MOTHERS OF AFRICA: REPRESENTATIONS OF NATION AND GENDER IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION

submitted for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

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IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

A thesis submitted by
Elleke Deirdre Boehmer,
St. John's College, Oxford,
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A protean doctrine, claiming cultural pride and demanding self-expression for those who espouse it, nationalism yet casts its defining symbols and reserves its privileges and powers according to gendered criteria. Nationalism, if seen as symbolically constructed, may be interpreted as a gendered discourse in which subjects in history and also in literature are assumed to be male. Especially in the Manichean worlds of colonial and newly post-colonial societies, nationalist narratives - such as those produced at the time of African independence - read as family dramas in which honour and duty are patrilineally bequeathed, and national sons honour iconic mothers. The invisibilities in nationalist discourse, often left obscure in the interests of an ironic 'liberation', may be redressed both through the displacement of dominant subject positions in literature - where 'non-nationals' tell their own fictions - and through the remoulding of inherited tropes and symbolic scenarios. In this way new plots are written into history; nationalist romances give way to literary fictions.

An investigation of the status of nationalism as symbolic language of gender, this thesis concentrates first on the inscription of nationalist icons in post-colonial African literature and on the gendered tropic patterns which govern that inscription. Writers considered include Peter Abrahams, Léopold Senghor, Camara Laye, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The iconic role of artist as nationalist hero is explored in particular in a discussion of essays and plays by Wole Soyinka. In its latter half, the thesis looks at African women's writing - novels by Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ and Bessie Head - and the work of a second generation of African writers, considering the ways in which this literature has begun to rescript the dramas of nationalism, to redream its visions of wholeness and healing.

Aan m'n moeder

and many thanks to
Jon Stallworthy
Ken Parker
Michael Anderson
Satish Keshav

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ABBREVIATIONS

Page references to texts from which several quotations are made will be cited in the thesis using abbreviated titles. Titles will normally be acronymically abbreviated. For works discussed across a chapter or substantial portion thereof, the title abbreviation falls away.

Titles of journals will appear abbreviated in footnotes and in full in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

> What mattered, he told himself, was that now he was totally detached from his mother-figure, Misra, and weaned. In the process of looking for a substitute he had found another - Somalia, his mother country. It was as though something which began with the pain of a rite had ended in the joy of a greater self-discovery, one in which he held on to the milky breast of a common mother that belonged to him as much as anyone else. A generous mother, a many-breasted mother, a many-nippled mother, a mother who gave plenty of herself and demanded loyalty of one, loyalty to an ideal, allegiance to an idea, the notion of a nationhood - no more, and no less.[1]

She is there at the beginning - of the lives of individuals and of peoples: the ground of their belonging, the shape of their desiring. Or so read the legends of nationalisms and, more recently, the matriarchal yearnings of dispossessed women seeking their own place in nations and in history. In nationalist mythologies of various descriptions and persuasions, mother figures have long cradled their children in comforting and capacious laps. Mother presences have been seen to reside in the earths of India and of Russia; Mother Erin has presided over Irish nationalism; French Marianne embodied the spirit of 1789; at the height of her popularity, Winnie Mandela was given the title, "Mother of the Nation." Nuruddin Farah, the Somali novelist, though

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[1] Nuruddin Farah, Maps (London: Picador, 1986) 96.

questioning in his fiction the secure reality of nationhood, has observed that referring to a country as a fatherland rather than as a motherland is to him an absurd idea.[2] Many male writers from Africa, speaking from various historical and geographical perspectives, among them Camara Laye, Kofi Awoonor, and Wole Soyinka, have seen the image writ large: Africa, the continent whole and full-bellied, is the beloved land and mother. The metaphor knits together images of common womb and origin, and of shared birthground.

The figure of the common African Mother is one to which African women writers, though perhaps holding different sentiments and ideals, have also made their obeisance. Buchi Emecheta, the London-based Nigerian novelist, for example, is of the opinion that "the white female intellectual may still have to come to the womb of Mother Africa to re-learn how to be a woman."[3] For the Zimbabwean poet and former guerilla fighter, Freedom Nyamubaya, to speak of the free Zimbabwean nation is to speak of the motherland. The concepts are so closely associated that Nyamubaya bestows upon the concept of freedom the same honorific title, "mother freedom."[4] A

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[2] Nuruddin Farah, "A combining of gifts: an interview," with Maya Jaggi, TWQ 11.3 (July 1989): 180.

[3] Buchi Emecheta, New Society, 4 September 1984, quoted in Kathleen McLuskie and Lyn Innes, "Women in African Literature," Wasafiri 8 (January 1988): 4.

[4] Freedom T.V. Nyamubaya, On the road again (Harare: ZPH, 1986) 3-4, 10-11.

Kenyan writer of children's fiction, Asenath Odaga, converts the emblem into self-image and role model, believing that African women should claim their identity as "women and mothers of [the African] continent."[5] In her recent novel, The Temple of my Familiar, Alice Walker, too, sings threnodies over the destruction of the ancient matriarchal worship of Africa: her characters restore meaning to their lives insofar as they are acolytes or avatars of the composite, omnibenevolent "Africa/Mother/Goddess."[6]

What sort of mother image is it that women writers are appealing to when they speak in this way? Do they, when adopting a nationalist vocabulary of self-retrieval and a related symbolic language of motherly adoration, occupy the same position relative to these images as that of their male counterparts? Noting that women are denied their own history and access to institutional power, it was Virginia Woolf who several decades ago asserted: "in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country."[7] When national belonging is styled as a yearning for lost wholeness on the part of dispossessed yet vengeful nationalist sons, and when

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[5] Adeola James, "Asenath Odaga," In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk, ed. Adeola James (London: Currey, 1990) 134.

[6] Alice Walker, The Temple of My Familiar (London: The Women's Press, 1989) 63.

[7] Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (London: Hogarth, 1986) 125.

self-determination and the achievement of national unity are represented as masculine self-assertion and as male bonding, are nationalist membership and the authorship of the nationalist text not cast as self-evidently male? And, following from this, though they may represent what is most to be honoured in the nation, if nationalist consciousness and subjecthood are designated as male, can women be said to participate in nationalist politics and national affairs on an equal footing with men? Questions such as these point to the main concern of this thesis, which will be to consider nationalism, in particular that expressed in African Anglophone fiction, as a gendered discourse. The idea is that, far from its defining images being merely decorative or supplementary, nationalism is conceived of and constituted by way of gendered metaphors.[8] Gender informs nationalism and nationalism in turn consolidates and legitimates itself through gendered forms.

Though the gender biases of nationalist ideology are also manifested politically and historically, the thesis will begin by investigating gendered representations of the nation

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[8] The term 'nationalism' is held to refer both to ideologies and to movements, and, in both readings, is seen to be expressed in symbolism and in polity. Nationalist symbolism includes historical myths, images of landscape, state ceremonials, and a panoply of national virtues. Raphael Samuel, ed., National Fictions, vol. 3 of Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity (London: Routledge, 1989), presents a long gallery of British national symbols and emblems.

in African novels and short stories (and, on occasion, in poetry and in plays), drawing on examples from the period of African 'high nationalism', the time of independence and after. It was during this time that African writers used their art to define and to proclaim new visions of national freedom, redeemed selfhood and historical pride. Yet, because the newly-opened spaces of national representation were in many cases mapped out using images of identity and authority which erased social difference and heterogeneity, or were predicated upon concepts of gendered power, nationalism did not always win the full identification of writers - in particular, women writers and writers of a later generation. The textual strategies used by such writers to address gaps and implied exclusions in nationalism will form the second major subject of the thesis. Therefore, if the first half focusses on prototypical ideas and emblems through which the nation imagines or composes itself - in particular, the grand image of the indomitable National Mother encircled by a band of worshipful sons - the second half of the thesis looks at the ways in which such tropes, and their associated complex of nationalist ideals, are contested and transmuted in narratives in which the nation is not, or no longer, a chief source of identity. Therefore, while the first part - Chapters One to Three - examines nationalism (or, more precisely, literary African nationalism) as normative symbolic construct, the second part - Chapters Four to Six - will look at

reinterpretations and revisions that, through effects of contrast and negation, explore and expose the idea of the national construct, not its gender basis merely, but also its fictionality, its status as symbolic and textual construct.

The symbolic drama involving the national characters of Mother and Son repeatedly enacts and so reproduces itself across the pages of African nationalist literature. Out of such allegorical clusters, nationalist dreams, identities and relationships of authority are forged. The gendered metaphors which are used to legitimate nationalisms embody the organisation of power in the nation and delegate national roles. This core idea of gender as providing imaginative material for the nation, takes a lead from two important historical studies which appeared in the mid-eighties. One, The Invention of Tradition, edited and in part written by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, asserts that traditions, in particular here national traditions, rather than being age-ennobled, are often novel and newly-minted. National anthems, symbols, institutions are made out of existing materials, or out of the extension of an inherited symbolic vocabulary: "[i]nventing traditions...is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past."[9] More concerned with the process of thinking the

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[9] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 4.

nation than with national topoi, Benedict Anderson, in his book, Imagined Communities, makes a similar case against the naturalness and hypostatisation of the national idea, noting in a phrase now much quoted, that the nation is "an imagined political community":[10] the nation's alleged autonomy and cohesiveness is a construct of mind, not natural.

However, though the theory of nationalism as constructed or man-made is taken as paradigmatic, the thesis seeks also to prise open one of the major paradoxes of that theory: the failure to realise, or to recognise, that gender - resembling nationalism insofar as it, too, can be seen as a social construct - functions as a basic constituent of nationalist imaginings; gendered ideas, in other words, are deeply implicated in the process of nationalist invention and re-invention. Benedict Anderson commits this error of oversight in the very process of defining the nation as imagined community: nationalist comradeship, he notes, as though it were self-evident, forms a "fraternity"; the experience of solitary elite heroes lays down the groundwork of national imaginings; "young [men] reading" invent the nation out of the media images.[11] The thesis aims to address such presuppositions, both by demonstrating the historical reliance

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[10] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983) 15.

[11] Anderson 16, 35, 37, respectively.

of nationalist thought on gendered power, and on gendered symbols of power, and, following on from this, by making visible, unfolding and so defamiliarising such hidden or innocent tropes.

The critical investigation of the imaginative vehicles deployed by nationalism, and of the exclusions through which they operate, points to a second area in which the thesis seeks to make a contribution - that of the analysis of myths and languages of power, and of the dissolution of the same. Engaging with, yet also interrogating post-colonial critical discourse, the thesis aims to unsettle the close relationship which is often assumed to exist between post-colonial writing and nationalism. Because of the association of that ideology, especially in a post-colonial era, with the self-determination of peoples, and with iconoclasm, its own holy images and sacred writ are rarely examined for points of tension and contradiction. The thesis applies itself to this oversight not only through critical exposition (in the first half), but also through a consideration of interrogative texts by writers themselves - actual instances that is, of critical displacements in a literature assumed to be part of one or other nationalist 'writ'. Focus will therefore move from symbol to textuality, from the general concept of nationalism as symbolic construct to particular strategies of rewriting inherited national narratives. It may be true that, given

Africa's embattled economies of literacy and text-reception, written narrative might no longer seem a productive area for such questioning. For this reason, popular and oral literatures tend to be regarded as pre-eminent in the articulation of dissent. Yet precisely because literature has functioned in the past as a signifier of nationalist identity, or as offering symbolic languages of national pride and self-determination, written narrative may still be regarded as a prime area in which to contest the legends and allegories of nationhood. From the point of view of those who continue to express in literature the continent's fractious reality, the written text, far from being abandoned, is rather seen as enabling, on its own terms, a quest for new selves and new visions.

In an investigation of the main sites of the conjuncture between gender-dominance and nationalism, Chapter One lays out the theoretical groundplan of the thesis. The conjuncture is considered at two levels: that of discourse and symbol, through an applied reading of the Bakhtinian concept of the "monologic", and that of politics, in a discussion of the modern state as projecting upon a national polity, patriarchal and hieratic authority. In the course of the discussion, the polarising and reinforcing effects of a colonial history on the evolution of a nationalist symbolic will be alluded to, though not yet discussed in full. The controlling idea of the

argument will be that of symbolic and structural homology - of parallels in ideology and in polity which are seen as operating in mutually reinforcing ways. In other words, if at the level of state structure, nationalism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, would appear, like the patriarchal family, to depend upon unitary and hierarchial forms of authority, this requirement is bolstered by the unitary vision which might be said to distinguish nationalist thought and fatherly state power.

With the basic symbolic and political framework in place, Chapter Two concentrates on supplying what might be called elements of a generative grammar of nationalist iconography. It will be proposed that, given their interrelationship, the national figures of mother and son are implicated in a 'family romance' in which, typically, the male role might be characterised as metonymic - males are brothers and equals, their roles specific and contiguous with one another. The female, in contrast, puts in an appearance chiefly as metaphor. Though examples are also drawn from other contexts, in this chapter the thesis bases itself in the terrain of African nationalist literature. Closer attention, therefore, is paid to the colonial history of nationalist images. Frantz Fanon has spoken of the colonial world as one "divided into compartments, a motionless, Manichaeistic world,

a world of statues."[12] Transferred across the rigid boundary lines of this world, or evolving within its narrow compartments, nationalist signifiers are more sharply defined, nationalist gender-specifics accentuated. "[C]asting off the yoke of colonial oppression...often implied reversion to earlier social codes":[13] indigenous patriarchal meanings were crossed with those brought in from without. Also, in order to build, consolidate and dignify their power at the head of nationalist movements and nation-states, the tendency was for elite brotherhoods to annex for themselves key social roles. This meant that not only statesmen and fighters, but also writers and artists were defined as properly nationalist and, implicitly, as male.

The assumption within nationalist literary movements that aesthetic enterprise is necessarily commensurate with the nationalist tasks of governing elites, or that writers should show nationalist commitment, supplies the governing idea for Chapter Three. Quoting a variety of representative examples, this chapter substantiates in particular the characterisation of nationalist son as writer or spokesman for his people. The

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12 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 40. For further descriptions of the colonial world as Manichean, see also 31-33, 39-40, 73.

13 Évelyne Accad, Veil of Shame - The Role of Women in the Contemporary Fiction of North Africa and the Arab World (Sherbrook, Can.: Éditions Naaman, 1978) 17.

body of the chapter, however, forms a type of monograph on a writer whose aesthetic philosophy proves the rule, not so much by exception, though this at first seems the case, as by significant, though disguised borrowings from the plot and allegoric structure of the nationalist romance. Though his views may on certain counts be dismissed as patriarchal 'pure and simple' (in particular his representations of women characters), Wole Soyinka's characterisation of the artist as courageous redeemer corresponds closely to the nationalist prototype, the correspondences being encouraged, it will be argued, by his modernist conceptions of artistic practice.

Chapter Four begins to look more closely at the question of the absent roles and blank spaces in the nationalist family drama as these pertain to gender. The thesis now changes direction, turning to consider the areas of tension in nationalist discourse. It is at this point, therefore, that the paradoxes which nationalist affiliation represent for women are confronted. How are they to identify with the idea of the nation in literature when that idea bears a gendered co-efficient? Relying in part on Kristevan ideas of "transformative" writing, the conundrum is addressed through an exploration of the concepts of the 'textual' and the 'temporal/territorial' as these are expressed in the narratives of four African women writers, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ, and Bessie Head. Because narrative - as

myth, history, cultural text - has been closely bound up with nationalist self-definition, it will be suggested that in repossessing story, in taking hold of the pen and inscribing their own sense of self, space and history, women writers begin to unsettle and to transmute the text of nationalism.

The last two chapters pursue the idea of writing against nationalism into the field of contemporary African fiction. The idea of a 'second moment' in African nationalist writing is considered, a time in which the old national plots, images and emotions are no longer felt to be appropriate or substantive and the nation becomes a contested term.[14] It is at this moment, too, that the propensity in postcolonial narrative for plurality and multi-linguality comes to the fore - the rich "alchemy of word and image" that survives and resists "structured systems."[15] Yet it remains a question whether the reworking of inherited tropes signifies a complete break with nationalism, or simply a modification and recombination of older motifs. In an extended discussion and analysis of what will be called the African revisionary novel - in particular, new novels by Chinua Achebe and Nuruddin

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[14] Though her treatment of history is somewhat cursory, see Jean Franco, "The Nation as Imagined Community," The New Historicism, ed. H. Aram Veeser (London: Routledge, 1989), for a discussion of the 'destabilisation' of the nation in Latin-American writing.

