AS THE ROOT CAUSE

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Abstract

The Nigerian Criminal Justice System continues to grapple with a persistent challenge: the conflicting and multiple interpretations of judicial judgments. At the heart of this issue lies a fundamental problem—the abuse and inconsistent use of the English language, which serves as the official language of legal proceedings in Nigeria. This paper explores how linguistic imprecision, ambiguous legal expressions, and poor language training among legal practitioners and court officials contribute significantly to contradictory judicial interpretations. Using *Okocha v. State* (1995) as a supporting case study, the paper analyses how the poor framing of judicial pronouncements can lead to miscarriages of justice or prolonged litigation due to conflicting interpretations. The research further examines how legal English, with its complex structure and technical vocabulary, often becomes a barrier rather than a tool of clarity in the justice delivery system. Recommendations are made for improving the use of legal English through specialized language training, clearer drafting of legal documents, and the institutionalization of plain English in court proceedings. The paper argues that without addressing the linguistic foundation of legal discourse, efforts at judicial reform may remain superficial and ineffective.

Keywords: Legal English, Judicial Interpretation, Language Abuse, Criminal Justice, Miscarriage of Justice, Legal Reform

Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in the administration of justice. In Nigeria, English is not only the official language but also the language of the courts, legal documentation, and judicial pronouncements. However, the overdependence on legal English—often characterized by archaic expressions, ambiguous phrases, and complex syntactic structures, has resulted in significant challenges in the Nigerian criminal justice system. One of the most troubling consequences is the frequent occurrence of conflicting and multiple interpretations of judgments, which in turn undermine the credibility of the judiciary and the rule of law. These interpretive conflicts often arise due to the misuse or poor mastery of English among legal practitioners, judges, and even law enforcement officers. In a multilingual society like Nigeria, where English is a second language to most of the population, including many legal professionals, the abuse of language can have far-reaching consequences. Poorly articulated judgments, inconsistent legal terminologies, and ambiguous statutory provisions contribute to legal uncertainty, prolonged trials, appeals, and at times, the miscarriage of justice.

This study is rooted in the belief that the abuse of English in legal contexts is not a mere grammatical or stylistic issue- it is a structural problem that affects the entire criminal justice process, from the framing of charges to the delivery of final rulings. It shares concern with the power of English- as much as the works of Aliyu, I.(2016) and Baba and Aliyu (2024). The former shows how Osundare manipulates English stylistically to critique governance and expose social contradictions in Nigeria. Example: Osundare's metaphor of being “still in the woods” criticizes Nigeria’s entrapment in corruption and bad leadership. Baba and Aliyu (2024) show how English is the medium of law in Nigeria, and how its misuse of lack of clarity creates judicial confusion. For example: Vague statutory expressions like “reasonable time”, or “due process” generate inconsistent rulings. Our paper argues that abuse of English (ambiguity, vagueness, poor drafting) is the root cause of confusing and contradictory Judgements in Nigerian criminal justice system. Thus, addressing the linguistic roots of these interpretive problems, this paper aims to shed light on an often-overlooked yet critical aspect of legal reform in Nigeria. Ultimately, it underscores the need for clarity, precision, and accessibility in legal language to promote fairness, efficiency, and public confidence in the justice system.

The paper “Conflicts and Multiple Interpretation of Judgements in the Nigerian Criminal Justice System: Dealing with Abuse of English as the Root Cause” focuses on how poor or ambiguous use of the English language contributes to judicial inconsistencies, legal misinterpretations, and procedural confusion within Nigeria's criminal justice framework. In this context, “conflicts and multiple interpretation of judgements” refer to situations where different courts, legal professionals, or parties interpret the same legal pronouncement or statute in contradictory ways. This problem is compounded by the abuse of English-which includes grammatical errors, misuse of legal terminology, convoluted sentence construction, and a lack of semantic clarity. English, as the language of law in Nigeria, plays a vital role in shaping legal reasoning, the interpretation of statutes, and the execution of justice. Unfortunately, many legal practitioners lack adequate training in legal English and often confuse ordinary usage with legal meaning, resulting in ambiguity and miscommunication. As Olaniyi and Oluremi (2017) observe in their article "Language Use and Legal Interpretation in Nigeria’s Judicial Process," the misuse of language is a “silent but powerful contributor to delays and miscarriages of justice.” Similarly, Adebayo (2015), in "Legal Language and Justice Delivery in Nigeria," identifies linguistic ambiguity as a key factor in the misinterpretation of legal texts and judgments.

This issue has practical implications in legal proceedings. For example, in *Okocha v. The State* (1995), one of the key appellate arguments centred on the unclear language used in the lower court’s judgment, which led to conflicting interpretations at the appellate level. Such cases highlight how legal outcomes may be determined not solely by evidence or precedent but by how well (or poorly) the English language was used in articulating the judgment. The relevance of this topic to the Nigerian criminal justice system is, therefore, both urgent and far-reaching. It exposes a systemic weakness that affects access to justice, judicial efficiency, and public trust in the legal system. Improving the clarity and precision of English in legal settings is not merely a linguistic exercise but a necessary reform to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights.

Overview of Conflicting Judgements and their Impact on the Nigerian Criminal Justice System

Conflicting judgments have become a recurrent issue in the Nigerian legal system, particularly within the realm of criminal justice. These inconsistencies typically arise when courts of coordinate jurisdiction—especially at the High Court and Court of Appeal levels deliver contradictory rulings on similar or identical matters. While such conflicts are sometimes due to divergent interpretations of the law, a deeper issue often lies in the unclear, imprecise, or ambiguous use of the English language in court proceedings and judgments. The problem is not merely procedural—it strikes at the core of legal certainty, judicial authority, and the rule of law. Inconsistent judicial decisions not only confuse litigants and the public but also weaken confidence in the judiciary as a neutral and reliable arbiter. As C.J. Dakas (2019) explains in his influential paper “Judicial Precedent and the Challenge of Conflicting Decisions in Nigeria,” conflicting judgments “erode the doctrine of stare decisis and diminish the consistency that should characterize judicial reasoning.” When legal practitioners and judges are unable to interpret previous decisions due to linguistic vagueness or contradictions, the system becomes unpredictable and unreliable.

A common contributing factor is the problematic use of English, which often leads to divergent interpretations of legal texts and judicial pronouncements. In *PDP v. INEC & Ors* (2014), the Supreme Court criticized lower courts for relying on “strained and obscure readings” of earlier judgments, which were largely caused by poor drafting and ambiguous wording. Legal scholars such as Egbewole and Alabi (2016), in “Language, Legal Interpretation and Judicial Clarity in Nigeria,” have also identified the abuse of legal English as a hidden but powerful driver of conflicting decisions in Nigerian jurisprudence. The impact of this issue is significant. Conflicting judgments delay justice, increase the cost of litigation, and often force parties to escalate matters to higher courts, thus congesting the appellate system. More dangerously, they open the door to forum shopping, judicial bias, and selective enforcement of judgments, especially when politicians or powerful litigants exploit these inconsistencies to their advantage.

In sum, while conflicting judgments may seem like a procedural irregularity, they reveal a deeper institutional problem tied to the misuse of language in legal settings. Addressing this root cause is essential for restoring the credibility and functionality of the Nigerian criminal justice system.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian criminal justice system is plagued by inconsistencies in judicial decisions, many of which stem from conflicting interpretations of judgments. While such contradictions are often attributed to judicial discretion or divergent legal reasoning, a more fundamental and underexplored issue is the abuse of the English language in legal proceedings. As the official language of the courts, English is expected to serve as a neutral and precise medium for the expression of legal norms. However, in practice, the misuse of grammar, vague expressions, archaic terminologies, and poor sentence construction often leads to semantic confusion and legal ambiguity. This linguistic dysfunction becomes particularly problematic in a multilingual country like Nigeria, where English is a second language for most legal practitioners and litigants. The result is a justice system in which the same statute or judgment may be interpreted differently by different judges, thereby creating legal uncertainty and undermining the principle of stare decisis. In *Buhari v. INEC* (2008), the Supreme Court lamented the inconsistent interpretations of its decisions by lower courts, describing such practice as a threat to the integrity of judicial authority.

Furthermore, legal scholars such as Omole and Adeyemi (2018), in “Language and Law: A Nexus in Nigerian Judicial Practice,” argue that “linguistic ambiguity is the unacknowledged saboteur of judicial coherence in Nigeria.” This problem is not merely theoretical, it has practical consequences. Conflicting interpretations delay justice, promote forum shopping, compromise fair trial rights, and erode public trust in the judiciary. Despite multiple legal reforms and institutional interventions, insufficient attention has been given to the linguistic aspect of justice delivery. Thus, unless the abuse of English in legal contexts is recognized and addressed as a root cause of interpretive conflict, efforts at judicial reform may remain ineffective.

Purpose/Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how the abuse of the English language contributes to conflicts and multiple interpretations of judgments in the Nigerian criminal justice system. The research seeks to highlight the linguistic dimension of legal ambiguity and its implications for justice delivery, and to propose strategies for improving legal language usage in order to enhance judicial clarity and consistency.

Specific Objectives include to:

1. examine the role of English as a medium of legal communication in Nigeria and its influence on judicial interpretation.
2. identify specific linguistic patterns that contribute to conflicting judgments.
3. analyse selected cases where poor use of English has led to interpretative inconsistencies.
4. evaluate the implications of such linguistic misuse on judicial coherence, public trust, and access to justice.
5. propose reforms such as legal English training, plain language drafting, and standardized interpretative guidelines for judges and legal practitioners.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the intersection between language, law, and justice. Specifically, it explores how language use—particularly legal English—acts as both a tool and a barrier in the interpretation of legal judgments within the Nigerian criminal justice system. At the core of this framework is the concept of “linguistic clarity as a foundation for judicial consistency.” The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach that draws from legal linguistics, discourse analysis, and judicial communication theory to analyse how linguistic structures impact legal interpretation and case outcomes.

Two main concepts guide this framework; legal language abuse and Judicial Interpretation and Consistency. Legal language abuse refers to the improper use of English in legal settings, including grammatical errors, ambiguous phrasing, archaic expressions, and inconsistent terminologies. These often result in contradictory interpretations of statutes or judgments. According to Gibbons (2003) in *Forensic Linguistics: An Introduction to Language in the Justice System*, legal language must balance precision with comprehensibility to support justice delivery. Judicial interpretation and consistency refers to how judges and courts construe legal texts and apply them to specific cases. The Nigerian doctrine of *stare decisis* demands consistency, but conflicting interpretations due to language misuse undermine this principle. As Oba (2010) argues in “Language, Law and Judicial Reasoning in Nigeria,” inconsistent use of language fosters “interpretative fragmentation” in Nigerian courts. This framework helps to establish a clear link between the abuse of

English and the systemic issues in legal interpretation. It also provides a foundation for evaluating linguistic reforms as part of broader judicial improvements.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the criminal justice system in Nigeria, with a focus on the interpretation of judgments by courts of coordinate and appellate jurisdictions. It concentrates primarily on how linguistic misuse of English contributes to legal ambiguities, conflicts in court decisions, and broader judicial inefficiencies. The scope includes: analysis of selected criminal case judgments from High Courts, Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court where conflicting interpretations have been noted, review of statutory texts, judicial pronouncements, and legal documents to evaluate patterns of ambiguous or poor language use, focus on English usage in legal drafting, oral arguments, and judgment delivery, without extending into indigenous language interpretation or customary court systems, consideration of lawyers, judges, legal educators, and policymakers as key stakeholders in the discussion. Geographically, the study covers federal and state-level judicial systems across Nigeria, while conceptually, it is confined to issues of linguistic clarity, judicial consistency, and legal interpretation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two key theories: Legal Linguistics Theory and Hermeneutic Theory of Legal Interpretation. These theories provide the intellectual foundation for understanding how language shapes legal meaning and the administration of justice.

Legal Linguistics Theory: Legal linguistics is a field that studies the structure, use, and function of language in legal contexts. It explores how legal texts are written, interpreted, and applied. According to Tiersma (1999) in *Legal Language*, legal English tends to be complex, archaic, and often inaccessible, especially in jurisdictions where English is not the first language. In Nigeria, the legal community's reliance on such complex structures often results in miscommunication and conflicting interpretations of judgments.

Hermeneutic Theory of Legal Interpretation: Derived from the broader field of hermeneutics—the study of interpretation—this theory holds that legal texts must be understood within their linguistic, social, and contextual frameworks. Gadamer (1975) emphasized that meaning is not fixed in texts but emerges from the interaction between the text and its interpreter. In the judicial context, this theory explains why multiple judges might interpret the same judgment differently, especially when the language used is ambiguous or structurally flawed. This supports the study's claim that the misuse of English language is a key factor in conflicting interpretations of judicial decisions.

Together, these theories help to analyse how poor command of legal language contributes to inconsistency and confusion in the Nigerian criminal justice system. They also provide a lens through which reforms can be proposed, focusing on linguistic clarity and interpretive training.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design, combining document analysis, case study analysis, and semi-structured interviews to explore how the misuse of English contributes to conflicting interpretations of judicial decisions in the Nigerian criminal justice system.

Data Collection Methods

Document Analysis: A purposive selection of 10 criminal case judgments from High Courts, Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court where conflicting interpretations were recorded. Judgments were analysed for linguistic patterns such as ambiguity, grammatical complexity, inconsistent terminology, and interpretative variability.

Review of Statutory Texts: Selected sections of the Nigerian Criminal Code, Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), and Penal Code were examined for language-related ambiguities.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews were conducted with judges, legal practitioners, and law lecturers (10–15 participants) to gather expert insights into how language use affects interpretation of judgments.

Data Analysis: Analysis was used to identify recurring linguistic and interpretive themes across court judgments and interview responses. Discourse Analysis was applied to uncover how language choices contribute to clarity or confusion in legal texts.

Scope and Limitations: The study focused on judgments delivered between 2010 and 2024 to ensure contemporary relevance. Limitations included restricted access to some court judgments, potential bias in interview responses, and the subjective nature of interpreting linguistic patterns.

This methodology was however, viewed suitable for uncovering the nuanced role of language in legal interpretation and for supporting the development of informed recommendations.

Literature Review

A substantial body of literature has examined the complex relationship between language and law, particularly the role that language plays in shaping legal outcomes, influencing judicial interpretation, and determining access to justice. In the Nigerian context, where English is both the official language and a colonial legacy, the clarity and precision of legal language become even more crucial.

Legal Language as a Specialized Register: Tiersma (1999), in his seminal work *Legal Language*, describes legal English as a highly specialized register, characterized by archaic vocabulary, long sentences, and convoluted syntax. He argues that while this legalese developed for precision, it often alienates laypersons and even legal professionals not well-versed in its conventions. His work provides the foundational understanding that legal language, though meant to clarify, can also obscure meaning when poorly used.

Language and Legal Interpretation in Nigeria: In the Nigerian context, Omole and Adeyemi (2018), in “Language and Law: A Nexus in Nigerian Judicial Practice,” examine how linguistic ambiguity contributes to conflicting interpretations in court rulings. They contend that legal practitioners’ poor command of legal English—ranging from grammatical errors to semantic confusion—leads to judgments that are open to multiple interpretations. The authors call for increased training in legal communication as a reform strategy.

Linguistic Ambiguity and Miscarriages of Justice: Egbewole and Alabi (2016), in their article “Language, Legal Interpretation and Judicial Clarity in Nigeria,” analyse how ambiguous language in legal texts contributes to judicial delays and errors. They provide case examples where unclear judicial pronouncements led to conflicting appellate decisions, highlighting the systemic consequences of language misuse.

Judicial Communication and Public Trust: Gibbons (2003), in *Forensic Linguistics*, emphasizes the necessity for clear communication in the justice system. He posits that language used in court judgments and proceedings must be both accurate and accessible, especially in multilingual societies. Though his work focuses broadly on common law jurisdictions, its relevance to Nigeria lies in his advocacy for plain language and transparent legal drafting.

Conflicting Judgments and Interpretive Challenges: Dakas (2019), in “Judicial Precedent and the Challenge of Conflicting Decisions in Nigeria,” notes that inconsistent language in prior judgments often leads to interpretive uncertainty. He links this issue to both linguistic ambiguity and the failure to apply *stare decisis* consistently. He argues that the clarity of legal language is integral to judicial coherence and predictability.

Language Training for Legal Professionals: Olaniyi and Oluremi (2017), in “Language Use and Legal Interpretation in Nigeria’s Judicial Process,” advocate for curriculum reforms in law faculties to include courses in legal English. Their research indicates that many Nigerian lawyers graduate with insufficient training in the linguistic nuances of legal practice, thus contributing to the problem of conflicting judgments and procedural confusion.

The reviewed studies consistently highlight the centrality of language to the effective functioning of the justice system. The research findings converge on a critical point: the misuse of English—whether through poor grammar, ambiguous terms, or inconsistent legal phrasing, is a significant contributor to conflicting interpretations of judgments in Nigeria. Although several scholars have recommended linguistic reforms, practical implementation remains limited. This review justifies the need for this present study, which aims not only to examine the linguistic roots of interpretative conflicts but also to propose actionable solutions, including training in legal English and the promotion of plain language practices within the criminal justice system.

The Impact of Language Abuse on The Interpretation of Laws and Judgements

The abuse of language—especially the misuse of English in legal texts and court judgments significantly undermines the clarity, coherence, and predictability of the Nigerian criminal justice system. When legal practitioners use ambiguous expressions, convoluted syntax, or outdated legalese, the intended meaning of laws and judgments becomes subject to misinterpretation, leading to conflicting rulings and legal confusion. According to Tiersma (1999), legal language should be precise, structured, and resistant to ambiguity. However, when misused, it becomes a source of legal uncertainty rather than a tool for justice. He warns that “legal misunderstanding often stems more from the language of the law than from its substance.” Gibbons (2003) similarly argues that language abuse in legal settings distorts legal meaning, especially in multilingual and postcolonial contexts, making justice inaccessible to both professionals and the general public.

In Nigeria, several studies have drawn direct connections between linguistic deficiencies and interpretative challenges. Omole and Adeyemi (2018) contend that ambiguous language in legal documents has led to conflicting interpretations even at the appellate level. Their analysis of court rulings shows that when judges are faced with unclear phrasing or contradictory expressions in legal texts, they are forced to rely on personal interpretations, which may vary significantly across jurisdictions. Egbewole and Alabi (2016) go further by identifying specific linguistic markers—such as redundant modifiers, double negatives, and poorly defined legal terms—as culprits in delayed or contradictory judgments. They cite instances where judges misapplied legal provisions because of textual ambiguities that could have been avoided with

clearer drafting. This misuse of language not only impairs the interpretation of existing laws but also erodes the authority of the judiciary. It contributes to prolonged litigation, increases appeals based on technicalities, and allows room for judicial activism or bias disguised as interpretation. Moreover, litigants, especially those without strong legal representation, find it difficult to understand court rulings, thereby obstructing access to justice.

Analysing the Nigerian Context and Relevant Case Laws

In the Nigerian legal context, where English is both a second language and the medium of court proceedings, the misuse or inadequate command of the language has a uniquely disruptive impact. Despite being modeled on the English common law tradition, Nigeria's legal system must navigate the complexities of interpreting laws written in a non-native language for a multilingual society. This results in not just linguistic but also cultural and contextual gaps in understanding. One illustrative case is *Okocha v. The State* (1995) 6 NWLR (Pt. 401) 321. In this case, the appellate court was confronted with a judgment from the lower court that lacked clarity due to poor sentence construction and inconsistent terminology. The appellate court criticized the lower court's use of "vague and imprecise expressions," noting that such language hindered proper review and contributed to conflicting interpretations.

Another case, *Buhari v. INEC* (2008) 19 NWLR (Pt. 1120) 246, highlighted how inconsistent wording in legal submissions and judgments complicated the interpretation of electoral laws. The Supreme Court observed that "the confusion arising from loosely worded pleadings and judgments opens the door to mischief and forum shopping." Similarly, in *INEC v. Action Congress* (2009) 2 NWLR (Pt. 1126) 524, the Court of Appeal struggled to reconcile earlier conflicting decisions due to differences in language and terminology used in interpreting the Electoral Act. The court ultimately acknowledged the urgent need for clearer, standardized legal drafting to avoid interpretive discrepancies. Beyond case law, scholars such as Olaniyan (2016) stress that judicial officers in Nigeria often lack training in legal linguistics, leading to avoidable misstatements and textual ambiguity. He suggests that law schools should incorporate modules on legal communication and drafting to address this deficiency from the foundational level. The Nigerian context is further complicated by regional linguistic diversity and unequal access to legal education, making the consistent use and understanding of legal English a national concern. While the Nigerian Bar Association and National Judicial Council have occasionally emphasized the need for judicial clarity, structural reforms and enforcement mechanisms remain weak.

Causes of Abuse of English In the Nigerian Criminal Justice System

The abuse of English within the Nigerian criminal justice system is neither accidental nor isolated—it is the product of several structural, educational, and professional factors. These factors contribute significantly to the miscommunication, misinterpretation, and inconsistency often seen in legal judgments and statutes. Below are the key causes, supported by scholarly works and case-based analysis.

Lack of Linguistic Clarity in Legal Drafting

One of the most pressing issues in the abuse of English is the poor linguistic quality of legal drafting. Legal documents—ranging from statutes to court judgments—are often written in complex, verbose, and outdated English. This results in unclear, ambiguous phrasing that invites multiple interpretations. Tiersma (1999) asserts that legal drafters frequently overuse archaic terms and complex sentence structures, assuming these add precision. However, in practice, they often obscure meaning. In Nigeria, laws such as the Criminal Code and Penal Code still contain colonial-era phraseology that has not been modernized, leading to confusion among

judges and lawyers. In their analysis, Egbewole and Alabi (2016) show how vague statutory language has led to judicial delays and reversals. They cite several appellate decisions where the courts noted that legislative ambiguity or poorly worded charges from prosecutors resulted in interpretative dilemmas and contradictory verdicts.