[15] Wilson Harris, "The Schizophrenic Sea," The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983) 17.

Farah, and writing by representatives of a younger generation, Ben Okri, Festus Iyayi and Tsitsi Dangarembga - this putative withdrawal from nationalist systems of reference will be examined, with the emphasis falling on the rescripting of the old symbolic dramas and on the reworking of inherited orthodoxies. Yet the idea of fiction as itself subversive of nationalism, or as self-consciously rewriting the nationalist writ, raises interesting new problems. To conjecture only: if narrative becomes exegesis, if it questions nationalism through raising awareness of the fictional status of the nation and generating alternative myths and allegories, does fiction then, from the point of view of one of its key-audiences, the national elite, take the place of the nationalist romance in supplying role-models, in suggesting 'how to be'?

Two qualifications should be made at this stage, one to justify and delimit the material chosen for analysis, and the second to clarify and expand the range of one of its key terms. First, as regards material, the geographical space of Nigeria was taken as setting functional boundaries - in practice fairly nominal - upon the literature to be considered. Such 'national' limits were required in order to deal in a coherent way with the rapidly expanding body of African writing and also, necessarily, to ground the material in a national context. Nigeria was chosen both for its rich

literature, and, paradoxically perhaps, for its formation in the absence of a regular independence struggle. The nationalism of its literatures, therefore, less polemical, more implicit and 'taken-for-granted', provides what might be called the confirmatory evidence of the commonplace, as opposed to that of the radical or extreme. Yet to counter the irony of working within national boundaries, and, in a related way, though more importantly, to find points of correspondence and contrast which exemplify and question the nationalist gendered grammar, the restriction was in many cases not considered binding. Therefore, while a Nigerian writer or pair of writers presides over each of the chapters of literary analysis - Wole Soyinka in Chapter Three; Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta in Chapter Four; Chinua Achebe in Chapter Five; Ben Okri and Festus Iyayi in Chapter Six - each chapter also looks beyond national confines. This wider panorama is important especially in the later chapters: in the case of Chapter Four, because women writers literally lie less thick upon African national grounds; but also because the subject of these later chapters - the displacement of nationalist signifiers in literary discourse - almost by definition calls for a non-national sampling of writers.

The idea of a dissolution of conventional nationalist boundaries points to the second qualification. Transcending national boundaries, the Mother Africa symbol has provided a

powerful talisman not only for individual African nationalisms but also for Pan-Africanism. A discussion of African nationalisms and related emblems, therefore, may seem at times to traverse national boundaries and to collide with a rather different ideology. This difference should be registered: Pan-Africanist ideology is not equivalent to African nationalism - not only the boundaries it recognises but its aims and motives are not coterminous with conventional state-based nationalisms. However, as will be argued in more detail in Chapter Two, the anomalies of nation-state history in colonial and post-colonial Africa, and the common legacy of slavery and occupation that unites the continent, have encouraged nationalist feeling in Africa to range beyond nation or state boundaries, and to find significance in wider cultural concepts, more generic images of Africanness or blackness. Certain of the postulates of Pan-Africanist ideology, therefore, can be construed as nationalist. Perhaps, as does Tom Nairn in his descriptions of British nationalism, Pan-Africanism may be characterised as the "a-national nationalism of a multi-national entity":[16] within such "non-ethnic nationalisms," "a personalised and totemic symbolism," in the case of Britain the monarchy, in Africa the image of Mama Afrika, goes a considerable way towards creating trans-national loyalties; problems of unity and identity are

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16 Tom Nairn, The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy (London: Radius, 1988) 11.

resolved by being projected to a higher symbolic level. Because of the historic and symbolic links which exist between state-based African nationalisms and a more ethnic or cultural Pan-African consciousness, one might then characterise African nationalisms - pertaining to particular states - as both outward and inward-looking, referring both to a geo-political territory and to a continental historical experience. Embodiment at once of home earth, and of continental culture and traditions, the African mother figure straddles both ideologies, the continental and state-national. Her ubiquity is worth emphasising for, where writers such as Soyinka or Farah see a pan-nationalist vision as an escape from the confinements of nationalist traditions, this need not imply a concomitant rejection of nationalism's gendered tropes.

On the subject of rejection, a final word needs to be said about the political position taken by the thesis. Inevitably, the kind of argument which will be made below brings with it stern problems of theoretical perspective and ideological affiliation. At a time marked by the might of trans-national capital and by the increasing impoverishment of the Third World, a critique of nationalist discourse might at first sight appear counterproductive, disregarding the importance of holding onto positive symbols of national identity as a means of reaffirming the honour of a people, or of asserting political difference. As Chapter One will

demonstrate, nationalist action for many marginalised groups signifies resistance politics, a way of defending customs, preserving a history, guarding resources. Ama Ata Aidoo has spoken of African nationalism as requiring an "unashamed commitment" from women writers.[17] Therefore, dispassionately to disassemble the symbolic structures of nationalism into constituent conceits and tropes, or to investigate discursive contradiction, may be to assume an apparently distanced and didactic, and perhaps also appropriative, vantage point. For a literature that treats of exclusion and of dispossession, the problem is compounded by the reliance in the thesis on so-called Western theories of nationalism and women's writing. Does such literature then become no more than a store of illustrative gew-gaws for the scholarship of the metropolis, a mbari shrine turned into an academic tourist stand?

As regards the problem of theoretical perspective, it is important to recognise that the emphasis in this thesis is on nationalism specifically as literary discourse - and on self-composition in narrative. Despite restrictions imposed by their differential economic positions, by literacy, language and cultural difference, it is a discourse in which post-colonial writers - creating stories of identity and fantasies

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17 Ama Ata Aidoo, "To Be an African Woman Writer - an Overview and a Detail," Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm 1986, ed. Kirsten Holst Petersen (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988) 162.

of wholeness, and tales of the making and breaking of nations - have been actively involved. Therefore, although there is always the danger that the encounter with Western theory lead to capitulation or appropriation, it is also possible to respect and to develop that encounter as a productive and therefore legitimate interchange. This is especially so in that, as will be seen in Chapter Five, stories can be read, more generally, as "theories of practice" - as defining or remaking conditions of being. Post-colonial fiction, whether nationalist or not, is most usefully approached in a way defined by the concept of intertextuality, as a multi-levelled cultural syntax where the intersection of imported and indigenous signifiers has the effect of composing in, and through, narrative a new reality. The potential exists, therefore, for the discourse of the nation, as a branch of this fiction, to open itself to interpretation, intervention, and retelling: were this potential not to exist, how might a people legitimately claim nationalism for their own?

As far as ideological affiliation is concerned, it must be stressed that the intention of this thesis is not to undermine the ideals of nationalism, but to expose certain of the contradictions which cut across and compromise the nationalist enterprise. Nationalist discourse announces itself as liberatory, yet, to define liberation, draws on a vocabulary of gendered power. Despite its professed

principles, nationalisms do not address all individuals equally. Significant distinctions and discriminations are made along gendered (as also class and racial) lines; certain groups and individuals will be deemed more national and more entitled to the benefits of freedom than others. This problem of exclusion speaks with particular urgency to Third World women and women of colour, not only because of their need to resist what is in many cases a triple marginalisation, but also because their own tactics of self-representation are often adapted from the more established nationalist politics of men. Yet the aim of the thesis, once again, is not to dictate a 'better way' for women. Rather, texts by African women writers themselves will be explored for strategies that subvert or revise patriarchal nationalisms. To make a last disclaimer regarding the problematic vantage point of a Western feminism, it is hoped that the thesis will draw together postcolonial writing and feminist literary criticism in ways that would reinforce or develop the tendencies to recreative plurality in both and, as a result, counteract the Eurocentric aspects of the feminism.

CHAPTER ONE

"A world of fathers": The Gendered State of Nationalism

> And as that texture [of history] reinforces itself over generations and centuries into an imprint of sovereign earth, so to speak, built into the institutions of the nation-state, it is inevitable that a vulnerable centre, an original frailty (and all that that means as marvellous susceptibility to space and depth) is wholly masked or forgotten. The accent becomes more and more collectivist, if not totalitarian, and the notion of original essence or interior body/interior essence is apparently eclipsed.[1]

> And perhaps, then, the gender of nationalism is male. Women fight for the freedom of their country. But men determine the defensive, traditional parts of that freedom.[2]

The point which this chapter will seek to make is that the nationalist ideology or ideologies which inform African literature have worked to limit representations of and by women. The idea is that nationalism generally, both in its past and its present manifestations, bears a clear mark for gender, and that this gender marking, rather than being

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[1] Wilson Harris, "Reflection and Vision," Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966-1981, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo, 1981) 84.

[2] Neal Ascherson, "Heroines of the Revolutions," The Sunday Times (6 March 1988): 13.

referred to a monolithic or trans-historical concept of patriarchy or hegemonic state structure, can be explained as a specific historical development of gendered power. As outgrowth of a time that 'enlightened man', nationalism makes its appeal, or professes to make its appeal, to all citizens equally. The controlling idea is of a homogeneous society: all have equal access to power. However, in symbol and in practice, in national 'business' or struggle, and certainly in its iconographies of power, nationalism may be characterised as a male drama.[3] Men are the subjects of nationalist aspiration and govern national action; women are the objects of their national designs and ideals. National freedom is identified in the first instance with male freedom; women are automatically excluded from normative conceptions of national brotherhood. Whether nationalism speaks the languages of emptiness, dream and desire, or whether of fulfilment and the achievement of meaning, the codification of meaning - of self and also of the objects of desire - is gendered.

As suggested, the hypothesis upon which these assertions rest is that, far from being merely a question of outer display or decoration, the fictions and tropes through which the nation represents itself are fundamental in the

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[3] Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism (London: Duckworth, 1971) 22-23, observes, in part unselfconsciously, that a basic "fact" of nationalism is perceived to be a relationship of brotherhood.

constitution of nationalist ideology. Nationalism forms part of the symbolic order of reality, and involves the imagining, invention and re-invention of self, statehood and community. The patriarchal vocabularies of nationalism, therefore, should not be explained away as simply another incarnation of the worn though resilient figure of the father. Gendered metaphors of self, place and identity actively embody the nation, decreeing how that nation recognises itself. If nationalism exhibits structural tendencies to male dominance, in the symbolic realm these gender specifics are repeated, embedded, and, if anything, made more real.

Gender, itself a highly-wrought social construct - vividly and intensely symbolised and also ubiquitous - provides key metaphors in social processes of imagining relationship and authority. What happens in a nationalist symbolic system, then, is that the semiotics of everyday life - of fatherly authority, or of mothers as breeders, nurturers and helpmeets - are transmitted into a public, national arena, consolidating and reinforcing its languages of authority. As Joan W. Scott has convincingly argued, "gender [is] implicated in the conception and construction of power" and so of politics.[4] Maurice Godelier, who elsewhere speaks of

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[4] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review 91 (1986): 1069.

representation (the idéel) as deeply implicated in the experience of social reality,[5] adds:

> It is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body's sexuality. Sex-related differences between bodies are continually summoned as testimony to social relations and phenomena that have nothing to do with sexuality. Not only as testimony to, but also as testimony for - in other words, as legitimation.[6]

Therefore, building on these insights, the contention is that gender operates at a primary level of structuration in nationalism: gendered signifiers are constitutive of and also constituted by a male-dominated nationalism.

Though this thesis is in the main concerned with the treatment by writers of nationalist tropes and fictions, the primary task of the present chapter must be to justify the claim that nationalism is profoundly informed by gender. This will involve setting the metaphoric economy of nationalism in a wider historical and symbolic context. What is required in the first instance, however, is some expansion of the initial proposal that nationalism has gender-specific or patriarchal features. The idea seems to cover two mutually determining conditions: one, that the structures of national communities

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5 See Maurice Godelier, The Mental and the Material: Thought, Economy and Society, trans. Martin Thom (London: Verso, 1988); "The Ideal in the Real," Culture, Ideology and Politics, eds. Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: RKP, 1982) 12-38.

6 Maurice Godelier, "The Origins of Male Domination," NLR 127 (May-June 1981): 17. I am indebted to the Scott essay for this quotation.

or nation-states are welded onto the struts of gender hierarchies; and two, as outlined, that imagining nations may be a process profoundly informed by those structures, that it may be difficult to conceive of nationalism outside of gender. The claim which is made here is stronger than that which would refer only to the legitimating force in nationalism of gender tropes. The assertion is rather that nationalism may be regarded both historically and symbolically as a specifically gendered ideology. The justification for this again operates at two levels: one which looks to the historical past of nationalism, its development alongside and collaboration with certain forms of power and social interest; and the other which remains focussed on representation, seeking out conceptual affinities between nationalism and other forms of imagining power. At all points, however, the two levels should be seen as inter-related. Whether in political structure or in symbolisation, the attempt is to trace structural homologies between nationalism and patriarchy. On both levels, too, the argument rests on an initial definition of nationalism as unitary or, in the manner defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, "monologic": what James Joyce in the "Cyclops" chapter of Ulysses suggests is one-eyed. Forming as it does a common ground between nationalism and patriarchy, it is the idea of the monologic that will now be explored.

Nationalism tends to function in a strictly autogenic and committedly self-referential manner. To constitute the unified identity of a national community, and to legitimate its existence, nationalist ideology appeals to an originary myth, or to a seminal history of ages - the manifestation of national truths through the unfolding of one predestined national way. The closed and changeless past, a rarefied sphere removed from sublunary spoilation, preserves the vital essence of the nation.[7] This essence is seen to be expressed through the originality and uniqueness of particular cultural forms, forms which function at once to bind and to 'bound' a people, defining their space and setting them apart. Especially when a nation is newly-born, and lacks a distinctive history, a dominant national image and ethos need to be produced and promulgated in order that the nation might, literally, both for itself and in the eyes of the world, identify itself as united, homogeneous, and distinct. Various national projects emerge: the collective history is re-processed; origins are discovered or refound. Cultural practices and artefacts are pinked and parcelled for national self-advertisement - crafts and masks migrate from rural

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7 "[W]hat is first, because it is first, because it begins, is eminent....The beginning as first point in a given continuity has exemplary strength equally in history, in politics, and in intellectual discipline - and perhaps each of these domains preserves the myth of a beginning utopia of some kind as a sign of its distinct identity [emphasis included]."
Edward Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 32.

villages to festoon the curio stalls of the capital. These cultural artefacts, often mass-produced 'exact' replicas, become national mascots, signifiers of the national identity, both its 'realness', or authenticity, and its reality.[8]

Nationalisms may, in a variety of contexts, be represented as ways of asserting difference, of resisting, for example, post-colonial efforts at 'development' or cultural conformity. As a rule, however, the nationalist act of assertion is cast in relational or conflictual terms: especially if set against a rival or dominant power, it does not mean a recognition of plurality, of differences within. In most cases, though their range may seem wide, and could suggest richness, the signification of national symbols is necessarily restricted. Especially where nations lack a single distinctive language or geography to locate, separate, and legitimate their physical and/or cultural territory, as has been the case in post-colonial Africa, national signifiers must carry the full burden of symbolising unity. The costume, custom, text or mask points to the new identity, and by pointing constitutes. Nigeria, or Kenya, for example, become nations when they are able to claim cultures that are identifiably Nigerian or Kenyan. That which is national may thus be defined, in general terms, as a limited set of

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[8] See Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 67.

labelled and standardised attributes. National languages, too, may be standardised and homogenised, forged, as Eric Hobsbawm explains it, out of "a multiplicity of actually spoken idioms."[9] Though these remarks apply most obviously to nation-states, where the relevant attributes have received the official stamp of government approval, nationalist movements generally, to determine identity, require differentiation, affirmations of singleness and singularity. We create our nation primarily by repeatedly, and repetitively, defining our national selves. So it happens that the national identity becomes identifiable as one, and only one: one typical culture and tradition, one people united by that culture, one tomorrow for all.

Both Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn have spoken of nationalism as bearing a "Janus-face".[10] With its suggestion of doubleness and opposition, the image aptly describes the contradiction that exists between the rigidity and imposed homogeneity of nationalism and certain of the ideology's main

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[9] E.J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 54. Hobsbawm describes the mystical identification of nationality with a "platonic idea of the language" as "a literary and not an existential concept" (57), thus substantiating the idea of the nation and nationality as "imagined".

[10] Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 130; Tom Nairn, The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism (London: New Left Books, 1977) 329-363. See also Anderson 144-145 for a description of the legacies of nationalism (both official and popular nationalisms) as "Janus-headed".

ideals. To return to the idea of difference, the characterisation of nationalism as restrictive or as eliding plurality may, to many believers, seem counter-intuitive. Do nationalisms not encourage self-expression and -determination, or a plurality of identities rather than, within the borders of the nation-state, simply and narrowly 'the many as one'? If we see nationalism as partially dissociated from its Western statist forms, is it not a defensive rather than an aggressive politics, a mode of championing singularity and realising a community, not necessarily of extending influence and power? More, in a world dominated by multinational capital, does nationalism not represent, as Simon During argues, the most efficacious and legitimate method of exercising autonomy on a world stage, or, more fundamentally, to cultures under threat, the possibility of survival?[11] For nations born out of decolonisation, nationalism has been taken to mean a release from oppression, and therefore, by implication, an iconoclasm, the sounding of new voices, collapsing barriers of distance and authority in a "novelistic" manner, as Mikhail Bakhtin might have it. Theories and definitions of nationalism are radically split by

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[11] Simon During, "Literature - Nationalism's other? The case for revision," Nation and Narration, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 138-153, especially 139-140. As Gellner 53-58 points out, however, nation-states were generated by the creation of "standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures." See also Gellner 39-40, 47-50; Tom Nairn, The Enchanted Glass 128-131. The modular implications of these readings of nationalism will be addressed later on in the chapter.

ambivalences such as these: nationalism speaks in the name of modernity and rationality, yet exacts loyalty by tapping emotion and impulse; as politics, it is expansive, it seeks to replicate itself across nations - individuation becomes a global outlook. Yet at the same time it continues to assert particularity, to fetishise the marks of a definable national character.[12]

Given the importance of self-determination to post-colonial resistance, it is worth at this point elaborating upon or, in a way, staging some of the ambivalences in nationalist thinking by citing alternative points of view. What sort of opinion has regarded nationalism as defensive and as promoting plurality? As a first example: impelled by shared ideals of emancipation and egalitarianism, women writers (designating a wide group, which includes Third World women writers and 'Western'[13] feminist critics and activists), have been ready to identify with national liberation struggles and to espouse nationalist values and ideals. Ama Ata Aidoo, a voluble proponent of self-determination for women, lays

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[12] See Étienne Balibar, draft chapter, "Paradoxes of Universality," Race, Nation, Classe, eds. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. Michael Edwards (Paris: Éditions La Decouverte, forthcoming) 1. Anderson 129-140 does not accept this thesis.

[13] As the world becomes ever more clearly divided along North/South lines, I mark off the term 'Western' in this way to suggest not so much a geo-political designation, as a historical category.

stress on her "pressing" need to "find my commitment as an African...to be an African nationalist": "[My concern] about us, African people, what we are doing with ourselves and so on....really is central to my preoccupation."[14] Flora Nwapa, whose work will be discussed later, also refers to the process of "nation-building" on the continent as inevitable and necessary.[15] To turn to 'Western' feminism, Alicia Suskin Ostriker, a North American poet and critic, maintains that an awareness of tradition, and of occupying one's own terrain, in other words, a feeling of nationalist solidarity, is conducive to speaking out, a triumphant assertion of women's voices.[16] In national traditions, she claims, "we discover the universal": "From a global perspective, the more deeply an artist represents the ethos of a nation, the more likely that artist is to represent humanity."[17]

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[14] Adeola James, "Ama Ata Aidoo," In Their Own Voices 14-15, 17. In the first remark, Aidoo was seeking to expand Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's statement that: "The female [African] writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a women and as a Third World person." It is important to note, however, that Aidoo is not speaking of a specifically nation-focussed nationalist feeling, rather of the Africa-wide solidarity that was referred to in the Introduction.

[15] James 115.

[16] Alicia Suskin Ostriker, "Introduction," Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America (London: Women's Press, 1986) 1-14.

[17] Ostriker 9.

In a critique of postmodernism, another North American feminist, Nancy Hartsock, has noted that theorists like Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty, despite their commitment to all that is decentred, ad hoc, and plural, continue to take for granted their own status as autonomous subjects.[18] They forget the Others who cannot take part in deconstructive practice because they have not yet "had a chance to name [them]selves and to theorise [their] situations."[19] The refusal of certainty and centralised power that is part of postmodernism depends upon a confident possession of knowledge and the power this implies. Though, it might be added, the marginalised do not suffer a complete lack of power,[20] they must create themselves as subjects, inscribe themselves into history, in order to forge their way out of non-being. This is a nationalist project, a task both of critique and of construction. The nationalist stand, in Hartsock's view, is situated close to that of feminists on a common ground of identity politics.

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[18] Nancy Hartsock, "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs Majority Theories," Cultural Critique 7 (Fall 1987): 187-206. For an allied consideration of the exclusions of postmodern - and also Enlightenment - thought, see also Sabina Lovibond, "Feminism and Postmodernism," NLR 181 (November-December 1989): 12-29.

[19] Hartsock 199.

[20] One might remember here Vaclav Havel's now prophetic essay, "The power of the powerless," trans. Paul Wilson, The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the state in central-eastern Europe, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985) 23-96.

Returning attention to Africa and to post-colonial nationalism, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of the continent's most outspoken and vehement proponents of the liberation of "the voice of the people," sees nationalism as a necessary adjunct to protest against neo-colonial rule. To Ngugi, nationalist formations informed by socialist convictions encourage cultural expression, and work to heal the alienation of colonised people. The national should be read as a synonym for the polyphonic. Ngugi expresses delight in the indigenous cultural traditions of Kenya: "one voice rooted in many voices - harmony in polyphony [Ngugi's emphasis]."[21] His novel, Devil on the Cross (1982), from which this line is quoted, is designed, as Bakhtin might say, as an "interanimation" of personal parodic testimonies, worker songs, popular slogans in two languages, as well as dialogic contestation and satire on the authority of church and state. On the face of it, this type of composition matches up point-for-point with Bakhtin's characterisation of (proto-novelistic) Menippean satire as:

> dialogic, full of parodies and travesties, multi-styled....Menippean satire can expand into a huge picture, offering a realistic reflection of the

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21 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Devil on the Cross (London: Heinemann, 1982) 60. The novel was first published in 1980 in Gikuyu as Caitaani Mutharabaini, and subsequently translated by Ngugi himself.

> socially varied and heteroglot world of contemporary life.[22]

Even more to the point, the Australian male critic, W.D. Ashcroft, in a theoretical account of the productive inter-relationship that might exist between feminist and Third World assertions of difference, argues for the existence of crucial links between the "maternal and the national."[23] To him, these connections can only advance self-expression and liberation. Though "the current orthodoxy is that nationalism is the expression of patriarchy par excellence," Ashcroft believes that the reclamation of the body in writing by women usefully parallels and endorses the discovery or re-discovery of a sense of place and community by the postcolonial dispossessed. Nationalism, once again, should be seen as the assertion not of essence but of difference. That nationalism may "[solidify] into chauvinism and jingoism" is no more than a manifestation of "the power of the imperial/patriarchal working within all cultures." As this interpretation presents exactly the reverse point of view to that which is suggested

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22 Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist, trans, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 26-27. One must remember of course that, in his efforts to recreate the voice of the people, Ngugi may too diligently attempt to keep the grainy texture of multi-dimensional existence within the lines of his own Kenyan national blueprint.

23 W.D. Ashcroft, "Intersecting Marginalities: Post-Colonialism and Feminism," Kunapipi xi.2 (1989): 23-35, but especially 30-33.

here, an immediate objection which might be offered is that nationalist forms and methods are far from innocent in their lapse into chauvinism: a hegemonic patriarchy does not operate as a single or primary cause in this process. That said, C.L.R. James, the West Indian historian, critic and theorist, has also found value in nationalism. Speaking of Black American women writers, he has observed that their art is enriched by their feelings of identity with their own people, by "[working] within the confines of nationalism."[24]

To distinguish the defensive nationalisms supported by Aidoo, Ngugi and others from unitary and/or authoritarian nationalism, one might want to emphasise, in the former, the principle of individuation, the triumph of difference, as against the coherence demanded by the latter, its imperative of sameness. Yet, even if such distinctions are upheld, it seems impossible to escape the fact that nationalism, as a politics of identity, in general insists upon differentiation, uniqueness and a certain unity. A ecumenical inter-national community of the most ideal sort must needs continue to rely upon exclusive and distinct definitions of national character. That nationalist movements may be schismatic, therefore, does not finally detract from the argument that, as a first principle, in order to put itself forward, nationalism asserts

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24 E. Ethelbert Miller, "Black Women Writers," C.L.R. James: His Life and Work, ed. Paul Buhle (London: Allison and Busby, 1986) 220-221.

specificity and will promote and standardise certain identifiable national traits. To anticipate a line of thought that will be followed through in the latter half of this thesis, the arbitrary, holistic, standardised signifiers of the nation may, as Homi Bhabha points out, exist together with the various, the erratic and the "unaccountable" of human desire and quotidian flux. At the same time, however, standardisation may work in such a way as to restrain certain forms of self-expression.[25] The idea must be emphasised for, as will be suggested, it is nationalism's tendency to the unitary and the narrowly specific which facilitates and draws attention to its co-operation with forms of gender dominance. If a first principle in nationalism might be defined as the remaking of a coherent and unified subjectivity, both the principle, and the ways it has been expressed in history, rely on exclusion and the advancement of particular groups. It thus becomes significant that apologists for a defensive nationalism (apart from some of the women writers quoted, in particular Aidoo) are generally blind to the gender specifics of the ideology.

The concept of nationalism as entailing a "monologic" politics will come into clearer focus through a more extended consultation with the Bakhtinian theory from which that term

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[25] See Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," Nation and Narration 291-322.

is drawn. Especially appropriate for the purposes of this exposition is the fact that, in his characterisation of the term, Bakhtin, a celebrant of polyphony, has explicitly addressed the national as univocal, as blocking dialogue, and as associated with fixed traditions, rituals of respect and fatherly law. Precisely the opposite reading of Bakhtin, however, has been offered by Tim Brennan in his analysis of nationalism and narrative.[26] Brennan draws on Bakhtin and Lukács, amongst others, to argue that the rise of the novel as polyglot genre was in fact enabled by nationalism, representing as it did the triumph of certain vernaculars over a standardised, learned language. He views the novel as historically expressive and also as "nation-forming," creating composite worlds, giving solidity and shape to a babble of freed tongues. Yet in alluding to the need within nations for order and solidity, Brennan lets slip an alternative reading of nationalism as resistant to polyphony, as requiring conformity. Further, because his view of nationalist history disallows this reading, he also ignores, or neglects to comment on, Bakhtin's association of the concepts of separate, received national languages or forms of expression with the

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26 Tim Brennan, "The national longing for form," Nation and Narration 44-70, in particular 50-51, 54-55. Brennan's difference of approach is indicated by his reading of Bakhtin's term "national" as referring specifically to a nationalist era, the period of the novel's rise, and as signifying "hotch-potch," "jumble," heterogeneity (50-51). In my reading of Bakhtin, the term 'national' has a wider reference, also signifying the cultural forms, encouraged in nationalist states, that suppress plurality.

epic form, not the novel. In an interpretation quite different to Brennan's, it is this association which will be of interest below. Therefore, without disregarding the historical convergences Brennan outlines, the intention here is to concentrate on generic forms and to give a description of nationalist singleness by using Bakhtin's characterisations as indices or metaphoric co-ordinates. Reading Bakhtin's definitions as metaphoric in this way will forestall what could appear to be a circularity in the exposition which follows: the implication, that is, that nationalism is "epic" or single-voiced because epic forms have already been described as proto-national.

To Bakhtin, language resembles a turbulent concourse of meanings; conversation is continuing and contrapuntal.[27] Building on his earlier studies of the material relations which underlie and inform the production of discourse,[28] Bakhtin sees words as formed in a communal forum and, in that

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[27] Much of this introductory reading of Bakhtin is drawn from his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1984), and also from Tzvetan Todorov's interpretation of Bakhtin's dialogism in Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle, trans. Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984). Confirmatory comments may be found in the later writings, Mikhail Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas, 1986).

[28] See P.N. Medvedev and Mikhail Bakhtin, The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics, trans. A.J. Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

forum, as ceaselessly contested, contradicted, reconstituted. In different mouths, at different moments, words butt against one another, chivvy, jostle, crowd. Should one meaning - or one myth, one voice - become official and standard, forces within language and within society will resist it. Identity, then, whether of the self or of the group, is necessarily communal or "dialogic". To cordon off the self as discrete hermetic territory is to exclude interaction and creative ambiguity. Similarly, then, in Bakhtinian terms, if a group of people were to assume a single identity, they would run the risk of denying their differential material experience, of subscribing to a unitary discourse (a "monologism"). By analogy, nationalism, which promotes one official interpretation of the past, one authoritative representation of the present, may be seen as a negation of heterogeneity.

In The Dialogic Imagination, his essays on the novel as definitive multivocal genre, Bakhtin makes explicit reference to the separation of the "national" heroic past from a multilingual contemporary reality.[29] In the course of the discussion he places national iconographies, its hallowed halls of "firsts" and "bests," in the context of "a world of fathers and of founders of families" (DI 13), and in so doing

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[29] References are in particular to the essays, "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," and "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," The Dialogic Imagination 3-40 and 41-83. Hereafter DI.

opens the debate for nationalism, as monologue, favouring patriarchal authority. What Bakhtin is not saying, however, is that the pre-industrial dynastic age, because characterised by forms of unitary rule and ritualised art, is nationalist. Rather, for the purposes of defining a monologic genre, he interprets symptomatic features of the past as nationalist, and uses these same features to typify epic. If, in the manner of "all high genres and all lofty models" (DI 21), the national favours homogeneity,[30] epic may be said to acquire a nationalist hue avant la lettre.[31]

In contradistinction to the epic as a deeply conventional and "complete" genre, typically associated with a high culture, the novel is parodic, iconoclastic, disputatious, distinguished above all by its contesting voices - it may well be taken as a trope for such contestation.[32]

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[30] Thus the monarchy or feudal aristocracy, though of a pre-nationalist age, appealed, as in conventional nationalism, to the past and to epic in attempts to legitimise their power. Here Said's comment in footnote 7 is again relevant.

[31] Note that the terms 'nationalist' and 'national' may thus be used interchangeably in the discussion of Bakhtin.

[32] Though Bakhtin's characterisation of the novel in opposition to the genre of epic recalls Lukács, his evaluation of the genres sharply distinguishes his theory from that of Lukács. For the latter, of course, the good of the novel was to be discovered in those realistic works which gave expression to a "totality of life," in this way effecting a restoration of that wholeness and coherence which the ancient world reflected in its epic forms. See, for example, the early study, George Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), and also the later Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey,

Bakhtin observes "there is no unitary language or style in the novel" (DI 48), and again, "[i]t is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language" (DI 47). Inherently a hybrid form, the novel "developed on the boundary line between cultures and languages" (DI 50, 60).[33] Even though, like nationalism, the novel is predicated upon the triumph of vernacular forms,[34] novelistic discourse does not rest with the homogeneous identities that nationalism requires. Convening and at the same time counterposing different cultural attitudes and linguistic practices, the novel brings in "the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly too contradictory and heteroglot to be fit into a high and straightforward genre [Bakhtin's emphasis]" (DI 55).

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trans. Edith Bone (London: Hillway, 1950).

[33] The emergence of the novel in Africa substantiates this claim.

[34] Although, of course, this is not all that is involved. See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (London: Hogarth, 1987). Scanning eighteenth-century conditions which favoured the development of the novel genre, Watt mentions the growth of a reading and book-buying public, the increase in leisure time, the new prominence of booksellers, and the emergence of that arch-individualist, economic man. These various elements are covered by the wider umbrella situation denoted as "the rise of the middle class," and the subjection of literature to the laws of the marketplace. See especially 35-59. See also the extension and dialectical elaboration of Watt's argument offered by Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987).