Inadequate Training of Legal Professionals in Legal Language

Another major cause of linguistic abuse in legal contexts is the insufficient training of lawyers, judges, and court officials in legal English and legal writing. While Nigerian law schools offer courses in legal method and jurisprudence, few focus systematically on the mastery of legal language as a communicative and interpretive tool. Olaniyi and Oluremi (2017), in their empirical study of legal professionals in southwestern Nigeria, found that many judges and lawyers lacked formal instruction in legal drafting and interpretation. As a result, court proceedings were often marred by poor presentation of arguments, misuse of terminology, and ill-structured judgments. Gibbons (2003) emphasizes that legal professionals need specialized training in forensic linguistics to ensure accuracy and clarity in courtroom language. Without such training, judges are more likely to draft judgments that are open to conflicting interpretations.

Limited Access to Quality Legal Education

The quality of legal education across Nigeria is uneven, especially between urban and rural institutions. Many law faculties operate with outdated curricula, under-resourced libraries, and a lack of exposure to comparative legal-linguistic studies. These deficiencies limit students' ability to master the linguistic and analytical skills required for precise legal communication. Oba (2010) argues that poor language proficiency among law graduates is a direct consequence of weak foundational education in both English and legal writing. His study reveals that many legal practitioners graduate with a limited understanding of how linguistic nuances shape judicial outcomes. Adegoke (2018), in his work on legal education reform, calls for a revision of law school curricula to include modules on "Plain Legal English" and "Language and Judicial Reasoning." He notes that graduates from some Nigerian law faculties struggle to write coherent briefs, draft clear contracts, or interpret judgments effectively.

Summary: Factor, Effect on the System and Key Sources

Lack of linguistic clarity in drafting leads to misinterpretation of laws, conflicting judgments Tiersma (1999), Egbewole & Alabi (2016)

Inadequate training in legal language results in poor courtroom expression, unclear judgments, and ineffective legal advocacy Olaniyi & Oluremi (2017), Gibbons (2003)

Limited access to quality legal education Produces legal practitioners with weak linguistic and interpretive skills Oba (2010), Adegoke (2018)

These factors, when combined, create a cycle of miscommunication and inconsistency in the Nigerian criminal justice system. Recognizing and addressing them is crucial for judicial reform, especially if the goal is to reduce conflicting interpretations of judgments and restore faith in the rule of law.

Impact of Abuse of English on Conflicting Judgements

The abuse of English in legal communication has had a far-reaching and detrimental effect on the Nigerian criminal justice system, particularly in the form of conflicting judgments. This problem manifests when different courts-especially courts of coordinate jurisdiction or even appellate courts-interpret the same legal provisions, precedents, or judicial pronouncements in divergent ways due to linguistic ambiguity or miscommunication.

At the core of these conflicts is the inconsistent, imprecise, or outdated use of English in judicial writing and legal drafting. Legal expressions that lack clarity or consistency often lead to misinterpretation, leaving room for multiple and contradictory readings of the same legal texts or judgments.

Erosion of Judicial Consistency and Precedent: One major impact of the abuse of English is the erosion of the doctrine of stare decisis, which is the bedrock of legal predictability and fairness. When courts interpret laws and judgments differently due to linguistic confusion, legal consistency is undermined. Dakas (2019), in *Judicial Precedent and the Challenge of Conflicting Decisions in Nigeria*, emphasizes that “language abuse creates semantic inconsistencies that disrupt the logic of precedent.” He analyzes several appellate decisions where poor drafting in earlier rulings led to interpretive confusion and contradictory verdicts. According to him, “semantic ambiguity in one court judgment becomes a virus that infects the reasoning in another.”

Miscarriage of Justice and Procedural Delays Ambiguous or poorly worded judgments create confusion not only for judges but also for legal practitioners and litigants. Such confusion often leads to unnecessary appeals, reversals, and retrials, which delay the delivery of justice and burden the court system. Omole and Adeyemi (2018), in *Language and Law: A Nexus in Nigerian Judicial Practice*, analyze multiple criminal cases where imprecise language in judgments caused appeals to be upheld, not because of evidentiary errors, but because the meaning of the lower court’s decision could not be clearly ascertained. They argue that poor use of English acts as an “invisible procedural defect” that courts must constantly correct.

Confusion in Legal Interpretation and Multiplicity of Rulings: Language abuse also leads to varying interpretations of statutes and judgments, particularly when key legal terms or judicial directives are not uniformly defined or applied. For instance, in *INEC v. Action Congress* (2009), the Court of Appeal faced difficulty reconciling its ruling with previous decisions because of inconsistencies in language and terminology used in interpreting the Electoral Act. Similarly, in *Buhari v. INEC* (2008), the Supreme Court lamented how vague and imprecise pleadings submitted in earlier trials resulted in conflicting understandings of legal arguments and electoral procedures. The Court noted that such linguistic issues not only confuse the judges but also empower litigants to exploit semantic loopholes for strategic advantage.

Loss of Public Confidence in the Judiciary: When conflicting judgments occur frequently, especially on similar legal questions, the public begins to question the neutrality, competence, and credibility of the judiciary. Abuse of English in court language contributes to this problem by making court rulings inaccessible to ordinary citizens and reinforcing perceptions of judicial arbitrariness. Gibbons (2003), in *Forensic Linguistics*, stresses that clarity of legal language is vital not only for fair judicial interpretation but also for public trust in the justice system. He argues that “when justice cannot be understood, it cannot be respected.”

Summary : Impact, Explanation and Sources

Erosion of judicial consistency ambiguous language disrupts the application of precedent Dakas (2019)

Miscarriage of justice and delays appeals and retrials due to unclear rulings Omole & Adeyemi (2018)

Conflicting legal interpretations courts interpret same laws/judgments differently INEC v. Action Congress (2009), Buhari v. INEC (2008)

Loss of public trust complex and contradictory rulings alienate citizens Gibbons (2003)

These impacts reveal the urgent need to reform language use in Nigeria's criminal justice system. Without clear, accessible, and consistent legal English, the risk of conflicting judgments and miscarriages of justice will continue to persist.

Examining How Language Abuse Contributes to Conflicting Judgements

The abuse of the English language in the Nigerian criminal justice system significantly contributes to the problem of conflicting judgments. This abuse is primarily reflected in the ambiguity, vagueness, misinterpretation, and inconsistent use of legal principles that arise from poor linguistic expression in legal drafting and judicial pronouncements. Each of these dimensions creates room for uncertainty in judicial reasoning and undermines the predictability of court decisions.

Ambiguity and Vagueness in Legal Language

Ambiguity- when a word, phrase or provision can support two or more distinct interpretations arises when a legal text or judgment can be reasonably understood in more than one way, while vagueness- when the meaning is indeterminate, fuzzy or has borderline cases, occurs when the boundaries of a legal concept are unclear. Both are common features in legal documents where English is poorly or inconsistently used. Legal drafters in Nigeria often rely on archaic or overly technical phrases without regard for clarity, leading to judgments that are difficult to interpret. For instance, Egbewole and Alabi (2016) point out that the use of double negatives, excessive qualifiers, and obscure terms in criminal statutes has led to prolonged litigation and appellate intervention. The presence of two negatives ("no...not) in "no person shall not be denied emergency medical treatment" makes it grammatically and legally unclear whether the clause creates a right(person shall not be denied) or prohibition (no person shall not be denied).

This sort of construction invites litigation about whether the phrasing creates a substantive right enforceable in court or is simply poor drafting. Litigations stem repeatedly from the use of excessive qualifiers such as "reasonable", "sufficient", "substantial", "in the opinion of" in statutes that criminalize conduct -when an officer has "reasonable cause to suspect" or when something is done "without reasonable excuse" or when an act is done "in the opinion of" an official. Such litigations are with regards to whether the statutory qualifier was satisfied by the facts.

A notable example includes poorly phrased charges that fail to clearly define the offense, resulting in dismissals or retrials. The Nigerian supreme court has recently reaffirmed that an unsigned charge or other fundamental formal defects can render a trial a nullity(not a mere technical irregularity).That means the whole proceedings may be struck out rather than cured- leading to discharge, quash or (in some circumstances) retrial only if Jurisdiction can be restored. See *State v.Tari Sabagi/ State v.Amos*(Supreme Court discussions in 2024 about unsigned charge being jurisdictional). In *Abidoeye v. Federal Republic of Nigeria*- defendants were charged on many counts described as laced with "intent to defraud"where the way the counts were framed did not disclose a recognized offence or the necessary ingredients; on appeal the defect in the charge was central to quashing convictions or ordering remedies.(Reports of the appeal and commentary describe the counts as defective because the essential ingredients were not properly pleaded).

Tiersma (1999) supports this position, noting that legal ambiguity-when not intentional, is "a design flaw" that invites conflicting readings. He argues that plain and direct language should be the goal of all legal drafting.

Using "And/ Or" Clauses: Example. A statute might criminalize behavior done "with Force and violence, or by intimidation".

Drafted badly, a prosecutor may charge that an act was done “with Force and violence and/or intimidation.”

Courts then split: some read “and/or” conjunctively (both required), others disjunctively (either sufficient).

Result: contradictory appellate rulings, all because the drafting used a clumsy connector.

Tiersma critiques this kind of drafting as unnecessary complication; plain English would specify “either...or..”.

Here are some examples of ambiguity and vagueness in Nigerian Legal Language:

1. Placement or scope of modifiers (“only,” etc)

Example:

A sentence in statute: “The Secretary of the Council of Legal Education may only authorize expenditure exceeding N100,000”.

This can be read in two ways:

(a) Only the Secretary, of all people, may authorize expenditures over that amount; or

(b) The Secretary has authority only over expenditures exceeding N 100,000 (so he cannot authorize anything less).

The ambiguity arises from where “only” attached. This kind of ambiguity arises from syntax and “scope” or modifiers.

2. Use of “or” vs “and”

If a law says “X shall committ offence if he does A or B”, is it disjunctive (A or B suffices) or conjunctive (both A or B required)? Sometimes the law or judgement treats “or” as “and” to avoid absurdity because the plain text is unclear.

3. Undefined general terms:

E.g a statute refers to “public interest”, due process”, “reasonable time”, or proper exercise of discretion” without defining those terms. Different judges may interpret what “reasonable” means differently: what is reasonable in one case may not be in another. That is ambiguity: multiple possible paths.

4. Overlap/ conflict in provisions

Suppose one section of a statute says “all vehicles must stop at the border checkpoint”, while another section gives an exception for “official vehicles”. If “official vehicle” isn't defined, or if the scope of “official” is vague, whether some government vehicle qualifies may be ambiguous.

Examples of vagueness in Nigerian Legal Language

1. “Any way not specifically defined in this law”

Example: Section 97(3) of the Criminal Law of Lagos State

“Any person who attempts, in any way not specifically defined in this law, to obstruct, prevent, pervert or defeat the course of Justice is guilty of a misdemeanor...”

The phrase “in any way specifically defined” is vague: what are all the “ways” not specified? How do you know whether a particular action is or not “specifically defined”? This leaves borderline cases and gives wide discretion.

2. ” Consultation “ in constitutional or statutory provisions

In some legal provisions, the word “consultation” is required - for example, where a law says a minister must act “after consultation with” some other body. What degree of consultation? Is it formal/minutes, or informal? Does

“consultation” require agreement, or just that the other party be heard? The lack of definition makes this vague.

3. “Reasonable time/ reasonable” type clauses

Many laws and contracts use “reasonable” or “ reasonable time” without specifying. What is “ reasonable time” to deliver a document? What is “ reasonable conduct” in the performance of contractual obligations? These produce fuzzy edges: the courts often have to interpret these on case-by -case basis.

4. “Proper exercise of discretion” / “ due process”

Terms like “due process”, “natural justice” ,” proper exercise of discretion” are often used without granular detail, creating vagueness. For instance, a law may require administrative authorities to act in a “fair manner” or “ justifiable manner” but leave undefined what procedures or standards constitute fairness or justifiability.

Misinterpretation of Laws and Statutes

When judges and legal practitioners confront poorly drafted or ambiguously worded legislation, they are often forced to fill in the gaps using personal reasoning or judicial discretion. This leads to divergent interpretations of the same law, especially in criminal cases where precision is essential.

In *INEC v. Action Congress* (2009), (also reported as *Action Congress v Osun State INEC* (2009) in many sources.

Background

. The Action Congress and some other parties challenged the conduct of local government elections in Osun State scheduled for 15 December 2007. They argued the elections were invalid because the statutory notice periods required by the Electoral Act 2006 (Federal Law) were not complied with. Specifically, there was a requirement under the Electoral Act that a 150-day notice must be given for certain elections, which the appellants claimed had not been met.

Misinterpretation/ incorrect Interpretation by lower court

The lower court (Osun State High Court, and later the chief judge)

Interpreted a provision (possibly, a state Electoral Law) to mean that a much shorter notice (21 days or similar) was sufficient. They treated a State law's provision as consistent with a federal law requirement or effectively subordinated the federal requirement to the state law.

. The part of the misinterpretation is thinking that a state law could override or reduce what the federal Electoral Act prescribed . The lower courts held that section 10 of the Osun State Electoral Law was consistent with section 31 of the Federal Electoral Act. But the Court of Appeal found that Interpretation incorrect.

Court of Appeal's Correction

The Court of Appeal held that the federal law (Electoral Act) must prevail over any inconsistent state law , per the doctrine of supremacy/ inconsistency under the Constitution . The federal requirement of 150 day notice could not be reduced by state legislation.

The Court also held that the notice given in May 2007 was inadequate- that is, it did not satisfy the 150-day requirement. Therefore, the elections held on December 15, 2007 were nullified.

Misinterpretation of Key Points

The lower court misinterpreted the relationship between the state and federal statutes, failing to respect that federal law supercedes conflicting state law.

The lower court misinterpreted or misapplied the notice- period requirement, possibly by misreading Language about when notice must be given and what sources of law apply.

There was also misinterpretation in squatting “substantial compliance” or “adequate notice” (from state law or in practice) with the strict requirement of the federal statute. The appellate court thought that insufficient.

The appellate court struggled to apply the same provision of the Electoral Act as in previous cases due to linguistic inconsistencies in earlier rulings. This resulted in a decision that directly contradicted earlier precedent.

Similarly, in *Okocha v. The State* (1995), the court identified serious ambiguities in the lower court’s judgment that complicated the appeal process. These included incomplete sentences, inconsistent terminology, and vague reasoning that left the appellate court to “guess the intention of the trial judge.”

Such misinterpretations are often not caused by legal disagreement, but by linguistic defects in the text or judgment under review.

Inconsistent Application of Legal Principles

The abuse of English in judicial reasoning can lead to the inconsistent application of legal principles, even where case facts are similar. When the same principle is described in different ways across multiple judgments—due to imprecise language or poor articulation—courts at the same level may unknowingly contradict one another. Dakas (2019) notes that “linguistic inconsistency in the articulation of legal doctrines has led to multiple lines of authority on identical issues.” For example, courts may interpret “reasonable doubt” or “burden of proof” differently, not because the doctrine has changed, but because its expression varies from one judgment to another.

Moreover, inconsistent terminology—such as switching between “conviction” and “finding of guilt” without distinction—further complicates legal analysis. This leads to conflicting decisions and impairs the ability of lawyers to advise clients or predict case outcomes based on precedent.

Language Issue	Consequence	Supporting Work/Case
Ambiguity and Vagueness	Multiple Interpretation of the same statute or judgement	Egbewole & Alabi (2016) Tiersma (1999)
Misinterpretation of Statutes	Contradictory application of laws by different courts	INEC v. Action Congress (2009); <i>Okocha v. The State</i> (1995)
Inconsistent Terminology	Legal Divergent understanding and use of legal principles	Dakas (2019)

In sum, the abuse of English—whether through ambiguity, vagueness, or inconsistent expression—serves as a root cause of conflicting judgments in the Nigerian criminal justice system. This phenomenon undermines the doctrine of precedent, erodes judicial credibility, and obstructs access to justice. Addressing these linguistic issues through

legal education reform, language training, and clearer drafting standards is imperative for the restoration of consistency and fairness in judicial decision-making.

Consequences of Conflicting Judgements

Conflicting judgments in the Nigerian criminal justice system are not merely technical or procedural issues -they carry serious consequences for the rule of law, access to justice, and public confidence in the judiciary. These consequences are exacerbated when conflicting judgments stem from the abuse of language, which creates inconsistencies in legal reasoning, interpretation, and application. This section explores the far-reaching implications of such contradictions, focusing on the erosion of trust, injustice, and legal inefficiency.

Erosion of Trust in the Justice System

Public confidence in the judiciary depends on the predictability, coherence, and fairness of court decisions. When courts of coordinate or even superior jurisdiction issue conflicting rulings on similar legal questions, it leads to perceptions of bias, incompetence, or corruption. This weakens the authority of the courts and undermines the foundational principle of legal equality. Gibbons (2003) asserts that when legal language is abused and judgments are inconsistent, "the legal system becomes linguistically inaccessible and morally questionable." In Nigeria, the frequency of conflicting decisions-especially in politically sensitive or high-profile criminal cases, has fueled public skepticism and diminished trust in the objectivity of the judiciary. Dakas (2019) also highlights that the inconsistency of judicial decisions due to language-related confusion has turned the courts into arenas of unpredictability, where litigants and lawyers exploit interpretive gaps to gain advantage.

Injustice and Miscarriage of Justice

One of the gravest consequences of conflicting judgments is the potential for injustice and miscarriage of justice. When courts interpret the same law or judgment differently, similarly situated defendants may receive different outcomes-one may be convicted while another is acquitted, despite comparable facts and legal arguments. Omole and Adeyemi (2018) cite instances where unclear judgments or misapplied legal principles led to the wrongful conviction or discharge of accused persons. In *Okocha v. The State* (1995), the appellate court criticized the lower court for drafting a judgment with vague and contradictory language that made it difficult to affirm or overturn the conviction without ambiguity. These inconsistencies violate the constitutional guarantee of fair hearing under Section 36 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and diminish the legitimacy of the justice system.

Delays and Increased Costs in Legal Proceedings

Conflicting judgments often lead to prolonged litigation, as parties are forced to appeal, seek clarifications, or request retrials to resolve ambiguities. This not only clogs the court dockets but also imposes financial and emotional burdens on litigants. Olaniyi and Oluremi (2017) argue that linguistic deficiencies and conflicting rulings contribute to judicial inefficiency, noting that many cases that reach the appellate courts do so because of technical or semantic issues, not substantive legal errors. This results in unnecessary delays and drains judicial resources. The economic cost is also significant. Legal fees, court filing expenses, and transportation costs accumulate as cases linger, particularly affecting indigent defendants who lack the means to pursue prolonged appeals.

Summary: Consequence Explanation and Supporting Sources

Erosion of trust in the justice system inconsistent rulings reduce public faith in judicial neutrality and fairness Gibbons (2003); Dakas (2019)

Injustice and miscarriage of justice conflicting decisions may lead to wrongful convictions or arbitrary acquittals Omole & Adeyemi (2018); Okocha v. State

Delays and increased legal costs Confusion and appeals caused by conflicting rulings burden the system and litigants Olaniyi & Oluremi (2017)

The consequences of conflicting judgments go far beyond academic or technical concerns—they directly threaten the core values of justice, equity, and the rule of law in Nigeria. Whether it leads to the loss of public trust, the denial of fair trial rights, or economic burdens on court users, the damage caused by these inconsistencies must be addressed. One fundamental starting point is to confront the abuse of English as a root cause, ensuring that legal language serves clarity, precision, and justice.

Solutions to Mitigate the Abuse of English

Addressing the abuse of English in Nigeria’s criminal justice system is essential for restoring clarity, consistency, and credibility in legal judgments. As demonstrated throughout this study, linguistic deficiencies are a root cause of interpretive confusion and conflicting rulings. The following are proposed solutions to mitigate the problem, based on scholarly recommendations, legal education reforms, and global best practices.

Improvement in Legal Education and Training

One of the most effective long-term solutions is to revise the legal education curriculum to emphasize legal writing, legal English, and language interpretation skills. Law faculties across Nigerian universities should integrate compulsory courses on legal communication and drafting, specifically tailored to the Nigerian multilingual context. Adegoke (2018) recommends the institutionalization of Plain Legal English courses in both undergraduate law programmes and at the Nigerian Law School. He argues that many law graduates lack the linguistic tools to draft clear legal arguments or interpret statutes effectively due to inadequate language-focused training. In addition, clinical legal education programmes should be encouraged to develop students’ practical communication skills in real-world legal settings, as done in other common law jurisdictions like the UK, Canada, and South Africa.

Promotion of Clear and Concise Legal Language

Another critical reform is the adoption of plain language principles in legal drafting. Judges, lawyers, and legislators must be encouraged—and in some contexts required—to use simple, direct, and unambiguous language in statutes, judgments, and legal correspondence. Tiersma (1999) and Gibbons (2003) both advocate for a “Plain Language Movement” in legal systems to improve public understanding and judicial coherence. In Nigeria, this means replacing verbose colonial-era expressions with modern, standard English, and adopting editorial guidelines that prioritize clarity over formality. The Law Reform Commission of Nigeria, as well as bar associations, could issue style manuals or drafting guides to support consistent use of terminology and sentence structure across jurisdictions.

Enhancement of Judicial Training and Capacity Building

In-service training for judges and magistrates is essential to address the linguistic dimensions of judgment writing and statutory interpretation. Many judges operate with outdated legal language norms or limited exposure to discourse analysis and interpretive techniques.

Olaniyi and Oluremi (2017) recommend continuous judicial education workshops that include modules on legal English, textual coherence, and linguistic analysis of statutes. These programmes, ideally facilitated by the National Judicial Institute (NJI), should also focus on how to avoid ambiguous phrasing and structure judgments for clarity and precedent value. This approach not only builds capacity but also reinforces the consistency of rulings across jurisdictions.

Additional Measures:

Development of a National Legal Lexicon: A standardized glossary of legal terms tailored for Nigerian legal use would minimize variation in interpretation and promote uniformity in legal language. Increased Collaboration with Linguists: Courts and legal educators can benefit from partnerships with applied linguists and discourse analysts to evaluate and refine legal communication tools.

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MUSIC AS CATALYST FOR PEACE, UNITY AND NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A SOCIO – PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECT NIGERIA PEACE AND UNITY SONGS

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Abstract

The incessant ethnic conflict, religious intolerance and political instability witnessed in the country, attributed to the multilingual and multicultural nature of Nigeria have left the citizens with sense of fear, despair and loss. These have also threatened the fabric of national unity and hindered social progress. Attempts aimed at putting an end to this menace are on – going. Musicians are not left out in this quest for peace and unity. Consequently, this paper sets out to examine how musical discourse functions as a catalyst for social change and national integration. A purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting two peace and unity songs produced in Nigeria that directly address these challenges. The study adopts a socio-pragmatic framework, applying Presupposition, Context, and Leech’s (1983) Politeness Maxims as analytical tools. Through qualitative analysis, the study reveals among others, that the musicians exploit linguistic politeness, shared cultural presuppositions, and contextual cues to negotiate and broker peace, reinforce unity in diversity as well as appeal to loyalty and empathy. The study concludes that peace and unity songs in Nigeria do not only mirror societal aspirations but also perform pragmatic acts that can shape national consciousness, heal divisions and foster inclusivity and sustainable peace and transformation.

Keywords: National transformation, socio-pragmatics, Nigerian peace and unity songs.

Introduction

The religious, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and ideological diverse natures of Nigeria have been attributed to constitute the reason “her trajectory has been laced with myriads of conflicts right from inception” (Ajayi and Bamgbose, 2019, p. 61). The countless and unceasing ethno-religious, cultural, linguistic and environmental conflicts witnessed in the country between her independence in 1960 and now (2025), corroborates the above submission. Apart from the Biafra Civil War of 1967-1970, Boko Haram Insurgency in the Northern part of Nigeria (Borno, Yobe, Adamawa) from 2011 to date and the Southern Kaduna Killings of 2017, other more recent crises include the Nasarawa Massacre of 2021, Plateau State mass shooting of 2023 among others. These conflicts are tension driven developments that have threatened the peace and unity of the country. On the front burner is the quest for peace and unity in the country. Attempts aimed at ending this ugly trend are on –going. Both the government and individuals are involved in this pursuit, musicians are not left out. The peace and unity songs produced in Nigerian in reaction to this ugly scenario give credence to the above assertion. This paper consequently examines the language of two (2) peace and unity songs with the aim of highlighting their socio-pragmatic import in the Nigeria context. It analyzes some language forms which musicians use in engendering the spirit

of patriotism and commitment in the citizenry. This study also identifies and analyzes the presuppositions embedded in the lyrics that contribute to messages of peace and unity. Using the socio-pragmatic tools of Presupposition, Context, and Politeness Principles, the study sets out to examine music as a catalyst or a tool for negotiating and brokering peace in the nation.

Music has been identified as “literature’s cousin” (Okpara, Orié, Enwurum, Amaechi and Madumelu, 2013, p. 378) Literature is a work of art conveyed with the help of language. This is why Nwahunaya (2010, p.1) sees the study of literature as “the study of literary artifacts, i.e. imaginative verbal constructs that emerge from the creative consciousness of literary artists”. Musicians are literary artist that convey their messages using language. The language forms employed by musicians most times capture the ills that permeate the society. Onyeji, (2012) in support opines that although music is relished as a creative art, the philosophy behind its creation and practice is not separated from human social life or produce for reflection, but relates to the social and cultural needs of the people. Just like every other aspect of literature, music is employed for the purpose of entertainment, information and education. This is why Okafor, cited in Ajamgbe and Ahanotu (2014, p. 115), sees a musician as a keeper of public conscience and an educator.

Purpose of the Study

This study sets out to:

1. identify and analyse the presuppositions embedded in the lyrics that contribute to messages of peace and unity.
2. examine how contextual features shape the meaning and interpretation of select Nigerian peace and unity songs.
3. uncover how politeness strategies are deployed to promote harmony, reduce conflict and foster national cohesion.

Theoretical Approaches

This study is primarily anchored on Leech’s (1983) Politeness Principles, complemented by Hyme’s (1962) Context Theory and Stalnaker’s (1974) Presupposition Theory. Pragmatics has to its credit many definitions from different scholars such as Morris (1938) Levinson (1983), Leech (1983), Crystal (1985), Yule (1996), Mey (2001) Grundy (2008), Udofot (2011) and etcetera. Leech and Short (1981, p. 290) opine that pragmatics is “ the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered. Supporting this view, Jackson and Stockwell (2011, p.180) aver that the discipline of pragmatics has developed to account for the “use of language in context” pragmatics considers people’s intended meanings, assumptions, purposes and goals and the kinds of actions they are performing when they communicate (Yule, 1996). In pragmatics, the analyst interprets meaning from the point of view of the language user, in relation to the context of use. Hence, user’s point of view, and context of use can be seen as dominant features in pragmatics analysis.

According to Holmes (2008, p.2), “Sociolinguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and the context in which it is used.” It x-rays the affinity between language and society. Consideration on how social situations affect the way language is used in a society, presupposes a socio- pragmatic approach to language study. This accounts for Agbedo, Krisagbedo and Buluan (2013, p.46) assertion that “socio-pragmatics refers to the way conditions of language use derive from the social situation” The present study aims at examining the social – pragmatic features of Nigeria peace and unity songs produced in the wake of countless ethno-religious,

cultural, environmental and linguistic conflicts. Context, identified as the “third face” of language (others being ‘expression’ and ‘meaning’) is significant in producing and interpreting utterance. Context enables an expression to convey a speaker’s intended meaning and be correctly interpreted by a hearer, (Finegan 2012, p.5). Odebummi (2006) cited in Aremu and Alayande (2011, p.143) sees context as “the spine of meaning” which is fundamental to pragmatic analysis. Utterances are appropriately produced and interpreted when consideration is made to the environment of use. This environment of use could be physical, psychological, socio-cultural and linguistic in nature. Physical context takes account of how participants, activities, place and time influence production and interpretation of an utterance. Psychological context considers how the state of mind of interlocutors affect the production and interpretation of utterances. Linguistic context considers the appropriateness of the individual’s lexical items that constitute an utterance while socio-cultural context considers how beliefs, values systems, cultural heritage and religion of interlocutors affect the production and interpretation of utterances. Insights from context point to the fact that language does not occur in a vacuum.

Another pragmatic concept that serves as tool for data analysis is Presupposition. It has been discovered that when speakers encode their message, they often fashion it in such a way that they intentionally leave some things unstated, assuming their hearers already know them. This assumed common ground or certain shared background information by interlocutors is called ‘Presupposition’ (Stalnaker, 1978, Kempson, 1977). It is seen as “the necessary preconditions or assumptions made in speaking or writing an utterance, distinct from what may actually be asserted (Wales 2011, p. 34). It is to assume or take something for granted in advance without saying it (Akmajian, Demers, Famer and Harnish 2008, p. 400). Presupposition is semantic and pragmatic in nature. The former is ‘the accommodated beliefs necessary for an utterance to make sense’ while the latter is “the accommodations needed for an utterance to be appropriate” (Grundy 2008, p. 48). By indication, semantic presupposition looks at the grammatical aspect of an utterance while pragmatic presupposition considers the appropriateness of utterance in a particular context. Yule (1996) quoted in Osisanwo (2008, p. 87-89) categorizes presupposition into (i) Factive (ii) non – factive (iii) existential (iv) lexical (v) counter-factive and (vi) structural. Factive Presupposition entails the use of verbs like “realize”, “regret”, “know” before a piece of presupposed information. Non- factive presupposition entails the use of verbs such as “imagine”, “dream” and “pretend” before presupposed information, rendering the information untrue. Existential presupposition involves the use of nouns or definite noun phrases and possessive constructions. Lexical presupposition happens when a speaker’s use of a particular expression is taken to presuppose another concept that is unstated. Counterfactive presupposition is related to non- factive presupposition. Here, what is presupposed is not just untrue but opposite of what is true. A typical example of this presupposition is the English conditional if-clause construction. Structural presupposition occurs when the form or structure of a sentence implies that something is true even when not obviously stated. The WH- question construction in English is a typical example of structural presupposition.

Politeness principle is another important concept of pragmatics. It was brought to lime light in the 1970s by the cultural anthropologists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. It is the verbal and non- verbal behaviour that makes a person to maintain face in a conversation (Brown and Levinson (1987). Leeche’s (1983) contribution on politeness principles is relevant to this study. He says that the purpose of politeness principles is to establish feeling of community and social relationship. Thus, he

described them as verbal and non-verbal behaviour that maintain harmonious relations (Aremu and Alayande 2011, p. 144). He proposes seven maxims of politeness which are (i) Tact Maxim (ii) Generosity Maxim (iii) Approbation Maxim (iv) Modesty Maxim (v) Agreement Maxim (vi) Sympathy Maxim and (vii) Pollyanna Maxim. The Tact Maxim advocates that speakers should minimize cost to other and maximize benefit to other. The Generosity Maxim encourages speakers to minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self. The Approbation Maxim requires speakers to minimize dispraise of other and maximize praise of other. The Modesty Maxim expects speakers to minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise self. The Agreement Maxim emphasizes the need to maximize agreement between self and other and minimize disagreement between self and other. The Sympathy Maxim stresses the need to minimize antipathy between self and other and maximize sympathy between self and other. (Leech, 1983). Finally, Pollyanna Maxim points that people often consider the bright side instead of the gloomy side in discussing others. (Aremu and Alayande 2011, p. 145; Ewurum, Njoku and Umeh, 2019, p. 65). Presupposition, Context and Politeness Principles aforementioned, will serve as analytical tools in examining the language use of the musicians in relations to the Nigerian context.

Conceptual Elucidation

The concept ‘transformation’ became topical in the affairs of the nation following the rise to power of former president Goodluck Jonathan on the promise of a Transformation Agenda. Transformation is a fundamental shift in the deep orientation of a person, an organization, or a society, such that the world is seen in new ways and new actions and results become possible that were impossible prior to the transformation (UNDP-LDP, cited in Asobie, 2012) for any nation to attain its desired goals and objectives, transformation is needful. One cannot keep doing same things in anticipation of new results. Therefore, there is need for a change of modus operandi for new desired results to be accomplished. Doing things in novel ways engender performance of great feat. Impossibilities become possible in the face of transformation. Akunyili (2013) corroborates this view as she asserts that ‘for any entity of system, organic or inorganic, to progress, to make lasting impact, it must transform. It cannot afford to remain static. It must innovate or it dies’. She further says that ‘transformation or change across board is sine qua non, a necessary condition, for a nation’s evolution’

It is deducible from the above expression that any nation that desires development or that wants to make lasting impact has to transform; otherwise it dies, and becomes a history. Transformation means the change of individual’s attitudes and beliefs for the realization of feats hitherto not achieved. Individual’s attitudes and beliefs can be influenced by the happenings in the society. They could also be influenced by the lyrics of music they listen to. Hence, music is perceived as a communicative device that serves as an important component of systems of persuasion and manipulation. It has a powerful influence over human behavior, exercised for a host of political, social and economic goals (Browns, 2006). Music plays an indispensable role in behavioral control by changing the systems of beliefs and attitude of the individual through persuasion. It is the intent of this study to consider not only the messages laden in the musical communication but the motives behind their use. Music, which is an aspect of man’s culture, appeals to people everywhere and has been the heart of all human societies (Ajefu 2012, p. 17). This is why it is often referred to as ‘The international language’ Music captures the perceptions of the ills that permeate societies it emanates from and also influences those societies in turn, thereby contributing meaningfully to national transformation. The peace and unity songs

produced in Nigeria in the wake of ethno-religious, cultural, linguistic and environmental conflicts give credence to the above assertion. "Peace is a state of harmony characterized by the lack of violence, conflict behaviours and the freedom from fear of violence" (Olufemi 2014, P.130). A peaceful environment opens doors for innumerable feats. Where there is no peace there is a questionable level of transformation. Peace drives away hostilities that threaten harmonious relations. Musicians acknowledge the functionality of a peaceful and united society in the actualization of any nation's visions and missions which may incorporate desire for transformation. They believe that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design hinged on descriptive and interpretive analysis. The design will enable the researcher provide in-depth analysis of the peace and unity songs produced in Nigeria in the wake of ethno-religious, cultural, linguistic and environmental conflicts witnessed in the country. Two peace and unity songs that serve as the primary source of data were selected through a purposive sampling technique, because of their relevance to national issues and their popularity in fostering peace, reconciliation and transformation. They include: Shadrach John (2011). "A Peace Song" and Onwenu O. and Zaiky (2014). "This land – celebrating 100 years of Nigeria" Transcribed lyrics of the songs serve as data for analysis. They are employed to analyze the language use of the musicians in relation to the context of use. Printed materials in the library and internet serve as secondary source of data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section hosts both data presentation and analysis. To facilitate reading and understanding, the two peace and unity songs with the titles; "A Peace Song" and "This Land" will be presented as excerpts 1 and 2 respectively. Each will be analyzed separately using the analytical tools adopted for this study.

Excerpt 1

Woke up one early morning no children playing
No sound of greetings one neighbor to another
Oh it's quite gloomy
Peace don't live here no more no more
Can't believe how much we have hurt each other
Can't believe the damage we have done
Brother hurting brother
Neighbour harming neighbour
Children grieving for their parents
Hacked home before their time oh oh
I can't go out
I don't know who to trust
Fear is just the order of the day
Is this the way we want to live?

With peace we don't have to worry
Where peace reigns fear is out the door
With peace we can work out our differences
Put an end to all the hate

Leave no room in your heart for vengeance and hatred no no no
A knife for a knife so lives everyone

We have our differences we cannot change things making wars
Without peace our dreams are gone
Without peace there is no home to build
To make Nigeria the country of our dreams

Wake up everybody; it's time to build a new day
Enough is enough let's put the past behind us
Because when there is peace we can build a new Nigeria
Enough is enough let's give peace a chance

Nigeria bianu!
Ummunnem ka-anyi biri n'udo n'udo n'udo
(Shadrach John, 2011)

Discussion on Excerpt 1

Excerpt 1 is a peace and unity song written by Shadrach John, produced by Wole Oni and Jeremiah Gyang and directed by Steve Gukas. The song is a collaborative effort and part of the Neighbor to Neighbor Peace Project album, featuring about fourteen influential gospel and mainstream artists from different parts of Nigeria, representing Nigeria's multi-ethnic, multi-Lingual, multi-religion and multi-cultural nature. Some of these artists include; Onyeka Onwenu, Jeremiah Gyang, Sunny Nneji, Timi Dakolo, Segun Obe, Yinka David and many others. The emphasis of the song is on national peace and unity. The song was released in the year 2011 when Nigeria witnessed an upsurge insurgency

Elements of Presuppositions in Excerpt 1

Presuppositions are the necessary preconditions or assumptions made in speaking or writing an utterance distinct from what many actually be asserted (Wales 2011, p. 34). The song writer of 'A Song for Peace' took for granted certain shared background knowledge between him and listeners of the song in the Nigerian context. "Peace don't live here no more" is typical of Existential Presupposition which implies that peace was once the norm and existed in the country but as a result of the incessant ethnic conflict, religious intolerance and political instability has eroded. "Children grieving for their parent" is also a type of Existential Presupposition which implies that parents have been killed as a result of the conflict. "Brother hurting brother" and "Neighbour harming neighbour" also presupposes that the relations that should protect and strengthen us are causing pain and harm. "Wake up everybody" presupposes that citizens have been complacent and inactive towards the nation's crises. "We can build a new Nigerian" presupposes that the present nation is decayed and in need of repairs. Another type of presupposition deployed in the song is Factive Presupposition, for instance "Can't believe how much we have hurt each other", "Can't believe the damage we have done" and "I don't know who to trust". The instances presuppose that much harm had already been done, that violence has led to irreversible damage and that betrayal has become eminent respectively. "Where peace reigns fear is out the door" and "Without peace there is no home to build" presupposes that fear has become a mantra in a nation where peace was previously enjoyed, and that peace is essential for nation/community building and development.

"Enough is enough let's put the past behind us" presupposes that there has been a turbulent past that continues to affect the present Nigeria. "Because when there is peace, we can build a new Nigeria" is a type of Structural Presupposition that presupposes that peace does not exist in the country currently. However, peace is

perceived as the necessary condition for national development. These presuppositions were deployed by the artists to highlight that Nigeria has suffered breakdowns and setbacks as a result of violence, and to reinforce the belief that peace is what the country needs for transformation and development.

Elements of context in excerpt 1.

Context according to Finegan (2012, P.5) “enables an expression to convey a speaker’s intended meaning and be correctly interpreted by a hearer.” The artists deployed physical, socio-cultural psychological and linguistic context in the song “A peace song.” the physical context of the song reveals that it is a song written in Nigeria (2011) within a period of heightened ethnic and religious conflict. When the country witnessed upsurge in terrorism. The artists deployed linguistic context in the song by their repetitive use of phrases like, “Peace don’t live here no more” and “With peace we don’t have to worry” to highlight the central theme of hopelessness and loss. The use of collective pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘our’ reveal that everyone is affected by the violence and the pursuit for peace should be a collective goal. Also, the repetitive use of imperatives such as “Wake up everybody” and “Enough is enough” in the song reveal the level of persuasion and urgency of the artists in their bid to restore peace and unity in the country.

The infusion of Igbo language in “Nigeria bianu” and “Umunnem ka anyi biri n’udo” situate the song within Nigeria multilingual nature emphasizing inclusiveness. The Psychological Context reveals that the artist’s state of mind is that of sadness as a result of the devastating pain caused by insurgency as captured in “Oh it’s quite gloomy”. The socio-cultural context is revealed in “No children playing”, “Brother hurting brother”, “ Neighbour harming neighbour” and “Umunnem ka anyi biri n’udo ” In Africa, the absence of children’s laughter depicts absence of communal joy and social harmony. Also references to “Brother” “Neighbour” and “Umunnem” depict African kinship ties and communalism now affected by violence. Context analysis reveals that the song performs a performative act. Language is employed by the artists to express displeasure as well as lament the loss of lives and property. It also serves as a persuasive call for reconciliation.

Elements of Leech’s Politeness Maxims in excerpt 1.

Leech’s politeness maxims as discussed above will be utilized for analyses. The artists deployed the Tack Maxim in the song such as “With peace we can work out our differences” to minimize imposition and recommend dialogue against war. They equally avoided the use of direct blame on specific group, rather the use of collective pronouns like “we”, and “our” and indefinite pronoun “everybody” were adopted to avoid direct accusations and to foster reconciliation.

The Approbation Maxim is exploited by the artists to extol positive value such as peace and forgiveness rather than focusing on blame. What the country will achieve if the citizens exhibit these positive values is also highlighted. “We can build a new Nigeria”, is deployed to praise unity and progress rather than focus on failure. The Agreement Maxim is exploited in Phrases like “Enough is enough”, “Let’s put the past behind us” and, “Leave no room in your heart for vengeance” to seek common ground by appealing to shared challenges and desire for progress. The Agreement Maxim is deployed to foreground unity over division. The Sympathy Maxim is exploited in phrases like “Children grieving for their parents”, “Our struggles and fear”, and “Umunnem ka anyi biri n’ udo” to invoke empathy and emotional solidarity with victims of violence, reveal shared aggravation and appeal to shared humanity and relationship respectively. The Generosity Maxim is exploited by the artists to

maximize benefit for all citizens by shunning revenge and hatred as captured in the song “Leave no room in your heart for vengeance and hatred”, “A knife for a Knife so lives everyone”. The target is to promote a life of forgiveness, and sacrifice for the greater good of the nation. The Pollyanna Maxim is exploited in “Because when there is peace, we can build a new Nigeria” to highlight the bright side of life peace can foster if allowed to thrive in Nigeria. Generally, the artists exploited Politeness Maxims in order to cushion the effects of harsh conflict realities, evoke empathy and foster peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Excerpt 2

1. Oh this Land of mine,
Nigeria on my mind
Born in diversity
Blessed beyond comparison
Through these 100 years,
Our struggles and through all our fears
We are strong in our unity, peace our destiny

CHORUS

Here we are, standing tall
Through adversity
We are one
One hundred years of unity
Nigeria, we will stand.

2. Oh this land of mine, Nigeria on my mind.
I pledge to you my loyalty, my love, my ability
When else we celebrate ourselves, we shall be dead again
To serve a new Nigeria, for a better land for all.

SOLO

Tell it on the mountain
Shout it on the valley
Nigeria has come a long way
And it is turning into a future of brighter and better days
Together we will make it strong and
Invincible we are on our way
One nation indivisible, Nigeria is here to stand
(Onyeka Onwenu, 2014)

Discussion on Excerpt 2

The excerpt above represents Onyeka Onwenu’s “This Land” written and performed as Nigeria’s Centenary Anthem to commemorate the country’s one hundred years (100) of Amalgamation in 2014. The song also featured other Nigerian artists from different ethnic, religious and linguistic background to showcase the nation’s strength in diversity.

Elements of Presuppositions in Excerpt 2

“Oh this land of mine, Nigeria on my mind” is a typical of Existential Presupposition that presupposes that Nigeria exists as a beloved, typical homeland. “Born in diversity” presupposes Nigeria’s multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual nature. Another presupposition deployed in the song above is Factive Presupposition, “Through these 100 years, our struggles and through all our fears”,

presupposes that Nigeria has witnessed real and devastating struggles since amalgamation. “We are strong in our unity” presupposes that Nigeria’s unity has been tested, but it remained resilient. “Whenever we celebrate ourselves, we shall be dead again” is an example of Counterfactive Presupposition that presupposes that lack of self-worth and self- appreciation have hindered national progress, and that only collective pride can sustain Nigeria. “Together we will make it strong and invincible” presupposes that Nigeria is not yet fully strong and incapable of being conquered, but can become a formidable force through unity. These Presuppositions were deployed by the artists in the song above to represent Nigeria as a nation tried by adversity yet able to stand strong through collective loyalty and peace.