As against this characterisation, the epic, as Bakhtin represents it, becomes an appropriate signifier for nationalism. Nationalism, in its tendency to take itself seriously, to believe its own myths and to enshrine traditions, privileges those genres which are precisely lofty and ceremonious and single-voiced: a "unitary, national myth," Bakhtin observes, "perceives itself as a totality" (DI 64). Epic, closed, valorising, serious, is the prime medium for a nationalist credo, which, to adapt Bakhtin's words, might be defined as a "pious and inert quotation that is isolated and set off like an icon" (DI 69) - in a word, as monologic. Epic authorises the reification of communal or folk symbols, the deification of heroes and the exclusion of unofficial historical views. Most significantly, epic embalms the past, interposing a space, "epic distance," between the heteronomous present and the national tradition. In this way it not only forms an ideal ground for national remembrance, but becomes itself a monument to the glorious past. This past, Bakhtin also notes, again with that significant coupling of terms, is hieratic and patriarchal, a "world of fathers, of beginnings and peak times" (DI 13-14).

Though Bakhtin's equation of the epic and the national via the monologic offers a convenient symbolic short-hand, a way of channelling this discussion, it cannot, however, be denied that the binary pairing of his key terms elides certain

important cross-connections. That nationalism might well be construed as encouraging self-expression, the emergence of new languages and, therefore, heteroglossia, is a question that has already been considered. By extension, too, in an alternative interpretation, epic or epic forms, like the West African Sundiata, or Mofolo and Kunene's renditions of the history of Shaka, would for the nationalisms concerned represent valuable ways of retrieving a lost or buried past.[35] But one might also ask whether national themes are solely, or even predominantly, to be expressed in epic form, and conversely, whether the novel is in all instances the primary polyvocal genre? What of the national traditions that are celebrated in mass culture?

Viewed conventionally, in the manner in which Ian Watt speaks of the newly emergent genre, the novel with its more or less linear plot, its insistence on causality and its single hero or heroine, hardly provides the material for a dense interlacing of polysemic narrative.[36] Then, too, in a post-

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[35] D.T. Niane, Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali, trans. G.D. Pickett (Harlow: Longman, 1979); Thomas Mofolo, Chaka, trans. D.P. Kunene (London: Heinemann, 1981); Mazisi Kunene, Emperor Shaka the Great: A Great Zulu Epic (London: Heinemann, 1981).

[36] See footnote 34. One might also note in passing that, in contrast to Bakhtin treating the novel as the product of a new vernacular and cosmopolitan period, theorists like Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson associate that new urban period more with homogenisation and standardisation, than with an outburst of heteroglossia. See, in particular, Gellner 19-38 and Anderson 66-79.

colonial context, such as in Africa, the novel may well be viewed as privileging a single narrative voice above the many voices of popular and oral culture. Though, as Gareth Griffiths has observed, within a literate elite, "[w]riting is an activity through which the African can define his [sic] identity and rediscover his historical roots,"[37] yet, in actual fact, the novel remains the testimony of a single speaker, and serves as a fairly reliable indicator of that speaker's privileged status. Contrary to Bakhtin's idealising view, writing, everywhere, is an objectifying, not to say an isolated and isolating activity, held within class and status boundaries. These distances are especially obvious in those contexts where the act of producing a novel signifies a long process of training in educational systems established and, at least for the first generation of African writers, governed by a colonial culture, followed by equally long hours spent working in solitude, removed from the sites of people's culture, the "context of eating and drunkedness" (DI 73).[38]

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[37] Gareth Griffiths, "Language and Action in the Novels of Chinua Achebe," Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, eds. Bernth Lindfors and C.L. Innes (London: Heinemann, 1979) 69.

[38] Of course, writers in Africa, in particular perhaps dramatists, can, and indeed have, participated in parodic activities disrupting and rupturing images of authority. Consider, for example, the Concert Party tradition in Ghana and Togo, or Yoruba popular theatre under the direction of the younger Hubert Ogunmola, or the more recent plays of Soyinka, such as Opera Wonyosi (1976 - an adaptation of Brecht's Threepenny Opera), A Play of Giants (1984) and Requiem for a Futurologist (1985). In the field of fiction, Mongo Beti's Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba (1956), Achebe's A Man of the People

The romantic view of the novel as dialogic freedom hardly works in this situation. Bakhtin's tendency to idealise multivocality itself brings problems. Evocations of a Brueghel-like marketplace culture freeze and reify that which should, in theory, resist unitary definition.[39] Too, in his efforts to assimilate the novel to popular culture, in a way, to trundle the printing presses out amongst the carnival players, Bakhtin may have forgotten that the logistics of the endeavour in most cases defy practical application.[40] Gutenberg irrevocably committed verbal activity to paper.[41]

Yet to qualify Bakhtin's terms in this way is more than anything else to orient his definitions towards a new cultural context, a shift of focus to which his theory is hospitable.

(1966), and Ngugi's Devil on the Cross (1982) come to mind as critical of leadership. In most cases, however, the problem of representativeness persists: such writers are not "men of the people," though they might want to speak as such.

[39] Or to take another line on the matter, popular culture is not, or not in all cases, likely to sustain its parodic edge under certain political dispensations, such as the repressive rule of an autocratic government.

[40] The hey-day of the chapbook at Onitsha Market in the years before the Nigerian Civil War, however, may have come closer to Bakhtin's ideal. See E.N. Obiechina, ed., Onitsha Market Literature (London: Heinemann, 1972), and E. N. Obiechina, Culture, tradition and society in the West African novel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 12-13, 78-79.

[41] On the other hand, again, the perception of plurality may be a textual function. As Roland Barthes has demonstrated in S/Z: An Essay, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), the activity of musing over, interrupting and breaking up a text which is reading, relies on the facticity and the fixity of the actual text.

Graham Pechey, for example, has argued that one might read Bakhtin as providing a type of rubric for decolonisation - for the reinterpretation of signs and the interrogation of authority.[42] Then, too, the above objections do not undermine the emblematic status of Bakhtin's characterisations of the novel and the epic. Both definitions are vehicles: the novel therefore becomes not only a medium or arena but also a sign for the dialogic, and the epic, in similar fashion, provides a way of conceptualising the univocal, and, based on this, both nationalist purisms, and gender dominance within nationalism.

Having returned to the concept of the national as "monoglot" (that is, once again, in expression, not necessarily historically[43]), a provisional summary of the concept as reflected through the Bakhtinian optic may be given. This rehearsing of Bakhtin's synonyms for the monologic will also bring back into play the equation of terms which is the chief issue in hand: the definition of the national as monologic and also as associated with fatherly rule. The national, then, is compared to Bakhtinian epic not

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42 Graham Pechey, "On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogization, Decolonisation," OLR 9 (1987): 59-84.

43 Though Bakhtin treats the novel as the product of a new vernacular and cosmopolitan period, it is noteworthy that theorists like Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson associate that new urban period more with homogenisation and standardisation than with an outburst of heteroglossia. See Gellner 19-34 and Anderson 66-79.

only because, like epic, nationalism valorises the past, but, more than this, because the national, in some cases using epic forms, valorises only that which, in the past, can be seen to be proto-national. National identity presents itself as unique and separate, not interactive.[44] History becomes the replication of favourable self-images. Therefore, though a national movement might encourage the silenced to speak, and expand verbal possibility, emancipation and expansion must necessarily take place over a narrowly-defined, self-referential range.

Nationalist self-referentiality is primarily circumscribed by the authorities which have command over social hierarchies and compose historical meaning - in a manner of speaking, the chanters of epic and their sponsors. Assuming, then, that social authority is generally male-dominated, national history becomes 'his-story', prominently favouring male actors, the fathers and makers of nations, whose power is similarly based on policies of singleness and exclusion. Cooperation, as it were, benefits both sides, endorsing nationalist legends of hieratic power as well as enabling and entrenching patriarchal authority. On these grounds, therefore, national epic - or narrative - can be broadly characterised as patriarchal monologue. . Remembering

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[44] Bakhtin refers to national languages as "closed and deaf to each other" (DI 12).

Bakhtin's explicit references to nations as the territory of fathers, the appropriateness of his image of the national as centrepiece for this discussion becomes more apparent. Not only does nationalism favour a single voice, but that voice also bears a distinctively male inflection. Not only is the accepted national vision monocular, it is also located in the eye of a male beholder. This connection has not escaped the notice of some contemporary women critics. Bev Brown and Aritha van Herk in the anthology, A Double Colonization, point out that national narratives are embedded in male-focussed memory and male-centred myth.[45] Coral Ann Howells speaks of concepts of the nation as being conflated with male experience.[46]

Yet, going beyond the mere appearance of a link-up, to assert that the national is monologic and for that reason primed to link up with forms of gender domination, can seem to impute a certain inevitability to the connection. This claim, positing a fundamental ideological sympathy, would seek to make a stronger case than that which would argue for

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[45] Bev E.L. Brown, "Mansong and Matrix: A Radical Experiment," and Aritha van Herk, "A Gentle Circumcision," A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing, eds. Karin Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (London: Dangaroo, 1986) 68-79, 59-67.

[46] Coral Ann Howells, Private Fictional Worlds: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s (London: Methuen, 1982). Howells argues, however, that this maleness is challenged by Canadian women writers.

historical or symbolic ties. The idea would be that patriarchal societies, in the course of history, have actively selected monologic or authoritative forms of governance, such as the national, as congenial, and further that nationalism has been consciously moulded in the hierarchical, authoritative image favoured by patriarchy. It is the patriarchal, therefore, that is in the first instance monologic. Its influence on nationalism is determining; the ideology did not become gendered simply by transmission and association.[47] The supposition which informs these ideas is that the masculine, whether expressed in thought, ideas, or social norms, favours rationality, homogeneity, and unitary order. Arguing the point would require an appeal to post-structuralist interrogations of Enlightenment metaphysics, and to the interpretation of the same by feminist theorists. Evolved within a male-dominated society, Enlightenment assumptions of transcendent truth or essential meaning, for example, might then be characterised as bearing a patriarchal cast. So nationalism, by promoting standardisation, homogeneous identity, and a single-stranded interpretation of history, betrays its origin in, and its affinity to, the same patriarchal system.

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[47] By implication, it cannot, therefore, be reinterpreted or made over to include women.

This study began, however, with the assumption that the idea of nationalism, though historically rooted, may be held to refer to part of that constantly shifting symbolic ground where human identities are constituted, an area made up not of fixed essences, but of crafted and re-invented images. Quite in contrast to this, an interpretation of nationalism as <u>inherently</u> gender-specific, or as a mode of thought generated and determined by patriarchy, is not only reductive, but relies uncomfortably on presuppositions of immanence. It would be more helpful, therefore, to let the strong case rest and to continue instead to see the Bakhtinian concept of the monologic as supplying a reference point or guiding concept with which to examine historic conjunctures. The definition of monologic techniques and attitudes suggests potential areas of commonality between nationalism and gender domination - hostility to opposition, affinity for hieratic forms - areas that might usefully be exploited by both.

The second part of this chapter, therefore, will seek to move beyond the appearance of reciprocity or conceptual connection, to an exploration of possible historical and structural affinities. Correlation, however, should be again be interpreted not as causality but as interrelationship, complex and deeply impacted. To reverse the terms of the case for immanence, if it is proposed that male authority favours the epic voice and that nationalism utilises the univocal

elements of that voice, it does not necessarily follow that nationalism and male-dominance are intrinsically related.[48] Rather it should be demonstrated that national rule has usefully articulated with or operated as a part of the rule of fathers. In this way it is possible to avoid seeing nationalism as wholly or necessarily male-dominated, or, if male-dominated, as irrevocably committed to that form of power. Though gendered, national identities are not innate but incorporative, working within and remaking the political and cultural materials which lie to hand.

An interpretative summary such as this, one which makes appeal to homologies, dominant symbols, and common patterns of accommodation, runs the risk of committing alarming errors of oversimplification, reducing varieties of human society to a few general and highly schematic terms. Admitting the dangers of such reduction, though also seeking to urge its strengths, Gianfranco Poggi, a sociologist of states, has offered a useful rationalisation which it is fitting to include here. In his discussion of changes in the "basic structural features" of the European state, Poggi urges that individual

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[48] Male-domination, too, should be viewed historically, as part of a wider system of interconnected and mutually constitutive forms of social authority. See Veronica Beechey, "On Patriarchy," Feminist Review 3 (1979): 66-82. Throughout this thesis, the terms 'patriarchal' and 'patriarchy' should be read as referring not to a fixed or immutable state of male-domination, but to different and changing social circumstances.

variants be set aside in order in order to abstract from history useful illustrative models - in effect, Weberian "ideal types."[49] In this way salient features of what are extremely complex processes may be isolated and discussed. In the present situation, where interest is specifically in tropes of state and national power, the basic generic method is usefully elaborated and supported by an intra-state comparison and contrast of important structures, an approach such as that pursued by Corrigan and Sayer in their study of the English state. As with Corrigan and Sayer, the point is to locate in state formations "parallels and complements" for institutional processes in other parts of society (most notably in this case, in the family).[50] If, drawing on an idea from Hobsbawm, it was accepted in early national theory that social evolution "expanded the scale of human social units from family and tribe" through to nation, the rationale for such symbolic interrelations would already seem to be in place.[51] Yet one might also do well to bear in mind Frederic Jameson's warning that a critique interested in homologies should not forget that differences, structural shifts and

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[49] See Gianfranco Poggi, The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) xii, 13-14, 16. His typological discussion of the history of the Western (chiefly the French and the German) state exemplifies his point.

[50] Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

[51] Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1790 33, 38.

displacements continue to separate zones and sectors which, for the sake of argument, are deemed to be parallel.[52]

To support the idea that forms of social authority mould and make use of differences external to themselves to safeguard and reinforce power, Ellen Meiksens Wood, speaking of capitalism, has argued that this economic system, though "uniquely indifferent" to the social identity of the people it exploits, conveniently co-opts the extra-economic differences expressed in racism and gender as a means of "constituting underclasses and providing ideological cover."[53] She stresses that "there is no specific structural necessity for, nor even strong systemic disposition to, gender oppression in capitalism [her emphasis]."[54] In similar fashion, one could say that there is no inherent tendency in nationalism to adopt patriarchal forms and, conversely, no structural tendency in a gendered society to develop nationalist systems or movements. Just as capitalism did not "create the patriarchal family but developed on the basis of the patriarchal domestic economy which was already in existence,"[55] so nationalism in its turn

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52 Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Methuen, 1986) 43-44.

53 Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Capitalism and Human Emancipation," NLR 167 (January-February 1988): 5, 8.

54 Wood 8.

55 Beechey 79. Her emphasis is included.

did not make patriarchy, or patriarchy nationalism. Rather, male-dominated society exploited rising nationalism in order to safeguard its hold on power, and conversely, too, nationalism, to attain its primary goal of self-determination, exploited existing social and political structures, including forms of gender domination. So we find that, whether in post-colonial times or earlier, during the heyday of European nationalism, nation-states are ruled by male elites, who mould that national entity in their own image.[56] The Sixties moment of independence in Africa was in effect a state take-over involving nationalist brotherhoods, groups who already possessed authority elsewhere in society.

If the ground of interaction between nationalism and gender-dominance is viewed as criss-crossed by a number of intersecting, and thus mutually reinforcing, power relations, then the state forms the primary site of that intersection. Again, this applies both to the new nationalisms of the twentieth century, and to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

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[56] An assertion such as this, however, would deny neither the iconic importance of the female form in embodying national virtue, nor the role played by women, such as Elizabeth I or contemporary dynastic inheritors of state power (Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Corazon Aquino, Violetta Chamorro), in directing national affairs and contributing to the development of national feeling through the exploitation of their iconic roles. This is a contribution that Julia Kristeva in "Women's Time," The Kristeva Reader, ed. Toril Moi, trans. Séan Hand and Léon Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 201-205, has discussed as "counter-investment". The subject of woman's symbolic role in nationalism will be examined at much greater length in the next chapter.

Europe, where nationalism first achieved official or state expression. As Hobsbawm has pointed out, nationalist movements cohere around existing territorial states or state traditions, and, in reverse fashion, states draw on national or proto-national sentiment or ideas to establish legitimacy where other socio-political bonds are in decline.[57] A fundamental compatibility between states and national groupings which Hobsbawm does not mention directly, however, is that in states, as in nations, the lines of control and expressions of authority emanate from the feared and/or revered figures of fathers - in a manner suggestive of family hierarchies. In a way the point is rather obvious: where a society is male-led and controlled, where any public hierarchy which we may care to mention "always everywhere finally [ranks] men higher than women,"[58] state authority too will be the domain of men. The structures of the British state, for example, as Corrigan and Sayer show, have been characterised by a pervasive masculinity.[59] Whether located in the old empires of Ghana and Songhai, in Ancient Greece,[60] or now, in

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57 Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1790 37, 76, 78, 81-85.