Elements of Context in Excerpt 2

The physical context of the song reveals that it is a song written in Nigeria to celebrate her 100 years of amalgamation (1914-2014). It showcases Nigeria’s pride, reflection and aspiration. The artists deployed linguistic context by their repetitive use of phrases like, “Oh this land of mine, Nigeria on my mind”, “Standing tall”, “100 years”, and “We are one”, to reinforce unity as the theme of the song. “Tell it on the mountain, shout it in the valley” are imperative sentences functioning as performative directive that encourage public declaration of national pride. Also, the use of collective pronouns like “our” and “we” depict inclusiveness. The Psychological Presupposition of the song is that of commitment and loyalty as captured in “I pledge to you my loyalty, my love my ability”. “Born in diversity, blessed beyond comparison” is typical of Socio-cultural Context depicting explicit acknowledgement of Nigeria’s plurality and reaffirmation of her unity in diversity. Context analyses reveal that the song is a celebratory one that performs a persuasive task of urging Nigerians to pledge loyalty, appreciate our unity in diversity, celebrate achievements and hope for a better tomorrow.

Elements of Leech’s Politeness Maxims in Excerpt 2

The artists deployed the Tact Maxim in “Nigeria has come a long way” to highlight her aspirations while downplaying on her failures and decadence. The Approval Maxim is exploited in the above song, “Blessed beyond comparison” in praise of Nigeria in order to extol her national unity. The Agreement Maxim was exploited by the artists in “We are one...we shall stand”, to seek common ground among Nigerians irrespective of the political, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences. The artists exploited the Generosity Maxim in “I pledge to you my loyalty, my love, my ability” to showcase willingness and passion to serve the nation selflessly. The Pollyanna Maxim is exploited in the song in “Here we are, standing tall. Through adversity, we are one ...”, to look at the bright side of Nigeria being able to stand despite the challenges confronting her. The Sympathy Maxim in, “Our struggles and fears” is exploited to display empathy with Nigerian citizens’ pains creating a connection between artists and Nigerians. These Politeness Maxims were deployed by the artists to avoid conflict, inspire self-respect and foster inclusivity among the Nigeria citizens.

Conclusion

This study has attempted a socio- pragmatic analysis of two peace and unity songs produced in Nigeria, in the wake of ethno-religious, cultural, linguistic and environmental conflicts witnessed in the country, with the intent of investigating how music functions as a potent catalyst for peace, unity and national transformation. Adopting a socio-pragmatic framework, the study utilizes Presupposition, Context and Leech’s Politeness Maxims as analytical tools. From the analyses, the study reveals that the language choices, presupposition, contextual meanings and Politeness Maxims

deployed by the artists exceed just entertainment. The artists' pragmatic import is to encourage reconciliation, appeal to shared national values and foster inclusivity. Finally, the paper concludes that when music is reflectively captured and socially awake, it becomes a unifying language with the potential to inspire patriotism, heal divisions and foster moral, emotional and physical transformation in Nigeria.

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CIVILIZATION OF THE DARK ROMANTIC HEROES IN *THINGS FALL APART* AND *ACROSS THE GOLF*

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Abstract

This study brings to fore the fallibility of the dark romantic heroes in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Johnson's *Across the Gulf*. The human fallibility construed in the internal conflicts and struggle that juxtapose their external achievements reveals the control of the internal construct over the external. Both heroes, Okonkwo and Ofala became very rich and successful in business and family and are highly respected in their communities but committed suicide and died abominably and tragically. The weave of force that pushed them to succeed is the same force that pushed them to their failure and demise. That force is not external or in their actions, it is in the internal construct of their individual minds. This is the place of the highest civilization in the romanticism tenet, where the life of the individual is shaped and becomes the force that drives the individual to the final destination. The dark romantic pursuit of this research discovered that both heroes in their internal construct struggle with fear, guilt, shame, vengeance and self-destruction, all attributes of the internal construct which the romantics have established is the center of all creativity and dictates the variables of individual lives. While Okonkwo was driven by the fear of failure or of being seen as weak triggered by his father's weakness and failure that ended in failure and shameful death, Ofala was driven by the fear and shame of revealing that his wife was not chaste, or later that the only son of the family born to him by his wife is not his son. Both men hide conflict that consumed their minds and while the internal conflict led them to greatness, it ultimately destroyed them. This study establishes that the dark sinister and evil nature can live along with the good within man and can lead to both success and destruction.

Keywords: Civilization, Dark Romanticism, Internal Construct, External Construct

Introduction

This study examines the civilization of the romantic heroes as projected by Chinua Achebe and Dul Johnson in their novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Across the Gulf* respectively. This work will take a sweep through the depiction of the dark romantic complexities that control the behaviour and then project the central position of the romantics on the internal construct leading in the superior road of any civilization of the individual's world. Frye (2006) explaining the Romanticism view of the internal and the external world, he leans heavily on Rousseau representative that "civilization was purely human artifact; something that man made and could unmake ... Above all, it was something for which the only known model was in the human mind." (p. 127) the human mind is the internal construct of the individual's mind that drives for the actions of the individual either in conformity or in the reverse to generate the desired goal of the mind. Yassine, Gabani in his dissertation titled "Dark Romanticism in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of The House of Usher*" relates that: "The main focus of Dark Romanticists was on human psychology and the complexities that control the behaviour. They kept nature as the source of imagination" (7) Dark romanticism writers do not believe that perfection is an innate quality of man. They assert the human fallibility that burdens on fear, shame, guilt, vengeance and self-destruct. G. R. Thompson in "Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition." Enumerates as asserted by Aradhana Mathews and Wafa Hamid: "Dark Romantics are much less confident about the notion that perfection is an innate quality of mankind ... present individuals as prone to sin and self-destruction ... For the Dark Romantics, the natural world is dark, decaying, and mysterious; when it does reveal truth to man, its revelations are evil and hellish." (7)

The Dark Romantic Heroes

The dark romantic heroes are Okonkwo and Ofala. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, was considered one of the bravest men and was respected all over nine villages. He also grew in wealth and prestige and was greatly honoured but inwardly Okonkwo was not perfect. It started with his father. Okonkwo's father was Unoka, a man who was lazy and worthless. He was highly indebted when he died. Okonkwo was ashamed of him and feared greatly anything that will reveal weakness from him and that was Okonkwo's driving force through his journey in life. He had fear and shame that he must defeat at all cost. His father was described thus: "Unoka ... was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. If any money came his way, and it seldom did, he immediately bought gourds of palm-wine, called round his neighbours and made merry ... Unoka was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbour some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts." (3-4) Even though Okonkwo's people did not measure a man's worth by his father's worth it did not diminish the internal occupation of fear and shame that Okonkwo possessed and worked for: "Fortunately among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (7) and despite the achievement of Okonkwo he still feared failure and is ashamed to be called one: "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village ..." (3) Okonkwo was indeed ashamed of his father "When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him?" (7)

In *Across the Gulf*, Ofala, the dark romantic hero and Ifunanya who were engaged to be married. Ofala had paid her bride price and a night before the traditional wedding war broke out in Okigboli, their hometown. They were together when the

explosions started. Ofala had to go back to the Biafran side of the army. Before they parted they made a promise to each other to remain alive and faithful to one another. Ifunanya said “Offy! But her voice was now cold and dreamy... ‘Will you come back?’” Ofala responded “Of course, I will. For you, I will remain alive and come back.” She also promised “For you, I will remain ... sealed, until you return.” (14) Ofala kept his promise, Ifunanya did not keep her promise and that led to a lot of contradictions in the internal construct of the hero that ultimately shaped the journey of the dark romantic hero. Just like Okonkwo, fear, shame and anger became the driving force of the dark romantic hero.

Dark Romanticism

The Dark Romanticism is a reaction to Transcendentalism and focuses on the darkest sides of human behaviour through mentally ill and sinful characters who have frightening experiences (Dinçer, 2010). American Romantic writers that are considered the founding fathers of Dark Romanticism such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe became so relevant that they constitute the canon of nineteenth-century American literature (Jackson, 2016). They combine the romantic dogma with the Gothic flare to create what is now known as Dark Romanticism, their focus on the individual and the internal construct which is central to romantic thoughts is not altered but they imbibed a darker side of the culture moving away from transcendentalism to blend in the darker side of the human nature which is hidden in the inside world of the mind. Marjiya Baktyer Ahmed in his work on Poe’s Gothic Fiction opines that “Dark Romanticism is characterized by a preoccupation with emotions like apprehension, fear, and the grotesque aspect of imagination.” (7) In concluding his essay on Dark Romanticism, Howard exposes the impact that Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville each left on American literature: “Dark Romanticism in doing so, mixing hope and beauty with pessimism and death, along with styles and themes distinctive to each man; their stories take two opposing styles and merge them in a profound and important way.” (9)

Howard in his essay *A New Genre Emerges: The Creation and Impact of Dark Romanticism* opines that: “Authors usually do not combine genres. However, three authors—Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville—each combine two styles, Romanticism and the Gothic, that at first glance appear radically opposite.” (7) He further states that: “They viewed the world darkly. Although some stories do contain elements of hope, in general their works tend to be pessimistic, and deal particularly with death. Morality, the question of evil, and the human psyche all play a role in the canon of all three men” (3) Howard says of Poe “Rather than longing for the beauty of nature, he longs for beauty of the spirit. The link between beauty and death fascinated him, and this ‘is Poe’s dominant theme’ (The Romantic Movement 12).” (3)

Analysis

Frye (2006) explaining the Romanticism view of the internal and the external world, he leans heavily on Rousseau representative assumption that “civilization was purely human artifact; something that man made and could unmake, could subject to his own criticism and was at all times responsible for. Above all, it was something for which the only known model was in the human mind.” (p. 127)

This is what was said of Okonkwo: “Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things” (7), he was considered a strong and fearless man and at a young age he had achieved so much :

He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. (7)

Ofala was also considered rich and successful in farming and business. “Ofala was one of the few young men in Okigboli who could roof their houses with Zink before the war. He was an enterprising young man whose farm produce, especially his yams, were sold all round the year.” (110) and even after the war he was still considered rich. “Immediately after the war, two things consumed his time and energy; repairing his house and getting married ... she did not think he was going to get one hut ready. She could not believe what she saw of the houses after two weeks.” (110-111) she did not know that he had hidden pounds in his house. (110) Ofala was still rich and that surprised his fiancée and later his wife Ifunanya.

Okonkwo’s Fears

Achebe describes Okonkwo’s fear as internal, within his mind which is where the romantics believe creation begins and thus influences the outside action of man. The romantics’ belief in the internalised structure is exemplified in the internal construct of the dark romantic hero shown in this excerpt “Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claws ... it was not external but lay deep within himself” (11) Okonkwo’s fear of failure made him a cruel man. His whole life was dominated with the fear of weakness or failure associated with him so he hid well his emotions; be it that he is sorry or in love.

The week of peace

In the week of peace, a week where violence is prohibited, Okonkwo desecrated the land by beating his wife because she went to plait her hair and did not cook at the right time. “Okonkwo was provoked to justifiable anger by his youngest wife ...” (23) he waited for her to return and then beat her severely. “And when she returned he beat her heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace. His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating half-way through, not even for the fear of the goddess.” (24) He was more afraid of being seen as weak than anything else including the fear of the goddess; he feared weakness and failure more than the spirits and the laws of his land so he was punished: “The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish.” (24) Okonkwo had to make the necessary sacrifices to the goddess for the land to be cleansed. When he went to see the priest “inwardly he was repentant” (25) but because he shielded his emotions so as to avoid being considered weak, people assumed that it was arrogance. They believe his wealth was getting to him. Okonkwo is able to risk anything that is good, his love for the gods and the land, his love for people, his humility and his love for his wives and children for the fear of being seen as weak and as a failure.

Ikemefuna

Ikemefuna stayed in the house of Okonkwo for three years. Okonkwo and his family became Ikemefuna's family. They all loved him including Okonkwo "Even Okonkwo himself became fond of the boy- inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness" (22), he allows Ikemefuna to carry his bag and follow him to meetings; this is a privilege for the favoured male child of the family. "He allowed Ikemefuna to accompany him, like a son, carrying his stool and his goatskin bag. And, indeed Ikemefuna called him father." (23) after three years, the people said the oracle has decided that he should die. Ikemefuna was a replacement to avoid war with the people of Umuofia "As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings and elders. And that was how he came to look after the doomed lad who was sacrificed to the village of Umuofia by their neighbours to avoid war and bloodshed. The ill-fated lad called Ikemefuna." (7) the Ogbuefi Ezendu, the oldest man in the village of Umuofia had come to warn Okonkwo not to be the one to kill the boy "that boy calls you father, do not bear a hand in his death" (45) Okonkwo then asked why the caution and Ogbuefi replied "Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The oracle of the hills and the caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you father." (46)

Okonkwo and the men set out to kill Ikemefuna. Okonkwo was not the person that hit him first and he looked away when it happened because he cared deeply for the boy but he feared more to be called a coward and so he threw the punch that killed Ikemefuna "As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, 'my father, they have killed me!' as he ran towards him dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak." (49) This fear of being called weak over shadowed any goodness in Okonkwo. He killed a boy he loved so much. He had an argument with his best friend on the killing of Ikemefuna "His mind went to his latest show of manliness" (52) he asked his friend why he did not go with them to kill Ikemefuna and if his friend was afraid of blood or if the friend challenged the Oracle. His friend replied: "And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families. Okonkwo replies "The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger ... A child's fingers are not scaled by a piece of hot yam which its mother put's into its palm" (53), his friend did not agree with him and said if his son were to be killed as prescribed by the Oracle, he will not be the one to do it but Okonkwo did it because of a show of manliness "And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death" (15)

Ezendu had died and celebrations were taken place and as was customary guns were fired. Okonkwo's gun hit and killed Ezendu's son mistakenly. "It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the center of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half- brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to the father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart" (99) Okonkwo was banished from the land for seven years. "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after

seven years.” (99) Okonkwo went to stay with his mother’s people for seven years during that time, the white man and Christianity confronted the people.

At the wake of Christianity, a new religion that opposes the traditional Igbo tradition, clashes erupted between the white colonial administrators and the locals and in many villages the locals were wiped out. The Igbo people hated the white missionaries with their new religion and the converts. The converts were the weak and the outcast and the rejected. Okonkwo’s first son Nwoye was converted and joined the Christian faith. Okonkwo was angry. “As Okonkwo sat in his hut that night, gazing into a log fire, he thought over the matter. A sudden fury rose from within him and he felt a strong desire to take up his matchet, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang” (122) Okonkwo had always seen his son as weak and joining the Christian faith made it worse. He sought revenge and hated his kinsmen whom he considered have become soft like women. He secretly desired to wipe them out. His hatred resentment and disgust for his father and now for his son who was like his father, whom he considers a weakling is deep. “Okonkwo was popularly called the ‘Roaring Flame’. As he looked into the log fire he recalled the name. He was a flaming fire. How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? ... Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Nnoka, who was Okonkwo’s father” (123) His hatred was indeed great. He does not want to have anything to do with his son.

“Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women.”(146) he has become accustomed the physical show of power because that enables him to hide his fear well and to show his prowess in strength and war. When he got back to his homeland after seven years and faced humiliation in the hands of the white man he became excited about going to war and taking revenge against the white man. There is going to be a meeting of the whole town and Okonkwo is ready to go to war “Okonkwo slept very little that night. The bitterness in his heart was now mixed with a kind of child-like excitement ... Before he had gone to bed he had brought down his war dress ... and he swore vengeance” (159) when the white man who is the District Attorney sent the local bailiffs to call of the meeting Okonkwo confronted them “In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside his uniformed body.” (163) he realized too late that he was the only one ready for war because nobody joined him and the rest of the bailiffs escaped. And his kinsmen are asking why he killed the bailiff. Okonkwo went back home and killed himself “Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo’s body was dangling, and they stopped dead” (165) and when the district commissioner requested and they showed him the body of Okonkwo, they requested of him to ask his men to take him down and be thrown in the evil forest or buried without honour. The district commissioner asked “Why can’t you take him down yourselves?” (156) they could not because Okonkwo died an abominable death. Killing himself makes him an abomination.

Obierike looked at his friend, Okonkwo’s dangling body, then on hearing the question turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog...” (165) That is the end of Okonkwo, his friend and indeed the village may allude his death to the white man’s evasion but Okonkwo death is as a result of his internal conflict occasioned by fear and self-loth for having a father that is weak. The fear, shame, anger and bitterness against anything or anyone he considers

weak led him to revenge and self-destruct which is the fallibility that defines the civilization of the dark romantics.

Ofala's Fear

For Ofala in *Across the gulf*, when the war started he had two battles in his heart: "The battle for Okigboli had begun. But in Ofala's mind, there were two battles" (16) and upon his arrival from the war, he had his life planned out: "All that lay in the future for Ifunanya and him was happiness and then, children. Then he would return to the business of farming, buy a Peugeot 404 Pick-up and then venture into the vehicle spare parts business, which had just started to boom before the war broke out." (111) Ofala came back and quickly established himself as a successful man that had hidden money before the war and even though the war destroyed some of his things, he rebuilt in less than a month and married the love of his life. On the first night, Ofala was drunk and lacked experience, so he was not sure but suspected that his wife was not a virgin but was afraid to find out. "Now he was confused. ... His peers would ridicule him, yet, something told Ofala that he did not meet his wife at home. A combination of fear and shame ... kept his mouth sealed" (87)

He was not just afraid, he felt shame but remained quiet until Ifunanya his wife told him herself that the pregnancy she is carrying is not his own but that of a Hausa soldier she called John.

Ofala sprang to a sitting position. His head started to pound when he saw Ifunanya. He saw her tears and his head pounded the more. She was pretending and mocking him. He would kill her and damn the consequences. No, he would kill himself instead. The earth could not reject his corpse; no, that was in those days. Besides, it should understand his predicament. What if his enemies got hold of this information? He squirmed at the thought that came to him next. (91)

It is because Ifunanya had told him that the child she is carrying is not his child that he felt betrayed, he had suspected that she was not a virgin on the first night of their marriage when they consummated their marriage "How foolish he had been! How stupid! On the first night he had suspected something, he foolishly dismissed it until she stabbed him with it. Why did he not think beyond that? Why was he so naïve?" (92) He blamed himself which is typical of a dark romantic hero; he felt shame and guilt and pain for what he should have known. Typical of a dark romantic hero he headed for self-destruct. He thought of the best way for his life to end: "Ofala thought and thought until his head fogged with clouds of self-pity and became too heavy to move. ... Ah! The sleep of death! That was far better than suicide. If only it would come! He closed his eyes again, and then passed out." (91-92) He blames himself for not ending it two years ago: "Why had he not ended it all two years ago so as to avoid this pain? Why had he struggled to keep alive when the federal troops forced his platoon into a river and surrounded them until almost everybody drowned or was shot? It was all because of this woman, this ingrate!" (92)

Ofala was successful and rich, the only man who could roof his house with a zinc and also has a bicycle and was trying to buy a pickup and his farm produce sold through the year. He served the elders the best palm wine and his son was offered the best title of the land (111,172 and 173) was in affluence and well respected in the society but his mind was in a battle for dignity. He did not have any other male child outside of Nnanna whom he knew was not his own. Everybody saw that he was not the cheerful Ofala. He was moody and always in a vile mood but people attributed it to the

war. "He spent more time in his farm, but did less work than he did in the past in less time. He no longer dreams of pick-up. He sold his yams, cassava, cocoyam, and palm kernels, but did not know what to do with the money. He prayed for the quick end of every day and dreaded the break of another." (111)

Ofala married another wife as vengeance against his wife cheating on him. But he was still plagued. The internal struggle increased, he promised Ifunanya he would try to love her son but "the Load in his chest grew heavier. Deep down in his heart and especially at night when he was in his bed, he lamented the heaviness of the stone in his chest, the stone that was his heart." (114) nobody understood what he was going through. Everyone though he was doing well and he tried to do all his responsibilities to the best of his knowledge and considering the story of the cross of Christ that was physical, he lamented his cross being spiritual "But his cross was not a physical one ... This cross was surely going to crush him" (114) it was an internal struggle. His believe is that one day that cross will crush him. He tries to love all his children including Nnanna and to be kind to everyone: "Ofala resolved to love his children. His wives were happy together and the family was happy. But down inside Ofala's belly, the embers still burned." (118) Ofala is wealthy and the son of his wife Nnanna whom he accepted as his son is also very responsible and wealthy. Everyone praised him but he felt fear that one day Nnanna's birth will destroy him. His mind was constantly at war and the force, the dark romantic force that always dominates the dark romantic hero is that of fear, shame and guilt that was not even occasioned by anything he did but it still haunted him.

Ofala's internal war came to a full circle when he realizes Ikenna, his half-brother had knowledge of the paternity of his son Nnanna, a knowledge he obtained when he delivered Ifunanya of her baby. The pains of labour forced the truth out of Ifunanya. Ikenna who despised his brother decided and planned to expose the paternity of Nnanna at the coronation where Nnanna would be given the most prestigious title while his son would be given the list title. He unknowingly revealed it to Nnanna that he was not Ofala's son. "You fool! You idiot! How could you be getting drunk and snoring away here like a hog when a bastard son, born of some mercenary *Awusa* soldier, is taking away your birthright from you? Eh, how could you? Nnanna froze in his steps" (184)

Nnanna runs home to confront his parents, Ofala is devastated. His worst fear has come full circle. He feels cheated and his worse fears have been realized. "Ofala felt like a man cheated from all angles, a stick burning from both ends and in the middle. He was a man betrayed by everybody and everything, including fate." (186) when Nnanna, the boy that he had grown to love and respect was asking about his birth father's location "Ofala felt a sharp and deep sting ... Ofala was now burning inside. To answer this question would amount to inflicting more pain upon him. Had he not suffered enough? Or was it wrong to have forgiven Ifunanya?" (186) when more questions were asked by Nnanna and Ifunanya said she had the picture of Nnanna's father "Ofala's heart kicked at his chest. He felt a chill in his spine. He felt his limbs go numb. For a brief moment he lost the power to think." (190) all the situations that happened on the day that would have been his day of greatest honour became the day of doom and his fallibility is activated in vengeance and self-destruct. Ofala as a person did not break his promise to his wife nor did he do anything that he should be punished for but the struggle of the dark romantic hero is not physical but internal. He sought vengeance and self-destruct to avoid experiencing his greatest adversary which is fear and shame and guilt. Back in his room, Ofala was dressing ... He looked at himself in the one-foot-long mirror on the wall ... he tried to force a smile, but hated what he saw,

How could he have changed so drastically overnight? Or has this been ongoing and he did not notice?” (199)

Ikenna who had caused so much pain unknowingly was planning to disgrace Ofala and his family at the place of coronation. He took out his gun and prepared it for the occasion but instead of using a plastic bullet he used the real bullets. “He carefully leaned the gun against the wall so that he could pack up the bag and kits he had worked with. As he turned from the wall his eyes fell on Ofala who was already upon him. A chill ran down his spine as fear seized him. He turned again quickly to grab the gun. He was too late. Ofala was faster, and the gun was now in his hand. Ikenna sprang to his feet ready to grab and wrestle Ofala to the ground the gun notwithstanding. But he rose just in time for his chest to come level with Ofala’s aim” (201) After killing his brother Ikenna, Ofala committed suicide by drowning in the sacred pool. “But the news was different. Ofala’s body was floating on the sacred pond, his hands bound. (217)

Conclusion

Okonkwo and Ofala are dark romantic heroes that were possessed with the internal struggle, their enemy was fear, shame, guilt that eventually lead to vengeance and self-destruct, the human fallibility that had possessed the internal construct of their minds and drove them to their end.

For Okonkwo, “Even though the people did not value a man by his father’s worth” (7), he still had the internal struggle when he thought of his father’s weakness, his father’s weakness became the force that shaped his destiny; that drove him to success and excellence and the same force that drove him to his demise and his death. “Whenever the thought of his father’s weakness and failure troubled him he expelled it by thinking about his own strength and success” (52) For Ofala, it was the love for his wife and her betrayal that give birth to the fear, shame, pain, guilt vengeance and eventually self-destruct. “He spent more time in his farm, but did less work than he did in the past in less time. He no longer dreams of pick-up. He sold his yams, cassava, cocoyam, and palm kernels, but did not know what to do with the money. He prayed for the quick end of every day and dreaded the break of another.” (111) Ofala’s thought were of death, instead of blaming his wife, he blamed himself. “Ofala thought and thought until his head fogged with clouds of self-pity and became too heavy to move. ...Ah! The sleep of death! That was far better than suicide. If only it would come! He closed his eyes again, and then passed out.” (91-92) He blames himself for not ending it two years ago: “Why had he not ended it all two years ago so as to avoid this pain? Why had he struggled to keep alive when the federal troops forced his platoon into a river and surrounded them until almost everybody drowned or was shot? It was all because of this woman, this ingrate!” (92)

Conclusion:

Hawthorne in the Romantic Movement 10 was said to embody dark romanticism as such: “He simply writes using a different type of Romanticism, one that combines the well-known aspects of traditional Romanticism with the darker themes of Gothic fiction. He had ‘That expansive idealism and that sense of inexhaustible potentiality and interest in life which are the marks of the Romantic. But in him appears another strain of Romanticism, a strain that is almost inevitably involved in its exaltations- that is, the conflict between the imagined perfect and the limitations and frustrations of actual, everyday existence.” (3) The two Authors successfully presented the dark romantic heroes as they strive for success and indeed, they succeeded but the same force that pushed them to their success pushed them to their demise. While for Okonkwo it was his disdain of his father’s laziness, weakness and failure that gave birth to the demon of fear and shame for failure and weakness.

For Ofala it was his love for his wife Ifunanya and her betrayal that gave birth to his demon of fear, shame, pain and guilt. The two dark romantic heroes subsequently pushed for vengeance and self-destruct as seen in analysis. Both heroes came into full circle after physically committing murder and then committing suicide when they could no longer fight with the internal demons that torment them, exposing the central core of their civilization which lies within the dark romantic sphere. Hawthorne believed “evil existed and was inherent in human nature” (5)

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MEMOIRE MATRILINEAIRE ET CONTRE-ARCHIVE DANS LA SAGA *SEGOU* DE MARYSE CONDE

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Résumé

Dans la fresque monumentale *Ségou* (1984-1985), Maryse Condé retrace l'effondrement de l'empire Bambara à travers la lignée patriarcale des Traoré. Si la critique a largement analysé cette chute sous l'angle politique et masculin, cet article propose de relire l'œuvre comme une tentative de constitution d'une "contre-archive" féminine. En s'appuyant sur les théories de la matrilinearité et de la corporéité postcoloniale, nous démontrons que face à une Histoire officielle masculine marquée par la rupture et la mort (l'exécution de Tiékoro, l'exil de Naba), les personnages féminins (Nya, Siga, Naba) incarnent une mémoire de la continuité. L'analyse révèle que le corps féminin dans *Ségou* ne fonctionne pas simplement comme un espace de reproduction biologique, mais comme un lieu de résistance épistémologique où se conserve ce que l'archive coloniale et patriarcale tente d'effacer. En insérant des voix de femmes discordantes dans la chronologie des hommes, Condé subvertit le récit épique traditionnel pour suggérer que la véritable survie de l'identité africaine ne réside pas dans le nom du Père, mais dans le "ventre" de l'Histoire.

Mots-clés : Matrilinearité, Contre-histoire, Corps féminin, Maryse Condé, Mémoire postcoloniale, Agency féminine

Introduction

Dans le paysage de la littérature francophone postcoloniale, *Ségou* (1984-1985) s'impose comme une "contre-épopée" qui revisite l'historiographie africaine traditionnelle. Comme l'a noté le critique, la littérature dans sa nature engagée reste un miroir d'une société donnée dans une époque donnée. Elle est mandatée à projeter une société de référence telle qu'elle est en exposant bien sûr ses atouts et ses problèmes tant social que politique voire économique dont elle tentera de condamner et chercher des solutions propices pour le bonheur de cette société en particulier et le monde en général. (Obidiegwu et Ugwu 55). Cependant, la réception critique de l'œuvre a longtemps été dominée par une lecture phallogocentrique, focalisée sur la chute de la maison Traoré par le prisme de ses patriarches : Dousika, le père fondateur, et ses fils dispersés (Tiékoro, Siga, Naba). Cette approche tend à reproduire, même involontairement, la structure de l'épopée mandingue classique où l'histoire s'écrit par le glaive et le sang des hommes (Hale 45). Pourtant, Maryse Condé, dans sa démarche de "cannibalisme littéraire", ne se contente pas de féminiser l'histoire ; elle insère des brèches dans la chronologie masculine. Comme le note Lydie Moudileno, l'écriture de Condé est une entreprise de "désordre" qui remet en question les légitimités établies (Moudileno 18). Au cœur de ce désordre se trouve la figure féminine, non plus comme simple adjuvant ou victime de la polygamie, mais comme dépositaire d'une mémoire alternative.

Il existe un vide critique notable concernant la fonction épistémologique des personnages féminins dans *Ségou*. Selon Mokwenye cite par Obidiegwu: Even though Francophone West Indian female writers have long made their impression on the literary scene, available critical work on them still leaves much to be desired" (99). Si

Annick Perrot a souligné la "crise de la tradition" vécue par les femmes de Ségou (Perrot 56), peu d'études ont analysé leur corps comme une "archive". Si des études ont examiné la condition sociale de la femme bambara soulignant son statut subalterne et les souffrances liées à l'ordre patriarcal, peu ont analysé comment ces femmes constituent une "contre-archive". Dans un contexte où l'écriture (l'Islam) et la loi coloniale (l'Occident) sont des technologies de domination masculine, où se réfugie la mémoire du peuple ? La problématique centrale de cet article réside dans cette tension : alors que les hommes de *Ségou* cherchent à faire l'histoire (par la guerre, la conversion, le voyage), les femmes, elles, portent l'histoire. Le corps féminin devient alors le lieu ultime de la résistance ontologique, un espace que ni le djihad ni l'administration coloniale ne parviennent totalement à coloniser.

Afin d'explorer cette dynamique, cette étude s'articule autour de deux interrogations principales

1. Comment Maryse Condé subvertit-elle la linéarité patriarcale en utilisant la maternité et la filiation matrilineaire comme des vecteurs de transmission mémorielle ?
2. Dans quelle mesure les personnages féminins (notamment Nya et les femmes de la diaspora) transforment-elles la "marge" politique en un "centre" mémoriel, créant ainsi une histoire souterraine qui survit à l'effondrement des murs de Ségou ?

Cet article défend la thèse selon laquelle *Ségou* met en scène le corps féminin non pas comme un site passif de reproduction biologique, mais comme une archive vivante et résistante. En s'appuyant sur les théories d'Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí sur la matrifocalité et le concept de "métissage créole" de Françoise Lionnet, je postule que Condé oppose à l'Histoire officielle (masculine, écrite, linéaire) une mémoire utérine (féminine, orale, cyclique). C'est dans cette mémoire que se joue la véritable survie de l'identité africaine face à la violence de l'effacement colonial.

La réflexion suivra un parcours en trois temps. La première partie établira le cadre théorique de la "contre-archive" féminine dans le contexte postcolonial. La deuxième partie proposera une analyse textuelle de la figure de la mère (Nya) comme ancrage de la souveraineté domestique face à l'érosion du pouvoir masculin. Enfin, la troisième partie examinera la persistance de cette mémoire matrilineaire dans la diaspora, démontrant que si les hommes perdent leurs noms, les femmes conservent les traces de l'origine. Afin d'appréhender la complexité de la représentation féminine dans *Ségou*, cette étude s'éloigne des lectures sociologiques classiques pour adopter une approche ancrée dans la critique féministe postcoloniale et la théorie de l'archive.

La matrifocalité comme résistance épistémique

Notre analyse repose sur une triangulation théorique visant à déconstruire l'historiographie impériale. Premièrement, nous mobilisons les travaux d'Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (*The Invention of Women*), qui critique l'universalisation des catégories de genre occidentales. Oyèwùmí soutient que dans de nombreuses sociétés ouest-africaines précoloniales, le pouvoir ne s'articulait pas uniquement autour de la biologique (homme/femme), mais autour de l'ancienneté et de la lignée. Dans *The Invention of Women*, elle soutient que la prééminence du genre comme catégorie sociale est une importation coloniale, effaçant des systèmes antérieurs basés sur la lignée et l'ancienneté (Oyèwùmí 31). Nous utiliserons ce prisme pour analyser comment des figures comme Nya exercent un pouvoir "matrifocal" qui échappe aux binarités occidentales.

Dans *Ségou*, nous utiliserons ce prisme pour démontrer que des personnages comme Nya ou la Grande Royale exercent une "matrifocalité" politique qui échappe à la binarité soumission/libération souvent plaquée par le regard occidental.

Deuxièmement, nous nous appuyons sur le concept de "Storytelling" théorisé par Trinh T. Minh-ha dans *Woman, Native, Other*. Trinh distingue l'Histoire (avec un grand H, linéaire, écrite, patriarcale) du récit (le conte, la rumeur, le secret). Trinh distingue l'histoire (Grand H) du récit mineur, affirmant que "l'histoire de grand-mère" est souvent le lieu de la véritable subversion (Minh-ha 120). Nous postulons que dans le roman de Condé, les femmes sont les gardiennes de ce récit "mineur" qui s'avère être le véritable dépôt de l'identité culturelle.

Enfin, nous intégrons la notion de "Contre-Archive" développée dans les études de la mémoire. Si l'archive coloniale est constituée de documents administratifs et de traités militaires (le domaine des hommes), la contre-archivage féminine dans *Ségou* est somatique : elle s'inscrit dans les corps, les ventres, et les rituels domestiques. Le corps féminin devient ici un document historique vivant.

Une lecture symptomale et genrée

La méthodologie employée est une analyse textuelle des deux tomes, focalisée sur les scènes où la continuité généalogique dépend exclusivement de l'intervention féminine, sémantique de la filiation et de la corporéité souvent en contradiction avec la volonté patriarcale.

Critères de sélection du corpus : L'analyse se concentre sur les scènes de "rupture" où la voix féminine contredit ou complète l'action masculine. Nous isolons spécifiquement :

1. Les scènes de maternité non comme événements biologiques, mais comme actes de transmission politique (ex : Nya conseillant Dousika).
2. Les moments de crise (guerre, famine) où la survie du clan repose sur l'économie domestique gérée par les femmes.
3. Les trajectoires des femmes dans la diaspora (Brésil, Caraïbes) pour tracer la continuité de la mémoire matrilineaire.

Approche interprétative : Nous adoptons une lecture symptomale. Il s'agit de lire "dans les marges" du texte pour repérer ce que le récit épique tente de refouler mais que la présence féminine rend visible. Par exemple, là où le récit de Tiékoro se focalise sur la théologie abstraite, l'analyse montrera comment les femmes ramènent constamment le débat vers la pragmatique de la survie et de la terre.

Cette méthodologie permet de dépasser la simple description des personnages féminins pour analyser leur fonction structurelle : elles sont les pivots silencieux autour desquels l'histoire de Ségou tourne réellement.

Le corps féminin comme lieu de mémoire : L'analyse du corpus révèle une dichotomie structurelle : si l'histoire de *Ségou* est scandée par les actions masculines (guerres, conversions, exils), sa continuité est assurée par une "infrastructure" féminine. Maryse Condé déploie une stratégie narrative où les femmes, bien que marginalisées par les institutions politiques (le Conseil, la Mosquée), occupent le centre de la pérennité ontologique.

La souveraineté de l'intime : Nya et la permanence du lignage

Dès le premier volume, Condé établit une dichotomie entre l'espace public (masculin) et l'espace domestique (féminin). Alors que Dousika Traoré s'inquiète de sa relation avec le Mansa, sa première épouse Nya gère la survie matérielle du clan. Dans le premier volume, la figure de Nya, première épouse de Dousika, incarne une forme de souveraineté que nous qualifions de "matrifocalité de l'ombre". Alors que Dousika

est préoccupé par l'effritement de son autorité publique face au Mansa et à la montée de l'Islam, Nya gère l'économie domestique et la cohésion du *tata* (la concession).

L'analyse textuelle démontre que Condé situe la véritable crise non pas dans la perte du pouvoir royal, mais dans la perturbation du foyer géré par les femmes. Lorsque Nya s'exprime, c'est souvent pour rappeler les impératifs de la survie biologique (la nourriture, la santé des enfants) face aux abstractions théologiques des hommes. En ce sens, Nya fonctionne comme une "archiviste du quotidien". Elle préserve les rituels et les liens de parenté que la politique masculine tend à dissoudre. Là où l'histoire patriarcale est une histoire de rupture (conquêtes), l'histoire matriarcale incarnée par Nya est une histoire de maintenance.

Le texte souligne que Nya possède une lucidité pragmatique qui fait défaut aux hommes, obsédés par leur honneur. Lorsqu'elle conseille son époux, elle ne le fait pas en tant que subalterne, mais en tant que pilier de la concession : « Nya était l'âme de la concession » (Condé, Murailles 42). Elle incarne ce que Françoise Lionnet appelle une "métissage de la pratique", adaptant les traditions pour assurer la vie (Lionnet 12). Là où Dousika perçoit l'arrivée de l'Islam comme une menace théologique, Nya évalue ses conséquences sur la cohésion familiale, agissant comme la véritable gardienne de la souveraineté bambara.

Le corps comme archive somatique : Violence et Résistance

Dans Ségou, il faut souligner la difficulté d'«être mère ou exister pour soi ». Notre analyse pousse ce constat plus loin en examinant le corps féminin comme une "archive somatique". Dans *Ségou*, les cicatrices de l'histoire (l'esclavage, le viol, le déplacement) sont littéralement inscrites sur la chair des femmes. L'histoire de Ségou est inscrite sur le corps des femmes. Les scènes de viol et de capture ne sont pas de simples péripéties ; elles constituent la documentation charnelle de l'effondrement de l'État. Condé décrit sans fard la condition des captives, notant que pour ces femmes, « être mère ou exister pour soi » devient un dilemme impossible (Condé, Murailles 210). Pourtant, c'est précisément à travers cette maternité contrainte que l'histoire continue. Contrairement aux hommes qui meurent au combat (une fin définitive), les femmes survivent et enfantent, transformant leurs corps en vecteurs de transmission malgré la violence. Le viol, arme de guerre destinée à détruire la lignée, est subverti par la femme qui intègre l'enfant "ennemi" dans la généalogie africaine, refusant ainsi l'anéantissement total (Perrot 60).

Prenons le cas des captives et des femmes violées lors des razzias. L'historiographie officielle des djihads tend à effacer ces victimes ou à les réduire à des dommages collatéraux. Condé, au contraire, place leur souffrance au centre du récit. Le corps de la femme devient le document historique irréfutable de la violence coloniale et précoloniale. Cependant, ce corps n'est pas uniquement passif. La capacité des femmes à enfanter, même issue de la violence (comme c'est souvent le cas dans la diaspora décrite dans *La terre en miettes*), transforme le viol en une forme paradoxale de survie généalogique. Le "ventre" devient le lieu où l'Afrique se régénère, refusant l'anéantissement total programmé par la traite négrière.

Au-delà du nom du père : La diaspora et la filiation utérine

Le basculement vers le deuxième volume, *La terre en miettes*, marque le triomphe de la mémoire matrilineaire. Dans l'espace de la diaspora (Brésil, Caraïbes), le "Nom du Père" (Traoré) est souvent effacé par l'administration coloniale ou l'esclavage. Les personnages masculins, comme Naba, perdent leur patronyme et leur statut. Dans *La terre en miettes*, la mémoire devient explicitement matrilineaire. Naba, exilé au Brésil, perd son nom et sa connexion avec les ancêtres mâles. Cependant, la transmission culturelle dans la diaspora s'opère par les femmes qui l'entourent. Condé

illustre que dans l'espace de la plantation, la "Loi du Père" (le patronyme, l'héritage foncier) est abolie par le Code Noir. Seule subsiste la "Loi de la Mère" : la transmission orale des contes, des recettes et des croyances (Japtok 730). C'est par la voix des femmes que la mémoire de Ségou traverse l'Atlantique, prouvant que la culture est moins une affaire de territoire (les murailles) que de filiation (le ventre).

C'est ici que la "mémoire utérine" prend tout son sens politique. En l'absence de registres écrits et de généalogies patrilineaires intactes, la transmission de l'identité passe par la mère et la grand-mère. Condé montre que dans les Amériques, la culture bambara ne survit pas par les grands récits épiques des griots (qui sont restés en Afrique), mais par les fragments de contes, de recettes et de croyances transmis de mère en fille. Cette transmission "horizontale" et féminine constitue la véritable contre-archive de la diaspora. Elle défie la logique patriarcale qui voudrait que sans père, il n'y a pas d'histoire. Condé prouve l'inverse : c'est parce qu'il y a des mères que l'histoire ne s'arrête pas au bord de l'Atlantique.

Vers une épistémologie utérine

Les résultats de l'analyse textuelle nous conduisent à repenser fondamentalement la dichotomie entre Histoire et Mémoire dans le roman postcolonial. *Ségou* ne se contente pas d'ajouter des femmes au récit historique ; l'œuvre propose une épistémologie alternative où la vérité du passé ne réside pas dans les traités ou les conquêtes, mais dans la continuité charnelle assurée par les femmes. L'analyse de *Ségou* nous invite à repenser la distinction entre Histoire et Mémoire.

Les hommes du roman tentent d'entrer dans l'histoire monumentale par la conversion religieuse ou la gloire militaire. C'est une quête verticale qui se solde souvent par l'échec et la mort, comme en témoigne la fin tragique de Tiékoro, exécuté par ses coreligionnaires (Condé, Murailles 450).

L'Histoire monumentale vs la mémoire vivante

Notre lecture met en lumière une tension genrée irréconciliable. Les personnages masculins de *Ségou* (Dousika, Tiekoro, El-Hadj Omar) sont obsédés par ce que Nietzsche appellerait l'"Histoire Monumentale" : celle des grands hommes, des États et des religions universelles. C'est une histoire verticale, rigide, et souvent mortifère. En revanche, les femmes incarnent une "Mémoire Vivante" (au sens de Pierre Nora), une mémoire horizontale, fluide et cyclique.

Cette discussion permet d'affirmer que pour Condé, l'Histoire (patriarcale) est une force de discontinuité, elle coupe les têtes et trace des frontières tandis que la Mémoire (matriarcale) est une force de reliure. En valorisant les scènes domestiques et les transmissions intimes, Condé suggère que l'Histoire officielle est une fiction de pouvoir, alors que la réalité de l'expérience humaine se trouve dans la gestion quotidienne de la vie, domaine traditionnellement assigné aux femmes.

Condé face au canon masculin : Une réécriture critique

Il est impératif de situer cette stratégie narrative par rapport au canon littéraire africain masculin. Dans *Things Fall Apart* de Chinua Achebe ou *Les Soleils des indépendances* d'Ahmadou Kourouma, la femme est souvent allégorisée : elle est la "Mère Afrique" ou la gardienne passive de la tradition, mais rarement un agent politique autonome.

Condé brise ce trope. Ses femmes ne sont pas des symboles ; elles sont des pragmatiques. Contrairement à Okonkwo chez Achebe, qui préfère mourir plutôt que de s'adapter, les femmes de *Ségou* (comme Siga) négocient, s'adaptent et survivent. Cette discussion révèle que Condé critique implicitement le romantisme tragique des héros masculins. Elle propose un héroïsme de la persistance féminine. Là où l'homme cherche la gloire dans la mort, la femme cherche la victoire dans la survie de la lignée.