58 Janet Todd, review of Rosalind Miles, The Women's History of the World, "In Female Hands," TLS (June 3-9 1988): 615.

59 Corrigan and Sayer 12.

60 Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), delves into ancient history to show that patriarchal relations of domination and subordination supply "founding metaphors" for other forms of social and economic

an age of trans-national capitalism, it is probably safe to say that, as far as we know, in all states formal political power has been gendered.[61] If, then, in addition to this, it is agreed that state formations in the modern age have found in the image of the nation a means of representation, certain homologies should start to emerge more clearly. Under fatherly rule, what we find is that the unitary state, in the form of the nation, takes the patriarchal family, another hierarchical and unitary structure, as one of the controlling motifs of its existence and its rule.

In addition to the state, the new force of capital in the late eighteenth century contributed powerfully to the rise of nationalism, and, again like the state, introduced predominantly masculine themes to the national pageant. Though one would again want to avoid the implication of planned development, scholars such as Anderson, Gellner, and

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authority. In support, Jameson, The Political Unconscious 99-100, adds: "sexism and the patriarchal are to be grasped as the sedimentation and the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest mode of production of human history, with its division of labour between men and women."

[61] For useful exposition of the concept of power as carrying a male gender, see Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1985). Hartsock's contention is, broadly, that power relations in society are grafted onto and determined by the politics of dominant male sexuality. Noting, in her introduction, the paucity of theories of gender domination, Hartsock also pertinently observes: "[class-focussed] discussion of 'the national question' and 'the woman question' have proved unable to account for white and male supremacy" (1).

Poggi agree in assigning to capitalism a determining role in the formation of the formal modern state and of nationalism. In the state, reformed conditions of civil equality conveniently correlated with capital's need for a public workplace in which men, liberated from feudal bonds, addressed as autonomous individuals, would be free to sell their labour power. As Gellner in particular demonstrates, the new economic rationality required a "universal," unified, school-transmitted culture, a homogenising infrastructure best controlled and supervised by a centralised state. It was upon this homogeneous base that nationalist ideology was built.[62] National structures, therefore, became not only deeply enmeshed with but also informed and to a large extent constituted by state forms operating in conjunction with new bourgeois power. This power, like that of the state, was explicitly gendered.

How was this gender-weighting of capital expressed? Though it might be explained simply as the modern manifestation of older forms of patriarchal authority, male dominance in the new social order did take on certain significant and identifiable shapes, emerging, for example, in the biases of bourgeois individualism. Where older hierarchies of authority - the aristocracy, the monarchy, and the church - were disintegrating or levelling out, into the

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62 Gellner 19-38.

breach, graphically speaking, had stepped the autonomous self - individual man. This new individual, economic man, found his meaning not under the aegis of natural law or divine will, nor yet within the hieratic forms of the feudal state, but in himself and within the new economic order.[63] Situated in a more horizontal and atomised culture, one shaped also by the new orientation towards the vernacular and the emergence of mass technologies of communication, it became possible to conceive of otherness as 'same', both over space and over time, or, to put it another way, of the identities of other human beings as multiple and discrete, but also as coincident.[64] Such conceptions were basic to nationalist imaginings. People could now see themselves as connected through their common submission to the symbol of the nation. Homogeneity facilitated identification: the unitary national identity - or uniform meta-subject - was the reflection of the other in self and the realisation of self in other.[65] Yet

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[63] Watt 60-92 describes this new bourgeois individualism in the context of the emergence of the modern novel.

[64] See Anderson 28-40 for his discussion of the homogeneous clock time created by the new print-media, and of monadic entities, whether nations or individuals, linked through their simultaneous imagined existence within this dimension.

[65] Joyce's parodic account of nationalist sentiment in the "Cyclops" chapter of Ulysses rests on the idea of the nation as equated with self, and of the nation as homogeneous:

> - But do you know what a nation means? says Joe Wyse.
> - Yes, says Bloom.
> - What is it? says Joe Wyse.
> - A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same

where imaginative reordering did not imply a change in existing forms of gendered authority, the image of the national self was never so transparent or transferable as to lose its specific tag for maleness. If the nation represented the imaginative space where the atomised units of modern society could be fused into one, that oneness, the experience of national bonding, would be predicated upon a male subject.

But the male-domination of bourgeois power was also structurally grounded, a grounding which again had specific symbolic effects. As a number of feminist theorists have argued, with the ascendancy of the capitalist state, the creation of an official public space of labour and of social regulation corresponded to the parallel development, as a type of verso to the public contract, of a private domestic sphere where individuals, the social actors, could be prepared for labour and consume its fruits - or, in more straightforward terms, where women might reproduce the labour force.[66] If the

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> people living in one place.
> - By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that's so I'm a nation for I'm living in the same place for the past five years.

James Joyce, Ulysses, revised ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 271-272.

[66] To offer a rough sampling of studies of middle-class society and its gender divisions (mainly with respect to Britain), see the following: Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850 (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Roberta Hamilton, The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978); Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex

nation provided the primary model of identification and integration in the public arena, the family and the ethos of fatherly control and female reproduction defined the conception and constitution of inner domestic space. However, the symbolism of this inner space was destined, as it were, to be turned inside out. As the nation-state relied upon and gave its backing to capitalist expansion, it would tend to absorb the gendered divisions accentuated and exploited by capital into its own representations of authority. The result was a transfer of models from the private to the public realm. The master symbol of the nation-state as male-ruled family, therefore, did not fortuitously bob to the surface of social consciousness in the process of the capitalist revolution. Rather, by adopting a morality and vocabulary of patriarchal deference and family organisation, the nation found itself powerfully equipped with a language of political legitimation. It might be imagined that, in the relative insecurity of a social system in flux, images of identity and authority that

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and Power; Bridget Hill, Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Lynda Nead, Myths of Sexuality; Representation of Women in Victorian Britain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), especially 32-36, 48-49; Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (London: Virago, 1989). Regarding the separation of public from private space, see also Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972) 24-51, in which he argues that the development of the modern state made possible a separation of civil society, the realm of civil rights and of man as ego being, from the realm of politics, where human beings are citizens.

still held - that were familiar - became pivotal points of social cohesion.[67]

Alongside these developments, changes in family structures were also taking place. These, too, would have a reinforcing effect on the conceptualisation of the national family as male-dominated (not necessarily only as father-ruled, but, where men of equal status were involved, fraternal). From the point of view of the middle-class, the disintegration of household enterprises and the separation of home and work-place had two related consequences. First, as intimated, with their part in production increasingly marginalised, middle-class women found their role in society to be ever more closely identified with child-bearing. Secondly - again speaking quite generally - in a new age of accumulation and booming property investment, it became important for middle-class men energetically to safeguard lineages, to guarantee rights of inheritance. Their desires

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[67] The idea of symbolic borrowing from family to nation is advanced by Corrigan and Sayer 1-13. Rachel Harrison and Frank Mort, "Patriarchal Aspects of Nineteenth-Century State Formation," Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory, ed. Philip Corrigan (London: Quartet, 1980) 79-109, though not as focussed on the nation, discuss ways in which the modern Western state "[secured] the continuation and definition of specific forms of patriarchal relations" (79). Commenting on the multifarious roles of the industrial state in South and South East Asia, Bina Agarwal, "Introduction," Structures of Patriarchy: The State, the Community and the Household, ed. Bina Agarwal (London: Zed, 1988), observes that the state and the household, as political entities dominated by patriarchal interest, deploy converging methods of power.

in this area, and the development of the rule of fidelity and respectability in the home, were secured by the compensatory ethos of the domestic haven. However, though identified as a zone of gentle female influence, the domestic space in reality remained the father's domain of authority. As though for good measure, Pauline injunctions regarding the position of fathers as the single and undisputed heads of households, reinforced this position. "A Family," runs a seventeenth-century homiletic description, in words that have a striking application to nations also, "is a naturall and simple Societie of certaine persons, having mutuall relation one to another, under the private government of one."[68]

Nationalism, evolving around forms of gender dominance based in the state, secured controlling images of loyalty, cohesion, service, and authority from within the sequestered hierarchies of the patriarchal and latterly middle-class family. As a hierarchy controlled by the word of the father, this family became a symbolic nexus for the nation. De Tocqueville made note of such familial parallels in his comments on American society:

> Nor have the Americans ever supposed that democratic principle should undermine the husband's authority and make it doubtful who is in charge of the family. In their view, every association, to be effective, must have a head, and the natural head of the conjugal association is the husband....They think that in the little

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68 Hamilton 69.

> society composed of man and wife, as in the great society of politics, the aim of democracy is to regulate and legitimate necessary power.[69]

Simon Schama observes that in the springtime of the Dutch nation, which, too, was "made up" "as they went along," "the ideal of a good family was the miniature of the ideal commonwealth" and "the family and the neighbourhood were...the irreducible cells on which the wider community of town or province ultimately rested."[70] An interesting analogy to this appears in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which, while also using the generic pronoun "he" throughout, stipulates that "the family shall be the natural unit and basis of society" (Article 18).[71] And again, in the ironic epigraphs to the chapters of The Child in Time, Ian McEwan points to the wide use of the 'nation-as-family' paradigm. The following quotation is said to be from the HMSO Authorised Childcare Handbook: "We could do worse to conclude, as have

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[69] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Doubleday, 1969) 601.

[70] Simon Schama, The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age (London: Fontana, 1988) 3-4, 185.

[71] "The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights," International Legal Materials 21 (1982): 61. I am indebted to Michael Anderson for this reference. V.Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge (London: Currey, 1988) 95, informs us that Julius Nyerere's ujamaa means "first of all the creation of a new society, a nation, based on the traditional model of family."

many before us, that from love and respect for home we derive our deepest loyalties to nation."[72]

The domestic realm, therefore, developed into a rich tropographic terrain where images of family unity and male control, as well as of female sublimity or submission, might be mined. According to ideological demand, the image of fatherly authority could be modified by or set alongside the more egalitarian metaphor, signifying democracy, of the state as collective of equals or autonomous selves, in other words, of brotherly comradeship. Yet unless otherwise specified, this image of the citizenry as fraternity of equals, by definition, did not include women, or, at least, not women <u>as such</u>.

For women, images of national roles were (and are) located elsewhere within the portmanteau trope of the patriarchal unit. Almost by definition, the familial image carries within it a fabric of female stereotypes based on ideas of mother-bondedness and state mothers. For where in Victorian society, for example, motherhood was defined as a respectable woman's primary role and the source of her meaning, and where "Home [was] the crystal of society - the very nucleus of national character....[the] nation [coming]

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72 Ian McEwan, <u>The Child in Time</u> (London: Cape, 1987) 69.

from the nursery,"[73] and motherhood its underpinning, it followed that women, in their capacity as mothers, would be called upon both as guardians of national virtue and integrity, and, almost literally, as its mothers or reproducers. Thus Adrienne Rich, writing on the institution of motherhood, has commented on the incorporation of the nineteenth-century (in this case North American) ideology of the ideal home into the broader conception of national patriarchy. She quotes from a publication of the American Tract Society:

> Mothers have as powerful an influence over the welfare of future generations, as all other earthly causes combined....When our land is filled with pious and patriotic mothers, then will it be filled with virtuous and patriotic men.[74]

To draw in another cultural perspective, Haleh Afshar has observed that the family (here signifying basic community, locus of honour and reproductive sphere) is pivotal to Iranian national identity. Motherhood is portrayed as the basis of nationhood, as generating the bonding of national sons.[75] The combative approach of Iranian fundamentalism may subtend this symbolism. Predictably, the image of mothers as national breeders and home-keepers, becomes particularly prominent

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73 Samuel Smiles, Self-Help (1856), quoted in Nead 33.

74 Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1986) 44. I have not included Rich's emphasis. See also 43-55.

75 Haleh Afshar, "Women and Reproduction in Iran," Woman-Nation-State, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (London: Macmillan, 1989) 110-125.

during times of national anxiety and also of expansion, when it is important for the family to rally together and act as one. In Britain in the nineteenth century the concern in, for example, eugenicist circles and among imperialists, lay with fostering a strong national (and again by definition, male) stock, the "material of Empire," "the future colonizers and soldiers." In this situation, it was imperative that women develop their capacity as "mothers of the race,"[76] nurturers of the nation. The high visibility of motherhood, however, did not win citizen-status or autonomy for women. Outside their symbolic roles of national mothers, women, lacking authorised powers of self-definition, excluded from normative conceptions of selfhood, did not figure prominently as national actors.

A family of male equals spontaneously fusing together, ruled over by the stratified and pervasively masculine power of the state: this, in schematic terms, was the image of the nation that Europe, in part paradoxically, disseminated across the globe through the systems of education and administration that upheld its colonising ventures. The nationalism thus propagated, bore, so to speak, an in-built mechanism or historical memory which primed it to co-ordinate with

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76 Quoted in Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," History and Politics, vol. 1 of Patriotism 212, 217. See also Nead 81-86 on the British national panic at the time of the Indian mutiny.

indigenous state and patriarchal hierarchies. As instruments of colonial rule, bureaucratic state structures, too, had been transferred from Europe, and remained in form and expression elitist, patrimonial, and alienated from civil society. Legitimation of such state power, therefore, if sought, could again be made through an appeal to pre- and co-existing structures of authoritarian and/or patriarchal rule at family and at community levels. Here, too, the family metaphor was readily and usefully appropriated as at once local and familiar and yet, as a mode of social organisation, widespread and adaptable. Within its gendered spaces, it meted out a variety of powerfully symbolic roles: Father of the Nation (Kenyatta, Kaunda), Great Mother/s (land, national reproducers), the collective of functionaries and loyal citizens as its/her sons. So Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his novel Weep Not, Child (1964), portrays Jomo Kenyatta as occupying a position in the national command structure corresponding to that of Ngotho, the protagonist's father, at a community and domestic level: family and national loyalties run in close parallel.[77] Once again, the family becomes the cottage industry in which leading signifiers of nationhood are prepared. Yet - the point is worth stating precisely because it seems obvious - the figures of national daughters are not much in evidence.

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[77] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Weep Not, Child (London: Heinemann, 1983). See also David Maughan-Brown, Land, Freedom and Fiction (London: Zed, 1985) 183-205.

This is not to imply, however, that the emergence of national forms on the colonial periphery - and in this case in particular its patriarchal manifestations - was even at the state level a simple reproduction or cloning process. Against the modular aspects of the theories of nationalism associated with Anderson, Nairn, and Gellner, it is important to point out that, far from straitforwardly developing along European lines as a part of processes of industrialisation and so-called modernisation, colonial nationalisms also drew on indigenous cultural concepts. If nationalism is a reconstruction from existing materials rather than a pure invention or straight imitation, the multiple variables of cultural difference and dissent - including syncretic forms of opposition to the colonial master, parodic mimicry, the hybridisation of political and other languages[78] - would transmute and remake nationalism in the process of its being transferred. As Partha Chatterjee argues, nationalist discourse, if not autonomous, need not be seen as purely

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[78] The concept of the Islamic community, umma or ummat, for example, is interpreted by Iranian nationalists as proto-nationalist, a precursor of the national community. For his ideas on the colonised as reading imperial culture askew and subtly shifting its meanings, see Homi Bhabha, Nation and Narration 291-322; "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Politics and Ideology, eds. James Donald and Stuart Hall (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1986) 198-205; "Signs Taken for Wonders," "Race," Writing and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986) 163-184.

derivative.[79] In fact, both Anderson and Nairn suggest that certain paradigmatic nationalist ideas, such as that of "compensatory reaction," or resistance to imperial oppression, or that of the definition of own space, may have developed on Europe's periphery.[80] The next chapter will expand on the problems that apparent derivation and imitation represent for post-colonial nationalisms.

For the present, however, what must be conceded is that nationalism, formalised within state structures, and shaped by an expansive capitalism, continues to bear the mark of its history or histories. Though protean in its various incarnations, it signifies less a play of improvisation and infinitely-changing identity, than one in which some of the rules and roles have already been inscribed. The persistence of gender biases in post-colonial nationalisms serves as a test case for such historical loading. In Africa, for example, colonialism was a nearly continent-wide experience: it would everywhere have been the case that the most successful forms of colonial power worked through exploiting

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79 Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse (London: Zed, 1986) 1-53.

80 Nairn, The Break-Up of Britain 336-345; Anderson 50-66. The quotation is from Nairn 343. Brennan 57-60 adopts these ideas.

existing power relations of hierarchy and subordination.[81] Presuming that forms of male dominance were already present in families and communities, as an effective means of legitimating the new authority, these indigenous hierarchies would be extended and reinforced. Far from being only an outward manifestation of colonial rule, male dominance, the intersection of indigenous and imported forms, became its medium. Taking into account that power is self-confirming, the usefulness of the system guaranteed not only its ubiquity and its survival beyond independence, but, as will be seen, its reproduction in the organisation and symbolisation of nationalist politics.

This implies that the unshackling of the African continent (in this case) from colonial rule through nationalism precluded a corresponding full emancipation of women. The queenly status of nationalist mother icons, therefore, would serve only to point up by contrast the actual lowly status of women within the new nation-states. In spite of the promises of national freedom, women in many African countries today are still explicitly legislated against as women, and are thus effectively barred from full national

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[81] For an exemplifying case, see Marjorie Mbilinyi, "Runaway Wives in Colonial Tanganyika: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage in Rungwe District 1919-1961," The International Journal for the Sociology of Law 16.1 (January 1988): 1-29.

participation on an equal footing with men. Instances of the state mobilising against women appear right the way across the continent. This is particularly the case where the regulation of women's lives, of their reproductive capacity and means of livelihood, become for male-dominated governments an important means of establishing and safeguarding authority. Mbilinyi mentions measures taken in Tanzania during the Seventies and Eighties to control the migration of women from the rural areas.[82] The Zimbabwean state has throughout the Eighties undertaken campaigns against prostitution, baby-dumping and social "uncleanness" - ways of obtaining control not simply over unplanned urban settlement, but specifically, of disciplining women as urban dwellers. The Campaign against Indiscipline of the Federal Military Government in Nigeria in 1984-85 targeted women - petty-traders, single women in cities - as the prime offenders.[83]

This highly schematic conceptual and historical account was given by way of exposition to a more specific symbolic analysis. If it can now be accepted that models for African nationalism rest on a historical interlocking of male-dominated systems, we might go on to ask in what ways that

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[82] Mbilinyi 26.

[83] See Carolynne Dennis, "Women and the State in Nigeria: the Case of the Federal Military Government 1984-85," Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia, ed. Haleh Afshar (London: Macmillan, 1987) 13-27.

history is made manifest in nationalist writing: how is the family trope or the concept of bonding expressed; in what manner does nationalism reveal, confirm and consolidate its politically gendered character? More specifically, what kinds of symbolic processes shape the gendered discourses of nationalism, and of African nationalism in particular? The next chapter will begin to explore the tropes which govern the representation of women - and reciprocally, too, of men - in the early nationalist writing of post-colonial Africa. As the Bakhtinian analogy between epic and national forms earlier suggested, figures suggesting autonomy, unity, and a singleness of determination, in particular, should figure prominently in this investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

"Mothers of Men": The Family Trope in Nationalist Iconography

> The Land is the Mother of us all; nourishes, shelters, gladdens, lovingly enriches us all; in how many ways, from our first wakening to our last sleep on her blessed mother-bosom, does she, as with blessed mother arms, enfold us all! The Hill I first saw the Sun rise over, when the Sun and I and all things were yet in their auroral hour, who can divorce me from it? Mystic deep as the world's centre, are the roots I have struck into my Native Soil; no tree that grows is rooted so....a Nation's Life depends upon its Land.[1]

> My son,
> No sound is breathed so potent to coerce,
> And to conciliate, as their names who dare
> For that sweet motherland which gave them birth
> Nobly to do, nobly to die.[2]

> We [women] no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African mother whom, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa.[3]

As the foregoing exposition of iconic trends in nationalist history will already have suggested, if in general

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[1] Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (London: Chapman and Hall, 1897) 174.

[2] Robert W. Hill, ed., Tennyson's Poetry (London: Norton, 1971) 77.

[3] Mariama Bâ quoted in Unheard Words: Women and Literature, ed. Mineke Schipper, trans. Barbara Potter Fasting (London: Allison and Busby, 1985) 50.

terms - the mother image embraces with some liberality and largesse the national imagination. In nationalist iconography, if male filial figures experience the gravitational pull to the national ground, women constitute part of its gravid mass. The female form is the fundamental matter of the nation - its bedrock, root bed, birthing ground. The organising metaphor of the national family, for which nationalist writings and narratives provide the script, locates the mother's position as axial: around her action turns. As in other symbolic systems in largely male-dominated societies, the body of woman - in this case in particular the gestative, hearth-bound body of the mother - is held to be the embodiment of national virtues defined by men. Indomitable, unshakeable, this mother cradles the nation in her capacious lap, inspiring its sons to deeds worthy of her name. As this chapter and also the next will demonstrate, the symbolic drama of their dedication to the mother repeatedly reproduces itself across the pages of the early nationalist literature of Africa.

From initial appearances, it is true, national symbols may seem to be in the main bad memories, residues of other and older male-dominated systems, further refractions of the worn visages of patriarchal stereotypes. Yet, if it is agreed that nationalism indeed represents power marked for male gender, though this is on one level because vested national

authorities are typically male, it is also because nationalist discourses and modes of self-representation imply and so secure the place of a dominant male subject. As earlier asserted, national icons provide the connective tissue of nationalist ideology and sensibility. Therefore, if national symbolic codes are tagged for gender, these same symbols will allocate, constitute and embed national roles. As Hobsbawm has put it, symbols, along with "rituals or common collective practices...alone give a palpable reality to otherwise imaginary community."[4]

To venture an opening exegesis: the mother figure in nationalism represents yearnings for lost wholeness, close(d?)ness, home, and for a coherence and completeness yet to be achieved. Her form stands for - or stands in for - the absolute fullness of meaning or self-presence desired by nationalism; she allows the vicarious enjoyment of such fantasies of wholeness, yet as surrogate she also signifies the endless deferral of their fulfilment.[5] Tom Nairn has spoken of symbols and emblems within nationalism operating as fetishes, in the manner described by Freud.[6] He is alerted to this likeness by Freud's own analogy for the fetish as "token

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[4] Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1790 71.

[5] On connections between religious and national consciousness, see Anderson, Imagined Communities 17-20; Hobsbawm 67-71.

[6] Nairn, The Enchanted Glass 113-114.

of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it," and for its associated complex of emotions:

> In later life a grown man may perhaps experience a similar panic [to that of the discovery of the mother's castration] when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger, and similar illogical consequences will ensue.[7]

In making the analogy between signs for the "phallic mother" and national fetishes, however, both Freud and Nairn overlook their explicit conflation in nationalist iconography - and, therefore, the gendered basis of the national signs. In nationalist discourse, the appearance of the "phallic mother," ultimate symptom of the severance built into the symbolic order, becomes the primary, or single most obvious sign of a lack, or of the need for a fullness of (national) being.[8] Thus the symbolic order, which, according to Lacan, is paternal and sacrificial, permits (nationalist) mothers' sons to transpose their desire for wholeness - whether for the phallus or the womb - onto the figure of "an archaic, full, total englobing mother."[9] Nationalist discourse, not only mother-focussed but also time-bound, linear, infatuated with

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[7] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," On Sexuality, vol. 7 of The Penguin Freud Library, ed. Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 353, 352.

[8] See Juliet Mitchell, "Introduction-I," and Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction-II," Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne, trans. Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan, 1985) 1-26, 27-57.

[9] Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," The Kristeva Reader 205, and, for fetishism, see also, "Revolution in Poetic Language" 113-117.

truths and origins, betrays its status as fatherly language and power.

"That," as T.S. Eliot said, "was a way of putting it." The psychoanalytic schema offers a meta-code or analytic fiction, a way of beginning to characterise the gendered narrative of nationalism. In that it situates a family scene, and highlights the positions of mothers relative to sons, it serves as a useful introduction, one that matches up with the trope of what I propose to call the national family drama - the iconic scenario which governs the allocation of roles and meanings in national symbolism. Yet there are also other processes which feed into this basic iconic scene: other conventions of symbolising women; specific cultural traditions and historical developments. These too must be examined. It is relevant, for example, that the literatures of the decades immediately prior to and following independence in Africa were expressive of a particularly polemical and pictorial nationalist phase, during which writers took upon themselves the project of rewriting and celebrating the start of a new history. Or, again, that in fashioning for themselves historical selfhood, national elites or fraternities had to work with the myths of power inherited from earlier patriarchies, both indigenous and foreign.[10] The questions

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[10] John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1969), provides an illustrative example of the andro-and also Euro-centric refashioning of this

now to be confronted, therefore, concern not only the nature of the nationalist family romance, or the ways in which it is made manifest, but also the various symbolic processes that might conceivably have contributed to its composition.

The elevated symbolic stature which may be accorded the National Woman in an African nation-state is clearly illustrated in the following extracts from the final two chapters of David Lan's Guns and Rain, an account of the popular struggle for and achievement of independence in Zimbabwe. Noteworthy is the fact that the actual lowly position of women in the nation throws into relief the loftiness of the National Mother's standing: it is a contrast stated though not explored by the author. He points to the continued existence of inequality between men and women after the war, despite the disruption of gender roles during the process of that struggle:

> By transforming themselves into warriors, the archetypal male role, and by wandering far from their fathers' homes with neither husbands nor chaperones, the women [guerrillas] achieved a dramatic break with the past and they were fully conscious that they had done so.
>
> Today....[t]hough there are those who wish to consolidate and extend the progress achieved during the war, in the face of determined male

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inheritance. Mbiti speaks of the God of African Religion being One, and also Father (48-49). The presence of female figures, symbolic or otherwise, in religious ritual and practice is neglected (77-78).

> opposition they all too easily fall victim to the pre-war male conceptualisation of women as no more than the providers of biological fertility and domesticity to the men.[11]

The reference to the resilient fraternal figure of the fighter or soldier, one of the prevalent male images in nationalist self-dramatisation, is significant, particularly when juxtaposed with the unambiguous female imagery of the second quotation. Here Lan describes the commemoration during independence celebrations and after of Nehanda, the spirit whose mediums were seen to have aided the liberation struggle:

> Countless songs were performed about her. Recordings of these songs sold in their thousands. Her image, incorporated into a design printed on materials and made up into headscarves and dresses was everywhere to be seen, bought back to life by the bobbing and ducking of thousands of women in the jubilant and dancing crowds. On a specially printed banner that was hung wherever the new nation state was welcomed, Nehanda's head and shoulders hovered above those of Robert Mugabe, the warrior of the past guiding, supporting and recommending this triumphant warrior of the present. Within six months, schools and, with particular aptness, a maternity hospital had been named in her honour. There was no doubt that Ambuya Nehanda, the grandmother of all the ancestors, had taken the whole of Zimbabwe under her care [my emphasis].[12]

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[11] David Lan, Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe (London: Currey, 1987) 212-213. A female ex-fighter is reported as having said: "the men wanted us [women guerrillas] in war but not in marriage." See Edde Ivan-Smith, Nidhi Tandon, and Jane Connors, Women in Sub-Saharan Africa (London: Minority Rights Group, 1988) 7.

[12] Lan 218.

The belief in spirit mediums, which was, as Lan shows, of specific importance to the Zimbabwean liberation fighters, obviously governs the way in which Nehanda is remembered. But the more general symbolic logic that subtends Nehanda's representation is also unmistakable: the spiritual custodian of the new nation, who was its inspiration in times of war, has now fused her warrior role with a more maternal function to become the great national grandmother. Her status overtops that of the prime minister, whose own position is confirmed by her proximity, and whose role, in relation to her, is significantly that of soldier - and thus of national heir/son and hero. The imaginative affinity of nationalism for powerful female/mother symbols co-exists with a dominant maleness in the characterisation of public national roles. The images that emerge out of this relationship disguise the actual gender equalities existing within the national society.

How might one begin to identify and to categorise the contents of the national package strapped to the broad maternal back? To look at the language of nationalism for a moment, in the commonplace referents used of national lands, the gender dichotomies of national iconography would also seem to operate. Consider the metaphors embedded in the terms 'motherland' -- and/or '-country', '-tongue', '-continent' -- and 'fatherland'. What immediately attracts notice here are the different symbolic valencies of these terms, suggesting

again that the images of mothers and of men occupy different levels in national imaginings. Syntactically, the epithet 'father' cannot be used interchangeably with that of 'mother'. So too, the meanings which collect around the mother metaphor when applied to lands, languages, and other national entities, are incommensurate with and preclude the idea of the father. The image of the mother invites connotations of origins - birth, hearth, home, roots, the umbilical root - and rests upon the frequent, and some might say natural identification of the mother with the beloved earth, the national territory, and the first-spoken language, the national tongue (thus nations are referred to as 'she' or as 'it'). In contrast the term 'fatherland' has conventionally lent itself to contexts perhaps more strenuously nationalistic, where the appeal is to bruderschaft, filial duty, the bonds of fraternity and paternity.[13]

Taken together with the roles assigned Nehanda and her warrior son, these buried metaphors begin to limn a paradigm for the representation of gender in nationalism. In state

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[13] George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 155-179, referring to nationalism as "competitive prestige" and power hunger, speaks of the object of national passion or the national "power unit" purely as the "Fatherland". Orwell distinguishes nationalism from patriotism, which he defines as a defensive attitude, "a devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life." It is tempting to think that with its connotations of quieter loyalties and greater passiveness, patriotism to Orwell matches with the term 'motherland'. See, in particular, 156, 162, 164.

practice, and certainly in its iconographies of power, nationalism invites characterisation as a male family drama. Male actors are assigned prominent national (and often already conventionally masculine) roles: as soldier, leader or representative of state, official spokesman (or artist) or faithful citizen-hero, the national protagonist is a fatherly or a fraternal figure. Against his prominent status, woman as actor or equal participant is strangely absent from the drama. She is rarely assigned a role alongside that of the male actors, nor does she set the scene or swell a progress. External to the serious affairs of the nation, she is most often found in the form of inviolable ideal or untouchable icon - that is, if she is not excluded from the action entirely as an unknown subversive quantity and a threat. Her role is that of emblem, designed to inspire not to act. Even if she is granted the part of single glorified heroine, she is seen as superhuman ('no normal woman could be this way') - once again removed from real life, once again inviolable. Tanika Sarkar observes of the Mother's role in Bengali national iconography: "when [the] resurgent patriotism of [the mother] irradiates her son, her task is complete and the burden of regeneration passes on from the mother to the son."[14]

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[14] Tanika Sarkar, "Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature," Economic and Political Weekly (21 November 1987): 2012.

On this basis, male roles in nationalism may be regarded as metonymic: as author and subject of nationalism, the male is a part of the nation, or contiguous with it; his place is alongside that of his brother citizens.[15] If he appears as a personification of the nation, he is both an individual and individualised - a John Bull, an Uncle Sam.[16] In contrast, the figure of woman in nationalism is usually seen as generalised and generic (not to say generative also). Her form swells into a trope closer to metaphor. In special cases, when for example she takes the androgynous form of woman fighter or soldier (the early Gladys of Achebe's short story, "Girls at War" (1972),[17] or, as will be seen, the latter-day Wariinga of Ngugi's Devil on the Cross), a woman character may be ranked together with her nationalist brothers. Yet, even apart from the ambiguous value of the male dressing, her status as single woman tends to remain idealised and totemic. In general, then, the woman - and usually the mother - figure stands for the national territory and for national values: symbolically she is ranged above the men; in reality she is kept below them. As, for example, in

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15 A (male) nationalist leader may also have a role as 'father' of the nation - in which case he would still honour the nation or land as his 'mother'.

16 See Jeannine Surel, "John Bull," trans. Kathy Hodgkin, National Fictions 3-25. Surel notes that John Bull is at once distinctive and individual, while also representing a variety of social characters.

17 Chinua Achebe, Girls at War and Other Stories (London: Heinemann, 1986) 98-118.

the imagery of African nationalism, as also that of Pan-Africanism, the idealised woman figure can take on massive, gravid, even continent-wide proportions - she is Great Mother, both Africa and mother, embracing each and every nation in her generous arms.