Le ventre comme contre-archive

Enfin, nous avançons le concept de "ventre" non pas comme réduction biologique, mais comme lieu de savoir. Dans la diaspora décrite dans le second volume, le ventre féminin devient la seule archive que le maître esclave ne peut pas entièrement brûler. C'est le lieu de la production du futur. Cette perspective rejoint les théories féministes noires qui voient dans la maternité sous contrainte coloniale un acte de résistance paradoxal. En enfantant, la femme africaine refuse la "mort sociale" (Orlando Patterson) promise par l'esclavage. Elle réinjecte de l'humanité là où le système colonial ne voit que du bétail. Ainsi, *Ségou* peut être lu comme la constitution d'une "contre-archive" somatique : l'histoire n'est pas ce qui est écrit dans les livres des Blancs ou des Arabes, mais ce qui a survécu dans le sang transmis par les mères.

À l'inverse, les femmes incarnent une mémoire horizontale et résiliente. Cette dynamique fait écho à la distinction opérée par Pierre Nora entre les "lieux de mémoire" et l'histoire officielle (Nora 12). Dans le roman, le corps féminin est le lieu de mémoire ultime. Cette lecture contredit le modèle de l'épopée classique, illustré par *Things Fall Apart* de Chinua Achebe, où la tragédie réside dans l'incapacité de l'homme à s'adapter (Achebe 150). Chez Condé, l'héroïsme n'est pas rigide mais fluide ; il est féminin. Les femmes de *Ségou* démontrent que la survie culturelle ne dépend pas de la pureté ou de la victoire militaire, mais de la capacité à "porter" l'histoire, au sens propre comme au figuré.

Dichotomie entre l'histoire patriarcale et la contre-archive matrilineaire dans *Ségou*

Ce tableau synthétise l'opposition structurelle entre les modes de transmission masculins et féminins identifiés dans l'analyse textuelle.

Dimension Analytique	Sphère Masculine (Dousika, Tiékoro, El-Hadj Omar)	Sphère Féminine (Nya, Siga, Naba)
Type de Temporalité	Linéaire et Téléologique (Vers le progrès, la conversion, ou la fin)	Cyclique et Biologique (Naissances, saisons, survie quotidienne)
Support de Mémoire	Le Texte et le Monument (Le Coran, les traités, les murs de la ville)	Le Corps et le Rituel (Le ventre, la cicatrice, la cuisine, le conte)
Espace de Pouvoir	Public et Extérieur (La Cour royale, la Mosquée, le Champ de bataille)	Domestique et Intime (Le Tata, l'intérieur de la concession, l'alcôve)

Dimension Analytique	Sphère Masculine (Dousika, Tiékoro, El-Hadj Omar)	Sphère Féminine (Nya, Siga, Naba)
Réponse à la Crise	Rupture et Mort Héroïque (Le sacrifice, l'exécution, l'exil politique)	Continuité et Adaptation (Le métissage, l'enfantement, la négociation)
Statut Historique	Histoire Officielle (Celle qui est écrite mais qui s'effondre)	Contre-Archive (Celle qui est tue mais qui perdure)

Conclusion

En dernière analyse, la saga *Ségou* ne saurait être réduite au récit mélancolique de la chute d'un empire patriarcal. Au contraire, cette étude a démontré que Maryse Condé opère, sous le couvert de la fiction historique, une véritable exhumation de la mémoire matrilineaire. En opposant la fragilité de la "Loi du Père" (marquée par les ruptures de la guerre et de la conversion) à la résilience de la "Loi de la Mère" (marquée par la continuité biologique et rituelle), l'auteure propose une relecture radicale de la survivance africaine. Notre analyse a révélé que les personnages féminins de Nya, la matriarche sédentaire, aux femmes anonymes de la diaspora ne subissent pas l'histoire ; elles la contiennent. Leurs corps fonctionnent comme des contre-archives, préservant les fragments d'une identité que les institutions masculines (coloniales ou théocratiques) échouent à protéger. Là où le nom des Traoré s'efface dans les registres de l'état civil brésilien ou caribéen, la filiation utérine tisse une toile souterraine qui relie les "miettes" de la terre à la muraille originelle.

Ainsi, cet article contribue à renouveler les études condéennes en déplaçant le regard critique du centre politique vers la marge domestique. Il suggère que pour Condé, la véritable résistance au projet colonial d'effacement ne réside pas dans la confrontation armée, mais dans la persistance obstinée de la vie que les femmes portent et transmettent. *Ségou* nous enseigne finalement que si les hommes écrivent l'Histoire avec de l'encre et du sang, les femmes écrivent la Mémoire avec de la chair et du silence. Pour les recherches futures, il serait fécond d'étendre cette analyse de la "corporité archivistique" à l'ensemble de l'œuvre caribéenne de Condé, pour voir comment ce "ventre de l'histoire" continue de pulser dans le présent postcolonial.

En conclusion, *Ségou* opère une exhumation radicale de la mémoire matrilineaire. Cette étude a démontré que Maryse Condé utilise les personnages féminins pour construire une contre-archive qui résiste à l'effacement colonial et patriarcal. Si les "murailles de terre" des hommes s'effondrent sous les assauts de l'Islam et de la France, les "ventres" des femmes assurent la continuité de la lignée dans les "miettes" de la diaspora. Ainsi, l'œuvre suggère que la véritable souveraineté

africaine ne réside pas dans le pouvoir étatique, mais dans la persistance obstinée de la vie transmise par les femmes.

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NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF DEPICTING ENDURING SHADOWS AND HORRORS OF THE EMPIRE IN GEORGE FOX'S *AMOK*

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Abstract

This Paper examines how George Fox's *Amok* (1978) uses narrative strategies to evaluate the psychological and cultural effects of World War II on the Japanese. The analysis focuses on the novel's use of atmospheric immersion and relentless pacing as narrative tropes for signifying how natural, political and cultural forces transform Kurusu, the main character of the book, who devours the jungles of the Philippines years following the war. The story follows a fast-paced, suspenseful format that reflects the unpredictable nature of the Amok's attacks: brief, intense chapters alternate between the soldier's lonesome viewpoint, the fear of the local villagers, and Michael Braden's compulsive pursuit after his brother is killed. Similar to a predator pursuing prey in the dark, this fast-paced rhythm deprives readers of leisure by intensifying the sensation of impending conflict and growing violence. Fox's skilful atmospheric immersion, which is accomplished through sensory-rich descriptions of the oppressive Philippine jungle, humid air thick with decay, rustle of unseen foliage, distant screams echoing through mist-shrouded valleys, and the metallic scent of blood mingling with tropical rot, complements this. As a postcolonial wilderness that engulfs society and permits the straggler's insanity, the jungle itself emerges as an active enemy that blurs the lines between natural savagery and human ugliness. In remote areas where American expatriate planters, Philippine authorities, and even Japanese veterans struggle to face a ghost of empire, these components criticize the erasure of wartime wounds. This essay makes the case that *Amok* serves as a warning about the cyclical nature of conflict by referencing postcolonial theory, namely, ideas of residual trauma and hybrid identities, as well as horror genre conventions. Fox demonstrates how story form may humanize geopolitical scars by inspiring empathy for both victims (displaced villagers and colonial vestiges) and perpetrators (the broken, duty-bound soldier). The analysis provided emphasises the novel's significance in late-20th-century Gothic literature as a vehicle for contemplation of the empire's persistent secrets, where insanity and cruelty continue long after formal hostilities cease, through close textual readings and historical contextualization of Japanese holdouts and Philippine-American entanglements.

Keywords: narrative strategies, psychological and cultural effects, World War II Japanese veterans.

Introduction

Narratology is the study of narrative structure, which writers use in conveying their messages through a text. Ryan, M. L. (2005) categorizes these narrative components in 3 folds: the narrator (voice), focalisation (mood), and the narrative situation. Every narrative has a story, which is the actual events, has a narrative discourse, and the

narration, which is the telling of the story. Genette (1980). Genette further argues that the narrative voice has many levels: the narrative instance, which refers to the actual moment and context of the narration, the temporal setting of the narration, as well as the time of the narration with respect to the events narrated. The second is the narrative time, which is indicated by the tense of the verb in the narrative, and the third is the narrative levels, which refers to the relation of the acts narrated to the acts of narration itself.

Genette (1980) further gives the following four levels of narrative: the sequence of events in relation to the order of narration (order), where he outlines the analepsis, which is the flash back, prolepsis, the order in which the events occurred, anachronism and metalthe point of view, which is further divided into paralipses where information is withheld from reader, and paralepse, where the narrator presents information which the reader ought to have. The focaliser can either be external, internal or retrospective focalization, where the character focalizes his or her past. This is further subdivided into four: the fixed, variable, multiple and collective focalised. Genet also talked about the narrator which he categorises into homodiegetic narrator, one who is in the story, while the heterodiegetic narrator is who does not participate and is out of the story, auto diegetic when a character narrates his or her own tale as in autobiography, intradiegetic is when characters become narrators and extradiegetic.

In this submission, the study explores some of these narrative features, particularly the narrative (voice) and the Focalization (Mood), with a focus on *Amok* by George Fox, Chapter One. The exploration will include how the voice and mood bring out the unique literariness of the narrative *Amok*.

The novel, which is set in the isolated Cagayan Valley of Luzon decades after Japan's surrender, revolves around a towering Japanese straggler soldier known locally as the "Amok" who, oblivious to the fact that the war ended with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, continues his lone guerrilla campaign with brutal efficiency, using a samurai sword to kill anyone who enters his domain. Inspired by actual Japanese holdouts found in the 1970s, this historical anomaly becomes a powerful emblem of unresolved imperial aggression, representing the persistence of colonial and wartime legacies. Stanzel (1984) says, an important question to ask in analysing a narrative is whose perspective we are getting, which calls the narrative situation, which, when summarised, are the first-person narrative situation (narrating 1), authorial narrative situation, and the figurative narrative situation (reflector). He further argues that it's mediacy that sets narration apart from other sorts of text, its role being to shape our relationship with whatever narrative we're reading. Against this backdrop, the study uses the voice and mood to analyse the first chapter of the text, *Amok*.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

Inspired by actual Japanese holdouts who continued to live in the Philippines long after World War II ended, George Fox's 1978 thriller-horror novel *Amok* is the subject of this study's concentrated, theoretically oriented investigation. The narrative, which takes place in the tobacco farms of Postwar Luzon, uses the terrifying character of Kurusu, a crazed Japanese soldier who carries out his terror campaign decades later, to address the enduring traumas of imperial occupation. The analysis, which draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, shows how the novel subverts genre conventions to critique postcolonial realities, where overlapping colonial histories, American plantation legacies, Filipino postcolonial existence, and Japanese wartime aggression create ambivalent, in-between spaces plagued by unresolved power dynamics.

The study aims to accomplish this by following three interconnected objectives:

1. analyse how postcolonial horror is portrayed in George Fox's *Amok* using narrative techniques.
2. examine how narratological elements, specifically, focalization, narrative voice, and narrative situation, emphasizes postcolonial conflicts and cross-cultural interactions.
3. place *Amok* in the context of postcolonial literature by demonstrating how its thriller-horror genre tropes function as a crucial tool for revealing persistent imperial shadows.

Theoretical Framework

According to Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, postcolonial settings are defined by ambivalent cultural encounters that overturn coloniser-colonised binary oppositions and create new, in-between identities that challenge established ideas of authority, culture, and belonging. Long after official decolonisation, colonial legacies persist in warped, often outrageous forms of hybridity, which take the form of tension, imitation, and contestation rather than peaceful synthesis. With its portrayal of postcolonial terror, George Fox's 1978 novel *Amok*, which is set in the tobacco plantations of post-World War II Luzon in the Philippines, effectively captures this lingering shadow of territory. The story revolves around a Japanese soldier named Kurusu, who, oblivious to the fact that the war is over, carries on his ruthless campaign decades later. He is a spectral legacy of imperial aggressiveness that terrifies both American expatriate families and the local populace. The end result of Japanese militarism combined with the residual traumas of militarism and protest, the figure of the "amok," a deranged, unstoppable, murderous individual brandishing a samurai sword, functions as a horrific hybrid entity whose presence haunts the ostensibly postcolonial landscape and reveals the incomplete break from wartime imperial establishments.

By using this perspective, *Amok* turns the thriller-horror genre into a postcolonial critique in which the terror stems from the eerie continuation of imperial power dynamics in an ostensibly independent era rather than just physical brutality. While the Filipino villagers struggle to survive amid these intersecting histories of oppression, the American plantation owners, who are descended from early 20th-century settlers following the Philippine-American War, occupy a liminal position themselves, neither fully indigenous nor unproblematically imperial. The novel's narrative techniques, which combine American revenge motifs, Japanese bushido ideology, and indigenous folklore, create a disjunctive cultural realm that defies simple resolution, as Bhabha (2015) makes clear. Thus, the persistent fear of the Japanese holdout represents the "enduring shadows of empire", unresolved colonial traumas that resurface in hideous, hybridised forms, necessitating a reassessment of fairness, memory, and national identity in the postcolonial Philippines. This overview sets the stage for the study that follows, how Fox's use of narratological devices like narrative voice and focalization intensifies these hybrid conflicts and makes the work an engaging examination of postcolonial terror.

Methodology

Gérard Genette's framework of focalization (mood/point of view), narrative voice (narrator), and narrative situation is the main source of inspiration for this study's qualitative, text-centred methodology, which is based on close reading and literary analysis. It integrates key concepts from postcolonial theory, especially Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity, with tools from narratology. The method uses George Fox's *Amok* (1978) as the main source, analysing its structural and discursive

components to show how the book uses the enduring, conflicting legacies of empire to create postcolonial horror.

The study aims to achieve three interconnected goals through a multi-layered interpretive process as part of the methodological procedure.

The overriding lens is Bhabha's hybridity, which conceptualizes the horror of the text as originating from cultural in-betweenness, mimicry, and the eerie return of colonial authority in warped forms. In a Postwar Philippine milieu characterized by American plantation legacies and local indigenous/folkloric responses, this portrays the Japanese holdout Kurusu as a hybridized monstrous person who combines imperial Japanese bushido ideology, wartime trauma, and spectral persistence. Specific sections, especially from chapter one and important events featuring narration variations, are analysed for focalization (internal to characters like American expatriates Mike Braden or Filipino villagers, external viewpoints of Kurusu, or zero focalization in thrilling sequences), narrative voice (mostly heterodiegetic but with varying disparity and occasionally free indirect discourse), and narrative situation (temporal anachronism via flashbacks to WWII, spatial positioning in the liminal jungle-plantation zone, and the implied narrative instance's ironic commentary on unresolved imperial histories). This demonstrates how formal decisions criticize partial decolonization and magnify disconnected cultural interactions. To show how terrifying genre conventions are adapted to reveal persistent imperial shadows, colonial hierarchies, liminal identities, and failures of formal independence while examining themes of memory, fairness, and national identity in the developing world, clue evidence from texts is combined with postcolonial criticism.

Discussion

According to Al-Alami (2019), the point of view in narrative refers to the focal angle of seeing, hearing, smelling, and perceiving the locations, characters, and events of the story. The opening paragraph on page seven employs the third-person narrative point of view, which is also the omniscient point of view and gives us insight into the characters' thoughts. By seeing through their minds, the covert narrative approach is used here. From the first lines through the use of the pronoun 'he', the narrator introduces the character in the text, by telling who he is and what he often does as a way of living, the word "again", which means that this character has the habit of going into the valley of Cagayan, which does not make today an exception. But today, the character seems to be hiding from something terrifying, so that while he hides, he still got himself a sword which could help him defend himself from the dangers that await him. At this point, the narrator is not a character in the text; he is therefore a heterodiegetic narrator. Furthermore, a simile is used to describe the intensity of fear in him, by comparing his frightened eyes to a crushed cockroach shells thus: "he peered down at the valley with eyes as flat and black as crushed cockroach shells". At this point, the reader also gets to know about what's happening in the text through the narrator, who is outside the text trying to tell the story; he is therefore an external focalizer when talking about the mode (Bal, 2014). He is also a fixed focalizer since he is a single narrator, giving the reader the narrative from a constant point of view (Creanga, 2007). On the same page, the narrator metaphorically tells us how the character studied the Cagayan Valley. His movement descending the steep slope into the valley is told by the narrator with the employment of a simile: "like a gigantic land crab" (Fox, 1978, p. 9), first paragraph.

Furthermore, there is a reported speech in an instance in the text which gives us information about the danger of the sun on the skin of the Bradens, so that the fog and the snow, as well as long overcast winter were good for them and not the heat from

the scorching sun. The use of “we” and “my” in “So naturally we settle in the Philippines” tells of a change in the narrative voice as a first person narrator is introduced here, although is in a dialogue with Cara, it is worth nothing to add that the act of telling occurred here providing us with the information about Lester Braden’s family who tried to avoid the heat of the sun, so they confine their personal inspection of the plantation fields to the early mornings and late evenings when the sun was yet to appear and when it had gone down, this we are told by the heterodiegetic narrator (voice). Here, we find both the homodiegetic narrator (voice) and the heterodiegetic narrator (voice) in the sense that the third-person narrator was still telling about Braden when Braden himself is introduced, telling the story as a character in the text, making him a homodiegetic narrator (voice). Prince (2001) states that that kind of narration is multi-focalisation (mood) because in the same episode, different focalisation is seen. Furthermore, in the expression “my brother mike is the only one of us who could stand the climate”, on (Fox, 1978, p. 9), paragraph three, we see the homodiegetic narrator (voice) and an internal focalisation (mood) because, we get to know what is happening through the character in the text where the first person perspective is used, but there is a switch in the mood on the same paragraph when the homodiegetic narrator goes further to talk more on his brother mike thus: “So, naturally, he was the first Braden in sixty years to move back to the states”. Then he comes back to using the first-person point of view and the multiple focalisation in “I” just wanted you to know what kind of crazy family you are throwing in with...” multiple because there is different focalisation in the same episode (Prince 2001). The use of “I” gives us a feeling of authenticity to the information disseminated by the narrator since the information given is first hand.

The employment of “His” in the an occurrence in the text, brings us back to our heterodiegetic narrator, who is the external narrator in the third person point of view, where he tells us of the desire old Braden had importing the hybrid seedlings which he thought will do well in the Philippines to compete with the ones in North American markets, unfortunately many of the plants had died using the pronoun “they”. The whole of this information was disseminated to the reader through this narrator.

Additionally, the narrator employs the use of the pronoun “he”, making him an heterodiegetic narrator who goes on to speak about Braden and his wife Cara teaching their four-year-old to swim and how he had not agreed to having a pool since the Cagayan river was not too far from them, good enough for him and his brother Mike. But he later understood why she needed one (Fox, 1978, p. 10).

Moreover, the heterodiegetic narrator introduces the narrative voice of Braden thus: “I worry too damned much”, he told himself... (Fox, 1978, p. 11). Multiple focalisation is seen here as in the same episode, different moods is seen, though a switch in the mood is seen when the narrator continued, describe how the Conary island seedlings were located. At this point, the narrator stands away, allowing the character to speak for himself. The narrator, being a third-person narrator, tends to see what happens everywhere, including what’s on the minds of the character such as the hunger and ache in the belly of the character; no wonder the narrator here is said to be the eye of God.

Imagery is used here, where a vivid picture of the struggle between fear and courage on Braden’s mind and on how to overcome the monster is created in the minds of the reader through the heterodiegetic voice, as the description of the monster is made, also, we are told how Braden was flung out of his saddle and his hat flew from his head. Through the narrator’s employment of a simile, the reader gets to see the

attacker standing above Braden, who could not scream for help because his throat had been choked with his own vomit, thus: “like straw absorbing water”. The narrator goes further in the seventh paragraph on page five to describe the dehumanising manner in which Braden was murdered, making him an external narrator. (Fox, 1978, p. 12). Subsequently, the author employs the use of visual image expressed by the external narrator to show how the dead man was dragged by the monster in the text. The reader still gets to know this through the narrator with a heterodiegetic voice. Telling the reader that there had been many Americans in the valley of Cagayan, “returning to hide his torso, he saw that he had slain a white man” (Fox, 1978, p. 13). Quickly in that same paragraph, we find the employment of the multiple focalisation (mood) as on the same episode, the point of view changes from the third person to the first person thus: “I have killed this man before “he decided” wondering how such a thing could be possible”... we see a reported speech here by the narrator even though he allows the killer to express himself on his thoughts.

Employing the Multiple focalisation and heterodiegetic voices, the narrative moves from Braden to Cara, his wife, describing her family life and background and how she enjoyed a bath in the pool under the sun while the nursemaid takes care of Evie, page thirteen, paragraph five. Her thoughts are revealed to us, the readers, through a monologue. We get to know how she despises being with Les as she says: “Oh God, I ’am going to be left with him again”. (Fox, 1978, p. 14). The personal pronoun “I” here tells of a first-person narrator, but it’s introduced by the narrator in the same episode as the one he was speaking on, so it’s the multiple focalisation. The narrator switches back to the third person point of view when he goes further to tell us about some of the reasons why she hates being left alone with Les, as he introduces us to Sam. We find the narrator here playing a very significant role, little wonder Martens (2017) contends that the standard assumption of classical narratology is that every work of fiction must have a distinct narrator.

Lastly, Cara’s voice is heard but still told by the narrator and grandfather, (Fox, 1978, p. 17) but all told to us by the narrator who is outside the text. According to Nilssen, (2017) is the heterodiegetic voice, Cara’s voice in the first person point of view is heard, but since it was within the same episode, it could be said to be multi focalisation, where she mentally framed words which she will tell Les when he returns, but when a jeep stopped by her veranda, we get to hear Cara’s voice asking what the matter was? Here, in an episode, we find both the third and first-person points of view, and it is said to be multiple focalisation, as well as the words “Amok”, said by the man in the jeep. So, there were about three people who spoke in the same episode.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity emerges as the primary mechanism through which unanswered colonial traumas resurface in terrifying, contradictory forms. The results of this study show that George Fox's *Amok* (1978) successfully employs narrative strategies to depict postcolonial horror as a manifestation of enduring imperial legacies. Kurusu's main character, the Japanese holdout soldier, serves as a model hybrid: a spectral combination of wartime militarism, imperial Japanese bushido philosophy, and extended seclusion that endures into the postcolonial era. Kurusu maintains his presidential bid of beheading and terror in the Cagayan Valley of Luzon decades after the fall of Japan, attacking both foreigners and plantation labourers as well as residents. Within the seemingly independent Philippines, initial American colonial establishment through tobacco estates, and the Japanese presence during World War II, this terrifying perseverance transcends time and cultural distinctions, creating horror not through supernatural elements but through the uncanny survival of imperial violence in a space that has supposedly achieved decolonization.