It might be said that the national family drama supplies a corroborative script and choreography for the larger symbolic romance which is nationalist history. Again and again in the literature and history of nationalist movements - though perhaps especially so in embattled, colonised or formerly occupied lands - the family romance in which national sons dedicate themselves to their Mother, is enacted. As will be seen, literature is a singularly appropriate medium for such romances, not only because it encourages self-articulation, but also, on a more metaphoric level, in that nationalist traditions of sonship are crossed with and reinforced by the vocabularies of patrimony and filiation which inform literary mythology. In a variety of literary traditions, including that of African nationalism, writing is characterised as a masculine activity, and the tradition as a struggle between author-itative fathers and their sons.[18]

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[18] The theory of the anxiety of this influence as also the idea of "sonship" are obviously Harold Bloom's. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination (London: Yale UP, 1984), offer a critical rereading of this theory in order to build upon it their own analysis of the influence and anxiety which operates in women's writing. See 5-7 and 46-53

Some concrete examples taken from the literature in question will begin to illustrate more precisely how the family trope works, and under what sort of guises it may appear. This will also provide material for a later unravelling of the symbolic processes which went into its making. First, however, given that a discussion of continental symbols inevitably raises questions of overlap, a preliminary word on Pan-Africanism is in order. Precisely because the constitutive effects of the Mother Africa symbol are manifested here, too, Pan-Africanism offers insights into the function and forces of the 'talisman'.

Faced with the unreality of the national territories which an imperial era implanted on the world map, post-colonial national movements in Africa have tended to look beyond the nation for significations of identity and, as Shelley put it, "self-empire". The affinities of nationalist consciousness for homogeneous historical experience and common ethnicity or cultural forms, led such movements to find in a broader African or continental experience (whether of slavery, colonialism, or of blackness and black culture), sources of cultural pride and images of selfhood.[19] This supra-nationalism or Pan-Africanism, though not strictly national

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for a discussion of the metaphor of literary paternity.

[19] See Hobsbawm 171.

because unenchanted by statehood or state power, remains nationalist in its quest for subjecthood, for the fullness of a continental or ethnic identity. Social division, or the absence of unifying cultural significance at a conventional national level, is resolved by being raised to the level of supra-national symbol.[20] As was suggested in the Introduction, and as Chidi Amuta confirms, African nationalism can be seen as bifurcated in certain ways, looking both to nation-state and to ethnic geography.[21] It is in mediating this split that the generic, all-embracing aspects of the African Mother have proved particularly useful: as fetish, the "englobing" mother summarises disparate desires for authenticity, unity, and self-determination at national and continental levels.

Ranging across a fairly wide terrain in the African literature of the Sixties and Seventies, the nationalist hero, often exiled or alienated from home (mother and heart(h)land), can be resilient and courageous (like a soldier); idealistic or visionary (like a poet); or resourceful, even omnicompetent. The case of Michael Udomo in Peter Abrahams's A Wreath for Udomo (1956) is representative on a number of

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20 See Nairn, The Enchanted Glass 11.

21 Chidi Amuta, The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism (London: Zed, 1989) 90-91.

counts and will therefore be discussed in some detail.[22] A Wreath for Udomo is a tale of exile from and return to Africa, embodied in Udomo's efforts to claim self-government for his nation and identity for his people. As character portrait of a liberator - assertive, visionary, vigorously male - the novel serves as vehicle for the author's own intensely emotive and idealistic African nationalism. For Abrahams this feeling was in fact so strong as to enact what could be called wish-fulfilment in text. A study of the political strengths and weaknesses of the first elite leadership of Africa, written one year before the independence of Ghana (the first European colony in Africa to achieve that status), the novel prefigures something of the career of Kwame Nkrumah, both its early optimism and the later dilemmas, ending with his fall from grace.

Implicit in the act of returning to Africa after exile is the problem of what to do after one has returned. Depicting the conflicting methods pursued by Michael Udomo and his opponents and friends, Peter Abrahams (himself an exile) plays alternative strategies of reconstruction and reformation off against one another. Of Black African independence, a character in Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook observes: "[t]here's only one thing an intelligent nationalist leader can do, and that is to strengthen nationalist feeling and

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22 Peter Abrahams, A Wreath for Udomo (London: Faber, 1979).

develop industry."[23] Udomo, no stranger to nationalist feeling, develops industry; his opponents, in what is represented as a regression to atavism, reject westernisation to affirm the primal energies of the land. The various conflicts in the novel, whether of personality or of politics, see-saw around a familiar framework of intersecting positive and negative values in which Africa/bodily instinct/femaleness are opposed to Europe/reason/male assertiveness.

Implicit from the start of A Wreath for Udomo, this complex of dichotomies stakes out the field of subsequent struggle and plots the moral and political positions of the characters. The pattern is comparable to A.-J. Greimas's "elementary structure of signification," or, in Frederic Jameson's interpretation, "semantic rectangle," organised around the traditional logical concepts of the contrary and the contradictory.[24] If the starting point or main signifier of the rectangle is that represented by Udomo, to find his 'own opposite', the narrative operates by testing out, as it

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[23] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (London: Grafton, 1986) 108.

[24] Jameson's useful interpretation of Greimas may be found in Frederic Jameson, The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 161-168. See also the adaptation thereof in The Political Unconscious 82-83, and the source of the interpretation, A.-J. Greimas, Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method, trans. Danielle McDowell et al (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), especially 18-31, 192-196, 222-295.

were, a number of imaginative possibilities within the meaning complex. Being the African man of reason and a natural leader of men, Udomo's strong position is only endorsed by this process: the positive terms of the novel reinforce and confirm one another in his character and action. He is the natural inheritor of his revolutionary mentor, Lanwood: he has the mental conviction, resilience of mind, and assertiveness required for the job (WfU 15); he is also suitably patriotic and male. His English lover, Lois, while cynically acknowledging her lowly status as woman, explicitly classifies him as such. As Udomo remembers the older generation of patriotic heroes and envisions the coming of a new, Lois comments:

> "You men and your patriotism!"
> He smiled. There was a hint of superiority to it.
> "You don't understand..." he murmured.
> "Of course not. How could I? I'm the primitive backward woman." (WfU 15).

Lois's attitude of wry and affectionate indulgence could be interpreted as a moment at which the text confesses to its own stereotypes of male and female personality. Yet, even if this is so, the moment is soon cancelled: to find complements for the positive masculine virtues which Udomo represents, the gendered value nexus which structures the plot is repeatedly allowed to show through its surface. Throughout it is "[o]ur young men [who] must ceaselessly prepare themselves for the

fight" (WfU 15) while "their" women obey orders to follow (WfU 18).[25]

The two centres of rival power which highlight Udomo's status as true national leader are both, though in opposite ways, negations or aberrations of those characteristics and qualities which Udomo incarnates. If on the one side are 'the women', all of them in some way either inconsequential or deviant, on the other side, occupying the position of simple negative, there are those of the elect (all of course male) who are at first suitably rational and freedom-loving, but who eventually fall from grace, turning to "tribalism" and subverting Udomo's plans.[26] These men, like Udomo, are at first self-conscious leaders who love Africa. Like him, they are represented as rational, also as pragmatic. With the return to Africa, however, they become, to use Lanwood's phrase, "negative and destructive" (WfU 74-75). They turn to atavism, to "blood ritual and ancestor worship" (WfU 302), or what Udomo calls "all that is ugly and evil in our past" (WfU 302). They kill Udomo because, by promoting Western ways, he is seen as having betrayed that past.

Contrasted with these potentially strong but apostate male characters and also with the figure of Udomo, the women

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25 Also relevant are WfU 43, 61, 92, 162, 218.

26 The term "tribalism" is in the text.

characters in the novel divide into two groups. Either they are metropolitan and thus marginalised (the white lovers of the male characters), or they are presented as mystical and powerful and therefore dangerous (chiefly Selina, the market woman who organises the popular resistance against Udomo). Maria, the submissive, 'real' African mate Selina finds for Mhendi, one of the elect, to help him serve Africa (WfU 197), does not fit exactly into this schema. Yet, even if she bears something of the true African spirit, she is little more than a weak peripheral realisation of everything that Africa means to the men who serve her. Her passivity qualifies her for inclusion with the marginalised group.

The single strong and positive female symbol in the narrative is that of Africa: only as ideal, purged of her materiality, it seems, can the feminine be seen as powerful and pure. Africa thus becomes the fourth locus of value in the novel's semantic rectangle, the negation of its negations, and Udomo's true complement. Like him, and unlike the "tribalists" or the heroes' women, the continent represents an ideal which the narrative fully endorses. Africa is promised land, the putative end of the nationalists' striving. For Selina, it is true, the continent is the site of instinctual power, of the true "dark ways" (WfU 123) of the past. Yet from Udomo's dominant point of view, Africa as contrasted both with the traditionalists' violence and with Lois's

emotionalism and womanly weakness, stands for a vital regenerative energy that complements his reason. In this latter capacity, Africa becomes the object of the concentrated desire of her exiled and returning son. In that part of the novel significantly entitled "The Reality," Udomo, in sight of his beloved African shores, apostrophises the continent as progenitress and protectress. His tone is adoring and supplicatory; his attitude one of annunciation. The reunion with Africa is pictured as a return to the womb, to authenticity. As loyal and powerful devotee, Udomo claims the right to be servant and son of this Mother. Note that in identifying with sun imagery, Udomo claims for himself agency and "sonship":

> Mother Africa! Oh, Mother Africa, make me strong for the work that I must do. Don't forget me in the many you nurse. I would make you great. I would have the world respect you and your children. I would have the sun of freedom shine over you once more. It was for this I left you for so long and lived in strange lands among strange people and suffered and was abused and was cold and hungry. It was in order to come back to free you, to free all your children, and to make you great among those who now look down on you. They do not understand your dark ways....I cannot see you but I can feel you out there in the dark. Tomorrow I will be with you, in you. Do not let me get lost in your many. Help me, watch me, guide me. My name is Michael Udomo. Do not forget it: Michael Udomo, the instrument of your freedom (WfU 122-123).

As will be seen in Chapter Three, the sentiment of Udomo's cries, the yearning to cleave and champion and unite, is reminiscent of the longing and striving of Negritude poetry;

the imagery of sonship will occur also in the work of Camara Laye and Edward Kamau Brathwaite.

In his appropriately named survey of sub-Saharan African culture, The Breast of the Earth, Kofi Awoonor, the Ghanaian writer, deploys terms of nationalist identification comparable to those of Abrahams: the mother is idealised but man is the social actor.[27] Awoonor builds his initial comments on an implicit symbolic substructure which represents the mother as the presiding genius of the home and the community. Some way into the work he makes this link-up clear. The mother in African society, he notes, is "sustainer" (BE 100), "inspirer and pathfinder" and "the nerve centre of the homestead" (BE 99). She doubles up as multi-mammia and mage. So it follows, Awoonor asserts, that: "[t]he mother in the African world represents not only the most steadfast person in the homestead, but also the symbol of the eternal giver, the earth itself" (BE 99-100). At the same time, however, on occasions when spiritual artefacts are being sculpted, her gaze - as well as that of children - is said to be "profane" (BE 60). We are reminded that the character of woman is dual. Again, at important rituals where the spirits of the community are worshipped, her presence is a defilement: she is forbidden entrance (might a parallel be detected here with selection

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[27] Kofi Awoonor, The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of the History, Culture and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara (New York: Nok, 1975).

procedures at national ceremonies, governing who will preside on grandstands and podia?). So it is significant that, in his own poetic work of reconstituting African traditions, Awoonor has taken over a form - the Ewe dirge - which is "normally [orally] performed by women" (BE 84). Here we see the male artist taking upon himself the prerogative of speaking for his culture and his land (his Mother) as nationalist.

At the southern end of the continent the conception of an overarching, transcendent mother-ideal is not markedly different, witnessing to the continent-wide popularity of the trope. In his long poem, "No Baby Must Weep," Wally Mongane Serote, one of the foremost of the Seventies Soweto poets, expands the meanings of the mother metaphor.[28] The township mama whose attention he as prodigal son insists on in the first part of the poem, gradually swells into the more generalised shape of Mother Africa. By the end of the poem, the poet-speaker imagines himself returning home to Africa, an oceanic and engulfing maternal presence (SP 90-92).[29] As with the other writers, but influenced in particular by a black consciousness idiom, he casts a maternal Africa as locus of origin and authenticity. Yet, in a pattern that is by now

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28 Wally Mongane Serote, Selected Poems, ed. Mbulelo Mzamane (Johannesburg: Donker, 1982) 72-92.

29 This is in contrast to the dystopic mother of "Alexandra" (SP 24-25), who is not seen as connected with the wider African earth.

becoming familiar, though the honoured iconic personage is feminine, the poet is concerned, both in this and in other poems, to tag his own identity as male. He is "manchild" (SP 34-35, 41), "ofay-watcher" (SP 38-41), concerned for his fellow brothers (SP 17-18, 31, 35) and with the sorrow and rape of his mothers (SP 31, 34-35), and wielding, explicitly in the sight of his mother, what would seem to be a phallic pen (SP 45).

In Ingoapele Madingoane's anthology, Africa My Beginning, the dichotomies are even more clear: the poems offer an unambiguously seminal statement of the gender categories which operate in nationalism.[30] Again, the mother is custodian of tradition and identity, of Africanness (AMB 14-15); she is interpellated as comforter and granted status in proportion to the support she offers (AMB 4-5, 6-7). However, we discover that this is all to guarantee the "manhood" of Africa's "blackmen" (AMB 4-5). They are in charge of meanings; the identity they seek is indistinguishable from an assertive maleness. To quote from yet another dedication: "I did not know,/ but had to know,/ that we in Africa are blackmen, born of women who loved

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30 Ingoapele Madingoane, Africa My Beginning (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1988).

oppressed men./ This book is dedicated to the women who love us in bondage."[31] As Valerie Smith has remarked of the Black Nationalist Movement in the United States, its discourse of liberation and cultural assertion "enshrines the possibilities of black male power."[32]

What might be the symbolic processes that contribute to the structure of the family romance in nationalist writings - to the weighting of the mother figure and to the characterisation of the dominant son? To begin to answer this question requires some mention of general tendencies, an exposition which will act as build-up and also as background to a more specific discussion of images of Africa and the African Other. As has in part already been shown, nationalism would in one sense seem to be following well-worn cultural precedents in glorifying masculine power and in using reified woman figures as symbols of value. For the majority of cultures on historical record, the womanly form has functioned in a variety of allegorical dramas to embody those qualities or virtues - Wisdom, Fecundity, Virtue, Justice - most

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[31] The page number in Africa My Beginning is not indicated. Don Mattera shares these sentiments: "I am the black plum/ Fruit of Mama Africa/ Spirit that cries out beyond the horizon." Quoted in Piniel Viriri Shava, A People's Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century (London: Zed, 1989) 100-101.

[32] Valerie Smith, "Gender and Afro-Americanist Criticism," Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Routledge, 1989) 60. See also Michele Wallace, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (London: Calder, 1979).

esteemed by male society. To quote from Marina Warner's introduction to Monuments and Maidens, a book which is detailed catalogue of such embodiments: "Every day, in public and private, we exchange goods, both as commodities and as ideas, as shared aspirations, desired proofs of status and badges of identity through the symbolic form of the female figure."[33] National movements, it could then be said, had the advantage of moving onto a prepared stage as they sought, through devices such as allegory, personification, antonomasia or metonymy, to represent homelands and national virtue. To the load of idealisations already borne by women's bodies, was added that of national pride and motherland-love.[34] The idealisation is encouraged by the correspondence between the oppositions man:woman and state:nation,[35] where nation signifies geographical territory, community, culture (that is,

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[33] Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form (London: Picador, 1987) xix.

[34] Such symbolism is resilient. Pre-twentieth-century embodiments of the national self-image - Britannia, Marianne as La République, the Statue of Liberty, Mother Erin - continue in the present century to exercise a compelling emotive force. The figures of La France, La République and Marianne, for example, have gone through a variety of permutations in the last two hundred years of national self-representation in France, yet the figures as such, as national motifs, have shown an impressive resistance to change. This was broadly, though not very critically demonstrated in the exhibition, as recorded in the catalogue of the same name, The South Bank Centre, La France: Images of Women and Ideas of Nation, 1789-1989 (London: South Bank Centre, 1989).

[35] For a reminder that nations presume states, see Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism 163-183.

the 'non-political', the 'metaphysical') in relation to the state's 'male sphere' of political structures, law and order.