Therefore, the novel depicts postcolonial terror as emerging from hybrid cultural contacts that defy resolution, where the “Amok” turns into a living legacy that highlights the vulnerability of national sovereignty and the continuous struggle over identity and space.

Further evidence of how these formal elements intensify postcolonial conflicts and hybridity comes from narrative analysis of focalization, voice, and narrative circumstance. The novel's primarily uses heterodiegetic narration with variable focalization: internal focalization through American expatriate Mike Braden (a Vietnam veteran returning for revenge after his brother's murder) highlights themes of reflected brutality and individual trauma; external or zero focalization in anticipation episodes heightens the mystery and terrifying nature of Kurusu as an unknown "other"; and sporadic shifts to the perspectives of Filipino villagers draw on local folklore depicting the killer as “The Amok,” fusing indigenous conceptual structures with histories of colonialism. By rejecting a single point of view and criticizing insufficient decolonization, these perspectival changes create a disconnected narrative realm that resembles Bhabha's hybrid site of contestation. While physical placement in the transitional jungle-plantation zone emphasizes overlapping sovereignties, temporal anachrony through flashbacks to WWII atrocities and the Japanese occupation contrasts historical imperial aggressions with contemporary hauntings. In addition to maintaining thriller-horror suspense, these structural decisions intellectually dismantle fixed colonizer/colonized dichotomies, exposing how hybridized residues uphold power disparities.

Ultimately, Amok transforms classic horror-thriller tropes relentless pursuit, terrifying adversary, graphic violence into a postcolonial critique that highlights the shortcomings of formal independence in eradicating imperialist traces. Perpetual colonial power structures and the fight for memory, fairness, and identity in the developing world are highlighted by the liminal positions of American planters (descendants of early 20th-century settlers), Filipino communities negotiating survival amid multiple oppressions, and the insane holdout individual. The book advances postcolonial literary discourse by using genre clichés as a means of examining these themes. It does this by demonstrating how popular fiction can address theoretical issues like hybridity to make the terrible, long-lasting effects of power structure evident in everyday postcolonial realities.

Conclusion

The first chapter of George Fox's Amok is analysed using narratological concepts, with an emphasis on two key categories: the narrator (as voice) and focalization (equivalent to mood or point of view). These elements, which are derived from Gérard Genette's paradigm, allow for an organised analysis of how the story creates discourse and perspective. The narrator's voice demonstrates the degree of diegetic engagement (heterodiegetic or homodiegetic) and the degree of overttness in influencing the reader's access to the storyworld, while focalization analysis reveals the filtering of events through a specific consciousness, whether internal to a character, external, or variable. By revealing layers of meaning beneath the surface plot, this dual lens sheds light on how the text's literariness arises from intentional formal decisions that control perception, distance, and interpretative authority. In addition to deepening understanding of the text's structural complexities, this narratological method aligns with the broader goals of narratology, which emphasise the structure and form of narrative discourse rather than its content. A thorough structural interpretation of Amok's first chapter is made possible by the interaction of voice, mood, and the entire

narrative situation, which includes elements like temporal ordering, geographical positioning, and the implicit narrative instance.

Recommendation

A fascinating example of late-20th-century American literature, George Fox's 1978 book *Amok* explores the lasting scars of imperialism by fusing elements of horror, thriller, and historical narrative. The plot, which takes place in the Philippines after World War II, revolves around a massive Japanese holdout soldier who fights a lone guerrilla struggle in the Cagayan Valley jungles without realizing Japan has surrendered. This figure, dubbed "the Amok" by the scared locals, represents the dehumanizing machinery of empire, reduced to a savage killer using a samurai sword on American foreigners, villagers, and others deemed a threat. With this assumption, Fox investigates the "enduring shadows and horrors of the empire" a term that alludes to the destructive, cultural, and psychological legacies of Japanese imperialism in Southeast Asia, entwined with remnants of American Colonial dominance by means of the owners of plantations and Vietnam War veterans. I recommend *Amok* for postcolonial and narratological studies as a researcher because of its creative storytelling techniques that undermines imperial beliefs and portrays the empire's legacy as an unavoidable, terrifying force. Scholars of war literature, horror as social critique, and narrative theory should pay special attention to the novel's stylistic skill, according to contemporary studies.

The narrative diversity, a technique that splits and divides narratives to reflect the shattered truths brought about by the empire, is at the heart of Fox's portrayal. According to Kyiileyang (2025), this method serves as philosophical deconstruction, using multimodal and temporally disturbed narration to demolish the monolithic myths of imperial power. Mobile focalization, in which the narrative standpoint moves smoothly between persons to reveal subjective realities and the empire's ubiquitous effect, is a crucial component. For example, the perspective changes between heroes like Mike Braden, a disillusioned Vietnam veteran seeking retribution for his brother's death, and the Amok himself, who is shown as a "human-monster" distorted by solitude and obligation. This mobility exposes the shadows of the empire as internalized tragedies rather than as distant history: Braden's devotion suggests that imperial aggression sustains trauma cycles throughout generations and nations, much like the Amok's unwavering loyalty. Fox emphasizes how empire warps perception and transforms people into vehicles of its persistent horror by rejecting a single gaze. Voice heteroglossia, which is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of conflicting discourses inside a text, complements this.

To illustrate ideological conflicts, Fox uses a variety of voices, including colonial English rhetoric, local Filipino languages, and the Amok's internalized imperial directives. Some scholars such as Kyiileyang deconstructs the empire's myth of superiority by analysing talks that combine American scepticism with peasant legend. Power disparities that persist in postcolonial environments are revealed by the Amok's silent, predatory presence in contrast to American protagonists' garrulous colonial excuses. The horrors of empire are shown in this heteroglossia as linguistic and cultural dominance: the Amok's rampage represents the violent eruption of suppressed history, while the "shadows" take the form of soft indigenous voices and the din of imposed ideas. A character's memory of the Japanese occupation breaks the plot in a crucial passage, connecting individual loss to more widespread colonial exploitation. According to Genette's narratological model, this strategy produces a disturbing non-linearity: the past "runs amok" in the present, symbolizing the novel's thesis that the

horrors of empire are cyclical rather than final, as seen by persistent bloodshed and cognitive dehumanization of people.

Fox's narrative techniques turn *Amok* from a pulp thriller often compared to *Jaws* due to its tense pacing into a deep indictment of empire. The novel's unrelenting drive, along with stylistic advances in focalization, heteroglossia, and analepses, makes the shadows of the empire visceral and unavoidable, challenging readers to face the monstrosity that colonialism spawned. Scholars and students studying literary studies, especially those looking at how genre fiction might challenge ideological frameworks, should definitely read *Amok*. It provides rich material for lectures on narratology, postcolonial horror, and the ethics of depicting the aftermath of war, and its relevance persists in an era contending with neocolonial legacies.

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**STIGMATISATION, PROTEANISM AND THE ADOLESCENT FEMALE IN
TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* AND JAMAICA
KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN*.**

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Abstract

Stigmatisation and proteanism are concepts that seem to be like polar opposites but they share a fascinating, often defensive relationship and overlap as adolescent girls negotiate a space for themselves in the postcolonial society. Adolescent girls are archetypically raised to consider others, to consider contexts and to be self-sacrificing. For this reason, their egos may have different developmental needs and this leads to imprints of stigmatisation. Therefore, they experience seismic and protean shifts, as they mutate easily to transcend boundaries that are thrust upon them by the society. Being stigmatized, their "fixed" identity becomes a source of pain or exclusion. Proteanism often emerges as a counter-strategy when senior women break free from the shackles of male dominance, they want to be in a position of power. So, the power dynamics is shifted to focus on the adolescent female who becomes marginalised and stigmatised by the senior female. The paper addresses the gap between the female generations and shows how proteanism is used as a reclamation of power. By refusing to be stigmatised, the adolescent female in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* possess the ability of character shape shifting which serves as a catalyst to stigmatisation.

Keywords: proteanism, stigmatisation, adolescent, female and postcolonial.

Introduction

The relationship between male and female has taken various forms in postcolonial literature. Gender relationships have taken a different turn and it becomes very controversial when we look at the relationship among female characters in the postcolonial society. If we consider that the senior female has broken some shackles of male dominance, she has been able to find a voice and take some powers in her hands to raise the female child almost on her own terms. In the novels under study, female adolescents are labelled or marked as a group as who is socially inferior or different from the male and senior female. It often results in a "spoiled identity" which is a term coined by sociologist Goffman E (1963). This kind of identity which he describes is the person carrying the stigma who is the female adolescent in this case. They are similar to Spvak's G (1988) ideology of the subaltern who is almost muted beyond redemption. Specifically, members of ethnic, social or racial groups are likely to feel a sense of shame when another member of their group engages in behaviours that confirm a negative stereotype about their group and, as a consequence, will seek to distance themselves from the event and the stigmatized identity. The adolescent girl is a category that is hardly noticed in the society in terms of importance in the societal ranking according to Jan Mohammed's (1985) Manichean pyramid. The young girl always finds herself inferior to the male gender and the senior female.

To avoid the weight of a stigma, the adolescent female switch personas by trying to adopting different dialects, dress codes, or behaviors depending on the social environment as seen in *Nervous Conditions* and *Annie John*. These young girls yearn to create for themselves a unique identity by mutating spaces, fighting the bonds of family, school, and state in a paradoxical search for affection and/or acceptance from those very same institutions. For a stigmatized adolescent female, having a single, rigid identity can be dangerous or limiting. Proteanism which offers a way to navigate various spaces acts as a catalyst of survival mechanism. Lifton (1993) who popularized the concept of the Protean Self, argued that fluidity is a response to historical upheaval.

Grounding analysis from the postcolonial theory and deconstruction theory, this work is divided into two parts. The first part analyses stigmatisation and generational spaces and the second part looks at protean identities as a solution for stigmatisation, considering fluidity prevents the stigma from defining the entire adolescence existence.

Stigmatisation and Generational Spaces

Stigma has its roots in differences. The impact of stigmatising attitudes on the stigmatised individual can vary in form and intensity. Stigma first of emanates from the mind and awareness of being different. Group identification may play a part in influencing the effects of stigma. In both *Annie John* and *Nervous Conditions*, the mother-daughter relationship is the primary site where stigmatization is enforced and proteanism is birthed. The mothers in these novels do not just raise their daughters; they attempt to sculpt them into survivalists within a world that devalues them. The conflict arises when the daughters realize that their mothers' "love" is actually a blueprint for a life they refuse to live. In post-colonial settings, the mother often acts as the primary agent of social control. Because they have suffered under patriarchy and colonialism, they use stigmatization to "protect" their daughters from the same fate—by forcing them to conform.

As evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, the adolescent girl as a category is stereotypically vulnerable and is hardly noticed in the postcolonial society in terms of importance in the societal Manichean ladder. The young girl always finds herself inferior to the male gender and the senior female. Specifically, she feels a sense of difference when relegated to the background thus confirming negative stereotypes about the adolescent female and, as a consequence, will seek to distance themselves from the stigmatized identity and to break free from it. The stigmatised individual in this case does not only experience prejudice and discrimination directly but they are exposed to representations of their differences from the other generational cohorts. Before the fact that adolescent girls suffer double if not triple oppression which leads to imprints of stigmatisation, the women in the novel try to break free from the shackles of male dominance. Just as Tambu notes below:

A victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them even heroes like Babamukuru did it [...]. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (115-116)

The above passage shows that the adolescent female finds herself inferior to the male adolescent gender where Nhamo goes to the mission school and Tambu grows maize and only has that opportunity when he dies. Their father, Jeremiah uses images of

cooking, 'can you cook and serve books to your husband? Learn to cook, clean and grow vegetable' (15), he says to Tambu. So, she only has the opportunity to attend the mission school only when Nhamo dies and there is no other male in their own branch of the family. That is why Tambu says "I was not sorry when my brother died... I was thirteen years old when my brother died... my brother went to school at the mission where my uncle was headmaster. (1) so she only had the opportunity to be educated at the mission school when her brother dies. Chido and Nhamo who are teenage boys like Nyasha and Tambu who are females go to better schools because they uphold traditional patriarchy and stigmatise and marginalise the adolescent female.

Education also plays a significant and powerful role in *Nervous Conditions*. Throughout the novel, Western Christian education is associated with emancipation and progress. For the different characters in the novel, each has a reason for education. For Tambu, her quest for education is motivated by her sense of responsibility to her family. Her purpose for education is to lift the rest of her family from the squalor in which they are trapped. She is wildly exhilarated with the idea of going to the mission school and later the convent. She later says, "going to the convent was a chance to lighten those burdens by entering a world where burdens were light. I would take the chance. I would lighten my burdens. I would go" to the convent. (179) Education has an ambivalent status in the novel. It is Tambu's means of breaking stigmatising female adolescent gender roles and poverty but simultaneously it implies the imposition of the coloniser's culture, history and language. Tambu sees it as the only way to escape impoverished condition, which is the result of white colonisation. However, there is a challenge when that educational system is one saturated with white ideas and influences.

This study adopts O'Donnell's (1985) definition of generation as an age group or a cohort. He asserts that a generation is a form of age group comprising of all those members of a society who were born approximately at the same time, whether or not they are related by blood. From this perspective, a generation is synonymous to an age group or a cohort. Norman (1965) notes that a cohort consists of a group of persons born around the same time who share a particular set of social and historical experiences. Consequently, social and political events may have differential effects on the various generations in society depending on each generation's stage in life-cycle development and its previous experiences. Braungart and Braungart (1986) also note that when a society changes rapidly and cohorts/generations come of age under different conditions, the members of each generation are likely to develop their own perception on cultural and political establishments.

Therefore, generation as a cataloguing term that defines a person's position in familial descent or social position in respect to his/her age mates. When such perceptions are substantially different from the experiences of others, they may provoke generational conflict and notions of exclusion and stigmatisation. In the novels under study, there are three generations of women and it is alarming that the senior female also inscribes an inferiority difference to the younger generation of females. Therefore, male and female adults assume the authority to define an appropriate code of conduct that connotes a relegation to the background of the female youth, one that is based on ideals of restraint and silence. The adolescent female has no say in decision making concerning even her own life. Young women who do not conform to these ideals are considered wayward and in need of control. The senior female gains her strength by castigating the female youth to positions of marginalisation and subordination. The senior female thus transfers what she suffers

in the hands of the male to the younger female. The novels centre around flawed feminists, bossy mothers and poor female allies.

In Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the generation gap between the mothers (Ma'Shingayi and Maiguru) and the daughters (Tambu and Nyasha) is not just a chronological difference; it is a profound cultural and ideological canyon created by colonialism, education, and patriarchy. While the mothers represent different ways of surviving a repressive system, the daughters represent the "nervous condition" of trying to transcend it. The relationship between Tambu and her mother is very flawed. Following their generational gap and therefore difference in ideology. Ma'Shingayi views life through the lens of "burden-bearing and illiteracy especially for the young adolescent. To her, being a woman is about enduring poverty and patriarchy without complaint. She sees Tambu's desire for education as a betrayal of her roots and a recipe for "Englishness," which she equates with rebellion. Tambu refuses to align with her mother's ideology of stigma of illiteracy and poverty. She sees her mother's life as a cautionary tale of stagnation. Her drive to go to the Mission school and eventually Young Ladies' Academy is a literal flight away from the "dirt" and "toil" her mother personifies. Ma'Shingayi resents Tambu's opportunity to escape, while Tambu resents her mother's fatalism.

Ma'Shingayi gives a direct response to colonial discourse. She rebels and breaks the chains that bound her children to "Englishes". She dares and breaks the silence that denotes colonialism and patriarchy. She can now speak her mind and highlight her firm belief that her family is a victim of colonialism. She shouts loud and clear for all to hear, "I have a mouth and it will keep on talking. It won't keep quiet" (140). Great tension exists between mother and her daughter Tambu. Tambu thinks education will free her from the stigma of blackness and poverty. While her mother hates Western education and the 'Englishness' it represents. Her mother sees education as the major insidious tool of colonialism, which takes away the culture of her children. And sees the mission as 'a place of death' and refuses Tambu from going to school there. She believes Tambu will come back home a stranger full of white ways and ideas. It will be English. English all the time. Education to her is a tool of division between her and her daughter. She manifests her resistance to colonialism through a hunger strike when Tambu goes to the mission school. Whatever she eats stays heavy on her stomach because she rejects whiteness and all it represents.

The relationship between the educated senior female Maiguru and her adolescent daughter is very problematic and flawed. Even though Maiguru is a mother who has been able to break certain glass ceilings somehow by being educated abroad there's a generational gap between she and her daughter Nyasha because Nyasha rebels not only against the man but also against being ordered around by her mother. Despite all Maiguru's exposure to Westernisation and her level of education, she still believes like her husband that Western ways are not the best. Whereas, Nyasha finds everything about the western lifestyle as her ideal way to shape her identity. Nyasha is a complicated character in the novel and her portrayal of identity issues is contradictory. Sometimes she speaks for the colonial authority and adopts white ways in almost all she does. Yet she counters this same authority even though her friends mock her, 'she thinks she is white throughout the novel, Maiguru tries to caution her daughter to no avail. She laments about Nyasha's loss of Shona values and the Dangarembga notes:

It really was very sad that Maiguru, who was the embodiment of courtesy and good breeding, should have such a rumbustious daughter. It was so embarrassing, the way Nyasha thought she could say anything to her mother. I did not know where to look.

They are too Anglicised, explained Maiguru [...]. They picked up all these disrespectful ways in England, she continued conversationally, and it's taking them time to learn how to behave at home again. It's difficult for them because things are so different [...]. We keep trying to teach her the right manners, always telling her Nyasha, do this; Nyasha, why didn't you do that. But it's taking time. Her head is full of loose connections that are always sparkling. Nyasha! Ha, Nyasha! (74)

From the above quotation, the Anglicanised Nyasha who is brought up in England is trapped in a Westernised adolescence and she even goes to the extent of smoking cigarettes and wearing miniskirts. But her Westernised ways do not fit into the society which she now belongs. She is not interested in values that her mother wants to instil in her. And in the course of the novels she is even described as having whore-like tendencies despite her having a decent mother like Maiguru. In the Caribbean frame work in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Annie John's the transition from childhood to adolescence is not just a protean shift; it is a violent collision between stigmatization(imposed by generational maternal structures Set in post-colonial Antigua, the novel tracks how Annie's world shrinks as she is groomed for "proper" womanhood, and how she uses her shifting identity to survive. As Annie enters puberty, her mother—once her source of total unity—becomes her primary stigmatizer. The intimacy they shared is replaced by a rigid set of colonial-Victorian social codes. We are exposed to the Stigma of the "Slut" when Annie is seen talking to boys, her mother calls her a "slut." This is a crushing stigmatization that labels Annie's natural development as moral decay. Annie is stigmatized for any behavior that deviates from the "young lady" ideal. Her education is a tool of colonial stigmatization, teaching her that her Caribbean heritage is "primitive" compared to British history. Then comes her menstrual Stigma: the onset of her period is treated not as a milestone of growth, but as a "shameful" secret that requires her to be physically and socially restricted.

The generational space begins as a site of total maternal-daughter unity, which Kincaid describes in almost erotic, fluid terms. In the early chapters detail a "pre-Oedipal" space where Annie and her mother bathe together and share a trunk of clothes. It is a world without men. In the course of time, as Annie reaches adolescence, the mother introduces stigmatization. The space is no longer for "them"; it is a training ground for "The Young Lady." The mother uses the domestic space to enforce Victorian standards, turning the home into a site of surveillance. Therefore, the adolescent girl Annie John rebels against her mother throughout the novel to be able to assert her identity and break free from stigmatization. The stigma is moral and physical. The early domestic space is a "paradise" of shared baths and herbal medicines. However, once Annie hits puberty, the mother turns the home into a space of surveillance. She sees Annie as a "loose" girl. Every move Annie makes is scrutinized for signs of "impropriety." Her mother begins to view Annie's developing body as a source of potential "sluttishness." The once-unified bond is severed, and Annie is stigmatized for her natural curiosities and her refusal to become a "lady." The ways in which Annie's mother's ambitions for her daughter drives her to try to inscribe the young girl's personal identity. Annie John feels stigmatised and at the bottom of the Manichean ladder and doesn't intend to remain there. Mrs John who is Annie's mother sees a rebellious girl that she has to dominate, but one that is, in many ways, a mirror image of her former self. Mrs John tries to repress Annie's individuation and her identity by imposing colonial values, traditions, and customs Annie just like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* thwarts her mother's attempts through acts of rebellion, which

include: lying, stealing money, behaving badly at school, playing marbles, and finally exile, which removes her from the mother's sphere of influence altogether. Annie goes against all set of societal standards as far as ethics in relation to the female body is concerned. Since Annie lives in an oppressive society—a British imperial one in Antigua, one of the many acts of rebellion that is performed by Annie is against the repressive norms and ethics that surround notions of physicality, sexuality, gender and adolescence.

As an adolescent girl she does not only face stigma through the challenges between mother and daughter relationship but also with her teachers who are mostly white. The conflict begins with the end of the “paradise” of childhood. Annie's mother, once her literal mirror, suddenly turns into a critic. Mrs. John begins to view Annie's puberty with suspicion. She uses the word “slut” to label Annie's independence. The Victorian “Lady”: Mrs. John enforces British colonial standards of “proper” behavior (manners, dress, etiquette). She stigmatizes Annie's natural, fluid Caribbean self to replace it with a rigid, colonial “ideal.” That is one of the reasons she ensures Annie has a good education to learn more manners.

Early in the novel *Annie John*, Annie comes into conflict with her manners and piano teachers because she resents the fact that they are British and she rebels against what she (Annie) perceives as her mother's desire for her to know “all about manners and how to meet and greet important people in the world” (27-28). She says this about her piano teacher: “The piano teacher, a shriveled-up old spinster from Lancashire, England, soon asked me not to come back, since I seemed unable to resist eating from the bowl of plums, she had placed on the piano purely for decoration” (28). The rebellious against her mother is translated to her teachers because they want to enforce some rules that Mrs John believes in. education in this case plays an ambiguous role because even though Annie wants to use it as a tool for liberation, it is used to reinforce more ideologies of stigma which she wants to break free from.

Generation conflicts enhance the possibilities of strengthening modern spaces in the novels Kincaid foregrounds traditional and modern differences through generational conflict between mother and daughter. One of the greatest examples of generational conflict in *Annie John* in the the love-hate relationship between mother and daughter. In *Annie John*, Antiguan tradition holds that a female must be descent in all her ways even in the modern society but Annie does not think it necessary to uphold this tradition much to her mother's chagrin as seen in the quotation below:

Once when I didn't wash, my mother had given me a long scolding about it, and she ended by saying that it was the only thing she didn't like about English people; they didn't wash often enough, or wash properly when they finally did. My mother had said, Have you ever noticed how they smell as if they had been bottled up in a fish? (36)

Kincaid uses a great deal of sarcasm as a narrative technique. She castigates the white man. It is ironical that the English man who thought the blacks were dirty and smelling in colonial discourse becomes the victim here. This is counter discursive as well as deconstructive on the well-structured discourse of colonialism. In *Nervous Conditions* and *Annie John*, female generational spaces are depicted as complex sites of both cultural preservation and patriarchal enforcement. While these spaces (the kitchen, the garden, the “trunk,” or the washroom) should theoretically provide sanctuary, they often become the primary locations where mothers pass down the stigmas of womanhood to their daughters. For both Annie and Tambu, the generational space begins as a site of intimate learning but shifts into a space of rigid discipline. In both works, it crucial to see that the mothers aren't “villains.” They are victims of the same

nervous conditions. Mrs. John was also separated from her home at a young age; she enforces rules because she knows how cruel the world is to “unruly” women. Ma’Shingayi is exhausted by poverty and patriarchy; she views Tambu’s proteanism as a personal abandonment. Maiguru is frustrated being a humble woman despite her level of education so she ascribes her frustrations on Nyasha. The conflict is essentially a battle between two generations: the mothers who believe identity is a fixed cage for survival, and the daughters who believe identity is a fluid tool for liberation. The generational space often collapses because the mothers themselves are suffering from the stigmas they are trying to pass down. Ma’Shingayi becomes “spiritually thin,” eventually collapsing into a depression that she calls “the weight of womanhood.” Mrs. John becomes increasingly bitter as Annie pulls away, seeing her daughter’s proteanism as a personal betrayal of the “proper” life she worked so hard to build. The generational space in these novels is a reproduction chamber. The mothers try to reproduce their own (limited) identities in their daughters. The daughters’ proteanism—their ability to change, lie, study, and eventually leave—is the only thing that breaks the cycle. Female adolescence stigma is a concealable one because it is not as glaring as other more visible cases. Whatever the case, to deconstruct the male and senior female dominance, an adolescent female requires to question the popular prejudices and to reinvent their identity. Good enough, adolescence is a stage of growth and metamorphosis. That ushers us to part two of the work.

Proteanism as Catalyst for Stigmatisation

To combat these stigmas, the teenage girls in the novels under study adopt protean identities. They “shape-shift” to navigate different power structures. Lifton (1993) posits that:

We are becoming fluid and many sided. Without quite realising it, we have been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time. This mode of being differs from that of the past and enables us to engage in continuous exploration and personal experiment. I have named it the protean self after Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms.
(1)

This Lifton’s metaphor of fluidity is a good imagery to exemplify the proteanism. Fluidity connotes instability and kaleidoscopic tendencies. of being evolving denotes a metaphorical thinking which breaks away from traditional consistency of identity as well as stigmatising labels. Proteanism is often seen as a survival mechanism in the novels under study. When the adolescent is stigmatized they may adopt a Protean Self as catalyst to navigate a hostile world. A female adolescent shifts their persona depending on the environment to avoid the mark of stigma. Because they have been deeply stigmatized often become masters of fluid identities By being protean, they shed the old, labeled self and emerge in a new context where the stigma doesn't yet exist.

Derrida does not define the term deconstruction as a theory so he remarks, no “univocal definition” or “adequate description” for this strange event called deconstruction, and the reason for “this absence of univocal definitions” is not “obscurantist”. In this paper, the notion of deconstruction is very synonymous to this protean way of thinking because female adolescents are able to break structures and metamorphose to other spaces.

Like the Greek god Proteus, the female adolescent character takes on various forms as she grows. She assumes multiple roles and wears different masks. The term adolescent is proteus-like connoting changes. The novel of adolescence can certainly be linked to the *Bildungsroman*, in its insistence on gaining knowledge about oneself

and one's place in society and identity. In *Nervous Conditions and Annie John*, the female adolescent, just like the protean self is capable of fluid transformations. Through a process of self-exploration on multiple levels of identification including personal, family, ethnic, religious, racial etc. Characters with this protean identity have cultural behaviours that are easily interchangeable between cultures and are flexible in various social settings. Hegemonic situations open a space for resistance which can be transformed to the quest of identity. It addresses a long-standing dichotomy between binary structures. Bjornson (1991) says that in the African context, there is a time of transition between ethnically based oral cultures to literate societies. Most importantly, he posits that 'when confronted by Otherness, people are obliged to reflect upon their own identity' (8). After binarisms shaped the colonial conditions of black and white, this dominance driven behaviour was also exercised to other situations such as gender. Women have spent longer time to dismantle the heritage of patriarchal power. And younger female has fought harder to break free from generational conflicts with mother figures.

In Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, the protagonist is a classic protean character someone who is constantly shifting, changing shape, mutating through growth, migration, education and so on, and refusing to stay in one fixed identity. Her fluidity, definitely a volatile nature of adolescence. For Annie, this isn't just about "growing up"; it's a radical, sometimes painful transformation of her soul and her world. The protean situation extends to growth and development of the protagonist just like in the novels under study which follow the traditions of an apprenticeship novel. As the female body changes, so does the imagination and the mind set as well as ideologies of stigmatisation. In this study, both protagonists are teenage girls and we watch them growing and evolving the various stages of life. This aspect of growth is very important in protean studies because it shows the various phases of Annie's life and how these changes affect her protean personality and the assertion of a selfhood identity.

Annie believes that the paradise she lives in cannot fade, the onset of puberty takes front stage. As the summer of her twelfth year progresses, Annie begins to notice physical and protean changes within her own body. Proteanism in this case become physical growth where the teenage girl Annie, metamorphoses into puberty. As Annie's body develops, her hair becomes more unruly, the smell of her body more unfamiliar, Mrs. John pushes her away from her image and forces the separation. Kincaid illustrates this separation when Mrs. John refuses to have a dress made from the same fabric as Annie. Annie's coming of age is a turning point in the plot as much as in the girl's biological development, as well as in the relationship between mother and daughter. In Annie's transition and struggles she feels as if the passion and love with her mother have diminished. Their relationship becomes strained, and uncomfortable as each become involved in battle within their home as Annie notes:

My mother and I each soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other. Hence, Annie has to disguise the tension between her mother and herself in front of people and even her class. But no sooner were we alone, behind the fence, behind the closed door, than everything darkened. (87-88).

The theme of disguise in the above quotation is one of the dominant themes in protean studies. Characters can change from one space to the other as the situation requires. The notion of two faces shows different spaces that they occupy in different social

settings. However, this tension eventually leads to her permanent separation from her mother after she recovers from her illness. Annie's physical growth in this case separates mother and daughter but Annie uses protean steps to escape from stigmatisation.

Kincaid depicts that identity is not only capable of relatively rapid change, but that it is fluid and malleable in its ability to adapt to physical and body changes. *Annie John* follows the norms of an apprenticeship novel or a bildungsroman just like *Nervous Conditions*. Their protagonist grows in the course of the novel and one must say that every new physical change epitomises another stage of step on the protean ladder because the change is not only physical but emotional and spatial.

In *Annie John*, Annie says that, "on the morning of the first day I started to menstruate, I felt strange in a new way- hot and cold at the same time" (51). This cold and hot way that she feels at the same time is a subtle kind of proteanism which shows the interrelationship between identity and physical image. In this case, hot and cold are spaces that make up the protean self. More so, she says:

As if that were not enough, my mother informed me that I was at the verge of becoming a young lady, so there were quite a few things I would have to do differently.... behind a closed door, I stood naked in front of a mirror and looked at myself from head to toe ... I could see the small tufts of hair under my arms.... a person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize. (27)

The image of the closed door is very metaphorical in protean discourse considering it connotes disguise. Behind the door, Annie does what she wants to do. Out of the door, she becomes the way the world expects her to behave. These are both spaces that comprise her protean identity. The salient issue here is that the new physical change in her life makes her feel different but it also ushers her to a new space where everything else has to follow in the newness as seen in the quotation below:

In the middle of all these new things, I had forgotten that I was to enter a new school that September. I had then a set of things to do, preparing for school. I had to go to the seamstress to be measured for new uniforms, since my body now made a mockery of the old measurements.... in my new school. I needed a different exercise book for each subject and in addition to the usual- English, arithmetic and so on- I now had to take Latin and French and attend classes in a new science building. I had begun to look forward to my new school. I hoped that everyone would be new, that there would be no one I had ever met before. That way, I could put on a new set of airs: I could say I was something that I was not, and no one would ever know the big difference. (29)

From the above passage, Annie is expected to learn French, Latin and English. These cultures carry the connotations of various cultures and Annie carries them all in the process of learning these subjects. The last part of the quotation saying what she was not connotes disguise which is an important metaphor in protean studies. She can put on any mask and not be recognised meaning she can metamorphose into any desired space she likes.

Newness; a recurrent term in the above passage indicates change which is synonymous to metamorphosis. Annie feels new about everything around her, when she says, "on opening day, I walked into my new school alone....everything about me was new ... even the road I walked was new" (34).

This newness is extended to her love relationship with her lesbian friend Gwen whom she starts to see in a different way, "at school, I had had a great change. I was

no longer in the same class with Gwen. I was now in a class with girls two or three years older than I was” (90). And so:

Gwen and I walked home from school in the usual way and did the usual things but just the sight of her was no longer a thrill to me though I did my best not to let her know. It was as if I had grown a new skin over the old skin and the new skin had completely different set of nerve endings. But what could I say to poor Gwen? How to explain to her about the thimble that weighed worlds, and the dark cloud that was like an envelope in which my mother and I were sealed? (91)

The image of the skin is very metaphorical as it reflects different spaces. Each skin carries a certain number of norms and of course segmental component and behavioural pattern. The new skin in protean studies is very important, because it follows the norms of deconstruction when things can be interpreted as proposes that every person carries the potential of many selves, capable of being realised at different social settings. In this instance, the choice of Annie’s mask does not involve her friend Gwen:

I looked at Gwen, could this really be Gwen? It was Gwen. The same person I had always known. Everything was in place. But at the same time, something terrible had happened and I couldn’t tell what it was.

It was then that I began avoiding Gwen... I took a new way home, a way that brought me through Market Street. (93)

It is interesting to note that the protean change does not involve Gwen whom Annie claims to have a relatively stable identity. Annie’s physical and biological identity adapts her to changing perceptions and expectations even of her friend Gwen while still maintaining a comforting sense of continuity of her growth and afford an ability to cope with the constraints realised in their friendship and interactions with a shifting space. At the end, their friendship becomes turbulent as seen below:

Gwen formally the love of my life now reduced to an annoying acquaintance. Along with all that, I acquired a strange accent- at least no one had ever heard one talk that way before- and some other tricks.... I could see that everything about me aroused envy and discontent and that made me happy. (129)

Annie John’s behavioural change can be described as a process involving relationships, between her friends and family. But with a focus on the self and realisation that the trajectory of her life’s course needs to change due to her body changes she describes a profound change in her behaviour, “I was standing there surprised at this change in myself” (95). This change aligns with Walter Truett Anderson’s (1995) view “the postmodern person is a *multi-community* person, and his or her life as a social being is based on adjusting to shifting contexts and being true to divergent-and occasionally conflicting- commitments”(128).

As Annie continues to evolve into various spaces in the novel, she notices, “I had got so strange” (94), and it is remarkable to note that her language becomes strange in accent which one must say it leads to an indelible mark on her identity which is typical of the postcolonial identity. We see the effects of proteanism on Annie’s personal identity. It has changed her to an extent that it has altered her perception of selfhood in relation to their community. She feels contented with others discontent. She allows herself to be incorporated into the school system and becomes enamored by its situation and grows to scorn her relationship with Gwen just like Anderson (1995) had predicated, “much of what was once ordained by cultural tradition is now negotiated. New rules and new roles are being socially constructed-not in the abstract,

but by specific people in specific times and places. And sometimes, of course, the negotiation escalates into conflict” (128).

Migration becomes part of the growth process therefore a step on the protean ladder. Migrating to different lands even under parental canopy connotes some freedom to the adolescent female. In the light of migration as a protean response, it means moving across borders of stigmatisation. It is the identity-based flexibility required to survive in new environments. The rigid stigmatising identity pushes Tambu to stop at nothing to travel to the mission at sacred Heart to be educated. Her mother’s breakdown and Nyasha’s trauma does not interfere with her schooling. She says:

I for one was going to take any opportunity that came my way. I was quite sure about that; I was very determined. The latest opportunity was this one of going to the convent. I would go. I was sure of myself [...]. Going to the convent was a chance to lighten those burdens by entering a world where burdens were light. I would take the chance. I would lighten my burdens. I would go. (179)

Homi Bhabha suggests that post-colonial subjects exist in a “Third Space” of hybridity. Therefore Tambu might perform different identities to navigate different power structures. She may adopt a Westernized, global persona when she goes to the mission to bypass colonial stigmas of incompetence. Whereas, in the domestic sphere: She may revert to traditional roles to maintain community ties and cultural heritage. In the creative sphere, Sse blends both, creating a new, fluid identity that defies stigmatization.

At the convent, she sheds her village identity to become the ideal colonial subject she is able to shake off some shackles of stigmatization. As her mind sharpens as she grows, with a growing critical consciousness, she begins to guard herself from the possibility of assimilation and alienation, in the white colonial education system. She tries not to forget Shona and her heritage. She is willing to think critically before articulating her decisions. As she continues to mutate even in her thought patterns, she tears herself apart by hybridising Western educational system and her Shona heritage. She says, ‘quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refused to be brainwashed’ (204).

In the Caribbean framework, the protean matrix is expanded to migrating just like in *Nervous Conditions*. Annie is exposed to other spaces in an attempt to break free from stigmatic shackles that she could not occupy in Antigua. There is an idea of proteanism as Annie the young girl’s struggle to recognise a selfhood and make a delicate balance between her loyalty to her own satisfaction and find a place for herself. Annie John passes through a cloud that metamorphoses into Belgium. She is literally travelling through a place in which physical hybridity is possible and begins to feel a “cloudiness” within herself which is a new kind of consciousness, a qualitative growth in her making of meaning away from her mother. She is drawn to Belgium in a heroic struggle in quest for change and another space to ascribe her identity. Annie begins the psychological journey toward a new environment and understanding of the development of her person as seen in the quotation below:

My most frequent daydream now involved scenes of me living alone in Belgium. A place I had picked when I read in one of my books that Charlotte Bronte the author of my favourite novel Jane Eyre had spent a year or so there.... I was walking down the street in Belgium, wearing a skirt that came down to my ankles and carrying a bag filled with books that I could not understand. (92)

The psychological migration in this excerpt exposes Annie to a new space in life. The books she possesses in Belgium are representative of the cultures she would face there that would be different from the culture she has encountered that is why understanding them becomes a problem. However, Annie's journey become real as she travels to the States. Annie's eventual departure for England at the end of the novel is the ultimate protean move. She realizes that as long as she stays in Antigua, the stigma of her mother's judgment will keep her fixed. By leaving, she chooses a blank slate—an uncertain, fluid future where she can finally define herself.

In the course of various steps on the protean ladder, Annie becomes like a fluid rebel. To counter the fixed identity her mother and school try to impose, in school, she becomes The British shadow where the school demands she be a refined British subject. Meanwhile The Antiguan reality demands her mother and the local culture demand she be a dutiful daughter and future mother. Annie realizes that to be authentic to either side is to be trapped. Her proteanism allows her to exist in the third space just like Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* but more like Nyasha even if that middle ground is marked by deep unhappiness and physical illness. The climax of Annie's protean struggle occurs during her long, mysterious illness. During the rains, she tries to wash the photographs of her family—literally trying to blur the “fixed” images of her past. her illness is the result of the exhaustion of being protean. She has shifted shapes so many times to avoid stigmatization that her physical body begins to break down under the weight of proteanism.

Annie becomes protean. She refuses to be one thing, constantly shifting her persona to undermine authority. Annie is a protean student. She excels in the colonial curriculum becoming a top girl while simultaneously defacing her history books she writes about The Old Girl can go to hell under a picture of Columbus. She uses the mask of the “good student” to hide the rebel. Her relationships with Gwen and later the Red Girl represent a protean emotional life. She shifts from the proper friendship with Gwen to the wild, unwashed, and rebellious nature of the Red Girl, trying on different versions of herself like costumes. Annie becomes an expert liar. For her, a lie isn't just a deception; it's a way to keep her true self fluid and unreachable by her mother's prying eyes.

The protean shift in the novel does not favour Nyasha to break free from stigmatization. It is like the more she runs away from it, she comes back it full cycle. It is true that she is displaced to England at an early age and is subject to their fashion, food and neurosis. When she returns home, she is confused and tortured because she is not allowed to foster the ideals in England. Even after a few years of staying at home from England, she still does not adapt to African style. Tambu says:

I had not been going to school long before I realised that Nyasha did not have many friends. The girls did not like the way she spoke. They were still imitating her behind her back when I went to the mission, which was three years after Babamukuru's return. And I thought that Nyasha ought to have lost more of her accent in that time than she allowed herself to, I also thought that her classmates had had long enough to grow used to it. As it turned out, it was not Nyasha's accent they disliked, but Nyasha herself. She thinks she's white they used to sneer, and that was as bad as a curse. (94)

She is not accepted by her friends who accuse, her all the time of being a whore and a snob. Her speech and dressing are characterised as Westernised. She describes herself as a hybrid because of her British education and her loss of her language and culture. She fails to reconcile these cultural differences and says, ‘I was comfortable in England

but now I am a whore with dirty habits' (117). She is classified a whore because she does not dress like a decent African child.

Decency is one of the most important values that the Shona natives uphold. Nyasha however, does not submit to this traditional pattern. Being in England makes her subject to their fashion. Having picked up Western preference and transported to Rhodesia, her wearing of miniskirts and cigarette smoking is an attempt to assert her being Anglicanised and exert control over her body. This does not give her respect with her female folks. She becomes disrespectful and indecent in her own protean mutations. Tambu says, "The way she dresses for the Saturday night dances! And the way she was acting with George or Johnson or Mathias or Changetai)! It's obvious. It shows for everyone else to see" (94). Going against Bher mother's expectation of feminine decency, Nyasha is condemned to 'whoredom'. On the night of the rave, Tambu describes:

On the actual night she was sulking a little because by the time she had finished dressing herself up and making up and was standing impatiently outside the back door waiting for us to come out, Babamukuru did not recognize her. He thought she was someone who had come to look for a place at the school. He could not understand why, if this was the case, she insisted on being his daughter. When finally, he was convinced, he disapproved. He wanted to know where his daughter thought she was going dressed up in such an ungodly manner and told her that, whatever she thought, she was in fact going nowhere. (109)

Nyasha fails to negotiate her identity property and Dangarembga punishes or eliminates her by making her fall into a mental abyss.

Conclusion

Involved in all of these protean changes is a profound psychic struggle with the idea of change itself and the negotiation of an identity. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha fails because she is trapped in the Stigma—she cannot pass and she cannot "shape-shift" successfully. Tambu and Annie John survive because they lean into the Protean—they accept that they must be many people at once, even if it causes a "nervous" internal fracture. It is important to note that when these female adolescents continue to mutate to new spaces, it becomes very difficult to arrogate an identity for themselves. The constant inconsistency of self is the very basis of neurotic behaviour. Trauma itself becomes another step or segment of the protean ladder. Most of the adolescent characters in the novels are worth psychological investigation. When these characters become traumatic, like Nyasha and Annie, they use their bodies to inscribe their frustrations of failing to assert a place for themselves in the society. By using their bodies, some become lesbians, some prostitutes, and so on. It is greatly ironical that these young girls were protected under parental control, meanwhile the freedom of proteanism they get exposes them to juvenile delinquencies. The idea of stigmatisation becomes a vicious cycle. It is satirical that it comes right back to the young female who refuses the notion of archetypal behavioural pattern to be monitored and controlled, to females who have failed to negotiate a sense of self and a place for themselves in the society.

It's an intriguing pairing. On one hand, you have stigmatization—the act of labeling and "fixing" someone to a single, often negative, identity. On the other, you have proteanism—the ability to be fluid, versatile, and ever-changing. When these two concepts collide, they create a fascinating tension between how society tries to "trap" an individual and how that individual chooses to transform. Stigmatization attempts to pin the adolescent female down to a stereotype; proteanism is her refusal to stay

pinned, turning identity into a fluid, defensive, and ultimately political act. When these two concepts collide, they create a fascinating tension between how society tries to trap an individual and how that individual chooses to transform.

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