The specific symbolic identification of land and mother has an impressive vintage, going back much further than nations. If the earth is, in the nature of things, generative, fecund, germinating, it is not surprising that human beings have tended to personify the gestative earth as female rather than as, say, impregnating male.[36] Such personifications have time and again been compounded by other reductive equations made between images of nature and woman, that is, woman as biological body or as anatomical shape. Cultural and historical differences do come into the equation, but, generally speaking, to 'woman' have variously been attributed such qualities as inertia, passiveness, instinct, mystery, the elemental - qualities associated also with the

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[36] For mythic reconstructions of mother earth cults and the Great Mother religions, see Nor Hall, The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine (London: Women's, 1980); Merlin Stone, The Paradise Papers: The Suppression of Women's Rights (London: Virago, 1979). A 'seminal' work in this field is Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans. Ralph Mannheim (London: RKP, 1955). Robert Graves, The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth (London: Faber, 1988), offers an impressionistic exploration, complete with colour biases, of the great "Theme" of the divinity of woman, embodied in the figure of the Triple Goddess. The work of Cheikh Anta Diop and Ifi Amadiume (see footnotes 51 and 53), though revisionist, bears comparison with these studies.

earth.[37] With proper husbandry and in a propitious season, women will, like land, yield rich fruits. If nations then, though admittedly starting as imaginative constructs, are ascribed concrete reference points, are - at least on maps - sited within geographic localities, the ground or potential for symbolic link-up with the female form exists virtually from the beginning. As Kay Schaffer has pointed out in her Lacanian reading of Australian national masculinity, where the normative national image is male, robust and tough, the land or bush - as external and unknown - becomes, even if implicitly, the place of the feminine.[38]

Such 'landlockings' or material bonds of woman to nation are, as was intimated earlier, strengthened, if not sanctified, by nationalist myths of origin. Retelling the past as the fulfilment of a single national destiny, or the coming to fruition of a national identity, nationalism, we have seen, favours stories of common growth and of evolution:

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[37] As Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 171-229, has exhaustively demonstrated. This is the theme also of Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her (London: Harper, 1975).

[38] Kay Schaffer, Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988). Preoccupied with the mechanisms of denial and desire that organise Australian national imaginings, Schaffer is chiefly concerned with binary divides in cultural codes and treats the national expression as a transparent category, a space into which meaning may be poured, rather than itself a symbolic language, one already ordered along gendered lines.

of seedtime, first blood, and of the common womb. In this context, the representation of woman as archetypal mother would seem almost predictable. Whether characterised as human cradle or as the fecund earth, 'woman' evokes suggestions of beginnings. As Marina Warner has pointed out, meter (Greek), mater (Latin), and materia (that is, matter) are etymologically connected in the root ma, meaning itself source or beginning.[39] The processes of representation of women and of nations thus feature reciprocal symbolic processes of extrapolation back to origins, as well as the idealising of those origins. 'Mother' signifies the nation in a state of prelapsarian completeness, before the fall into a combative and divisive history. In addition, as was pointed out at the end of the last chapter, by encouraging women to be originary and fostering a cult or fashion of mothering, the nation-state guarantees its own continuity. Further parallels suggest themselves. It does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that, in a male-dominated world, national lands resemble women in so far as both may be held, possessed, and - given the tendency of combative nationalisms - conquered. The ravaged woman or motherland represents national integrity violated. Given the character of nationalisms, it would also seem more satisfying to represent the national good as strong, resilient, and substantial, and so as a woman of the soil, foundation of

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[39] Warner 69. Warner also makes pertinent reference to Aristotle's observation that the male supplies the determining form for the female's amorphous matter. See 343-344.

life, rather than in terms of the contrasting stereotype of the female as malleable and febrile.

When nation takes on nation in battle, and emotions are polarised and extreme (or more particularly and appropriately in the case of Africa - when nations struggle for self-recognition), analogical connections between figures of women and of the national earth are reinforced. Imaginative justification forms an important part of the ideological and/or demagogic backing given to a liberation struggle or war effort.[40] The evocation of the supreme national duty, coupled with a requisite amount of aggressiveness and territorial feeling, requires an appropriate object: the hallowed national ground. So soldiers, putting aside their mother's arms, commit themselves to the embrace of a more exacting protectress, a "new mistress": for most, their 'Country', for many, the colder lap of the earth. What this suggests is that where the domestic and the everyday, which is associated with woman, becomes irrelevant, the woman as national icon - in particular as Mother, Mother-Earth or as Warrior - will become

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40 See again, Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," History and Politics 203-235. Significantly, in its offensive against counter-revolutionaries after June 1989, the Chinese Communist Party, too, relied on the mother image. One of its propaganda songs begins: "Party, O Party, dear party, you're just like my mother in the way you raise me." Quoted in Nicholas Kristof, "In Beijing, Sex Still Sells the Shampoo," New York Times (20 July 1989): A6.

proportionately that much more prominent.[41] In some cases, that the nation might display itself as invincible conquering power, female national icons take on an additional symbolic burden: flame-warmed Olympian musculature or magnified stature, for example, suggest invincible potency - as with Delacroix's Liberté. Feminine 'nature' is here subordinated to a more aggressive or more glorious masculine persona. As in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's depiction of female fighter characters, the woman becomes otherworldly, supranatural; as receptacle of male meaning, medea rasa, she is effectively represented as transmuted male force.

Although the young man does not worship an alternative female ideal as such, the following passage from Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage reflects something of the torsion created in the national family drama as men change from loyal sons into soldiers and heroes. Particularly significant is the contrast between the soldier-son's vivid patriotic dreams and his mother's more commonplace feelings of affinity to the soil:

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41 Speaking of social roles in war, Margaret Higonnet has commented: "[W]ar must be understood as a gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all the members of a society, whether or not they are combatants." Quoted in Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Rise of Gender," Speaking of Gender 10.

> He had burned several times to enlist. Tales of great movements shook the land. They might not be distinctly Homeric, but there seemed to be much glory in them. He had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds.
>
> But his mother had discouraged him. She had affected to look with some contempt upon the quality of his war ardor and patriotism. She could calmly seat herself and with no apparent difficulty give him many hundreds of reasons why he was of vastly more importance on the farm than on the field of battle.
>
> [....]
>
> ...she had disappointed him by saying nothing whatever about returning with his shield or on it. He had privately primed himself for a beautiful scene. He had prepared certain sentences which he thought could be used with touching effect. But her words destroyed his plans. She had doggedly peeled potatoes....[42]

Aside from fighter heroines, the women, as Joseph Conrad once pointed out, are "out of it," removed from the field of action and the thick of things. In addition to evoking the pivotal mother-son relationship in the family drama, this passage also suggests that, as 'natural' guardians of the national earth, women are not in the first instance patriots. They do not compose heroic pictures or rousing sentences in praise of a cause; rather, they are associated with the fruits of the earth. In Africa, at the time of colonialism, this process of

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[42] Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage (London: Dent, 1983): 3-4. In Joseph Conrad's novel of Russian nationalism, Under Western Eyes, Razumov, the hero, conceives of Russia as a vast "sacred inertia," requiring the saving powers of a single leader - "a man strong and one." Joseph Conrad, Under Western Eyes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) 35, 105.

confining women to the land was repeated in a new form as the colonised sent their gifted sons to the capital and then on to the colonial metropolis to be educated, keeping their daughters at home.

Fraternal dedication to a National Woman is clearly demonstrated in Irish Nationalism, in which the family romance is heightened in certain cases by Catholic iconography[43]: "'Woman' could only ever be an eternal essence beyond the physicality which suggested other, darker, demands and desires."[44] W. B. Yeats's 1902 play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, offers what might be called a paradigmatic script for the nationalist male drama or, as he put it, "the perpetual struggle of the cause of Ireland and every other ideal cause against private hopes and dreams."[45] Cathleen Ni Houlihan - who is "Ireland herself,"[46] for the love of whom "many men have died" - draws a bridegroom away from his bride and his nuptials ceremony, and into her service. Her words are uncompromising: "If any one would give me help he must give me

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43 In comparable fashion, images from the Hindu pantheon have fed into the imagined forms of Mother India, as in Bankim's Anandamath (1882). Sarkar 2012.

44 David Cairns and Shaun Richards, Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988) 77.

45 W. B. Yeats quoted in A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1975) 27.

46 Yeats quoted in Jeffares and Knowland 29.

himself, he must give me all."[47] The mother-son (Nehanda-Mugabe) scenario emerges also in "The Proclamation of 1916", in which the Mother Ireland personification is juxtaposed with the emphasis (despite the reference to Irishwomen) on the activity of "her" nationalist sons:

> Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.
> Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the IRA, she now seizes that moment....[48]

Somewhat beguiled himself by the mythologies he discusses, Seamus Heaney has characterised the Irish conflict as a "struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess," where the male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell and William of Orange, encounters "an indigenous territorial numn, a tutelar of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever."[49] The metonymic and metaphoric connections embedded in this dichotomy correspond to the

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[47] W.B. Yeats, "Cathleen Ni Houlihan," The Collected Plays (London: Macmillan, 1952) 73-88. The quotations are from 82 and 84.

[48] R.F. Foster, Modern Ireland 1600-1972 (London: Allen Lane, 1988) 59. Like the 1916 Proclamation, the 1956 Freedom Charter of the African National Congress, too, informed by similar humanist ideals, is concerned that all the nation's people live in "brotherhood".

[49] Seamus Heaney, "Feeling into Words," Essays by Divers Hands: Innovation in Contemporary Literature, ed. Victor Cronin (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1979) 97-98.

tropic pattern laid out earlier: the female principle is fully embodied in land mass and mythic figures; males, individuals, act upon it. As Richard Kearney summarises it, in Irish nationalist mythology, Ireland becomes a

> mother goddess summoning her faithful sons to rise up against the infidel invader so that through the sacrificial shedding of their blood, she might be miraculously redeemed from colonial violation.[50]

These are general considerations. Based on such generic patterns, the question which must next be confronted concerns the predominance of the mother figure specifically in African nationalist writings. Here the roles and attitudes adopted by the image-making nationalist actor or subject, the son, should help to shed light on the general iconography, delineating the forms gender has taken in nationalist politics and literature. Of particular interest will be the cultural and historical factors which might have effected transmutations, adaptations or rewritings of the national dramatic script. Is it possible to establish symbolic link-ups between colonial history and the cultural legacies that have fed into African nationalism in order to explain the Mother's prominence? What of the nationalist African writers who, in their efforts to claim an overtopping stature and power for the African Mother, would assert that the mother-worship of Africa is unique and natural

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50 Richard Kearney, Myth and Motherland, Field Day Pamphlet 5 (Derry: Field Day, 1984) 21. For further parallels, see C.L. Innes, "Through the Looking Glass: African and Irish Nationalist Writing," ALT 9 (1978): 10-24.

because autochthonous, and therefore different from and untainted by a colonial inheritance?

This study began with the idea that nationalist images, and also, though in a slightly different way, concepts of nations, are crafted things, made out of pre-existing attitudes and symbolic material. However, far from their being merely derivative - imitations and mass-productions - this view casts nationalism and its symbols as imaginatively adaptable and malleable. Nationalism, to this extent, is an open-ended text: as it is adopted here, reworked there, it encourages new symbolic interpretations, additions, modifications, and, in particular, the incorporation of new and/or hybrid cultural forms. So if an African nationalism would nominate respect for the mother as an essential distinguishing feature of culture, that feeling should not be dismissed or explained away as simply a component or construct of the nationalism. Admittedly, the tendency here is to regard claims of traditional or essential matri-focality with circumspection. Yet, though the mother image, and also its essentiality, are taken as constructed - or the expression at a national level of a respect for mothers built into social attitudes - at the same time the respect itself could be culturally rooted.

Given the centrality of the mother image to African national and Pan-Africanist self-conceptions, it is worth digressing for a while on this point, looking first at certain of its manifestations, and then at the actual cultural influences that might affect those representations. In the course of this exposition, reasons may already begin to emerge for the prominence of the image as construct in African nationalist thought, and as an important complement to this, for its place also in Pan-African ideology. As suggested, for certain African patriots, the concept of an essential Africanness is closely identified with cultural matri-focality, and also with assertions of an African 'ur-originality'. These ideas are closely interconnected. So, if the continent is believed to be nexus of the first and truest of cultural origins, as the bed of civilisation, the seat of matri-focality, it may also be represented as the source of more humane, more communal (in part because more matriarchal) values than are now in evidence. Africa is, in effect, the lap or bosom of the earth, the mother or homeland of mothering societies. From this it follows that the redemption of such cultural values would counter the destructive influences of recent colonial history.

Cheikh Anta Diop, the African revisionist philosopher and historian, is usually cited as the father of the more

radical African-Mother myths.[51] Though he bases his conclusions largely on material garnered from North and West Africa, Diop has suggested that, in the remote pre-colonial past, continental African society featured not so much simple matriarchies as mother-centred civilisations. Because agricultural societies were prevalent in Africa, women, as inventors (he claims) of agriculture and as supervising agricultural collectivities, held highly influential positions in their societies. In religion, too, female spirits were worshipped above all others. Invasion from the North (that is, Europe) disrupted these peaceful, highly-evolved civilisations, but not before matri-focal attitudes had themselves been disseminated - naturally, by a process of gradual diffusion rather the sudden savagery - to societies first in Egypt and then in Europe and Asia. Along similar lines of benign influence and attraction other positive values nurtured in the cradle of African matriarchal societies reached Europe: "a sentiment of immanent justice," "a belief in communality," the notion of an all-embracing God presence.[52] In a reciprocal manner but with maleficent intent and destructive results, the North imparted to the South class

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[51] See, Cheikh Anta Diop, The African Origin of Civilisation: Myth or Reality, trans. Mercer Cook (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1974), and Precolonial Black Africa: A Comparative Study, trans. Harold Salemson (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1987).

[52] See Diop, Precolonial Black Africa 15, 24, 31-33.

divisions, hieratic social values, material interests, and an insidious individualism.

Ifi Amadiume has drawn on Diop's theory in her study of Igbo society in the two books, Male Daughters, Female Husbands and Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations (the latter she has dedicated to him).[53] Amadiume concedes that patrilineal authority structures were and are unquestionably a dominant feature of African culture. Yet that gender roles and identities do not always correspond to sex differences based on biology, gives her reason to believe that matri-focal authority antedated father rule. Igbo patriarchy was reinforced during the time of European colonial rule; originally, power was in the hands of African mothers.[54] In an attempt to connect up her own culture with its African roots, Alice Walker in The Temple of My Familiar also subscribes to a belief in African matriarchy: worship of the "Goddess of Africa", "The Black Madonna" - professes her matriarchal heroine, Miss Lissie - is originary; it passed from Africa into Europe via Spain.[55]

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[53] Ifi Amadiume, Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society (London: Zed, 1987), and Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case (London: Karnak, 1987).

[54] See Amadiume, Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations 7-11 and 83-84, and Diop, Precolonial Black Africa 4, 7-8, 48, 49, 50, 59, 65.

[55] Walker, The Temple of My Familiar 190-195.

Ayi Kwei Armah, also revisionist and Africanist, has added an interesting gloss to such mother-focussed observances, turning attention once again to the part of the adoring son. His novel, The Healers, is dominated by the physically and spiritually broken figure of the queenly Araba Jesiwa, whose state symbolises divisions in the black communities of the Asante coast. Unity, it is believed, will be restored by the warlike "healers," of which the hero, Damfo, is one. The pan-nationalist romance, however, confesses to its oedipal underpinnings when at one point Damfo is given a drug to fortify his courage and manhood: this potion is said "to make men want their mothers."[56] The common vision of these different writers shows correspondences with the encyclopaedic work of Martin Bernal who, in his Black Athena, takes to task the "cultural chauvinism" of European classics studies.[57] He argues that the ancient Greeks obtained their religion, mathematics and philosophy from Egypt. Against the views of what he calls the "Aryan" school of classics, Bernal maintains that the ancient Egyptians were not only geographical Africans, but black Africans. The Greek

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[56] Ayi Kwei Armah, The Healers: An Historical Novel (London: Heinemann, 1979) 188-189.

[57] Martin Bernal, Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation, vol. 1 of The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985 (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers UP, 1988).

Athena was equivalent to the Egyptian Neït and was therefore also a black goddess.[58]

To open the second part of this inset-exposition of African matri-focality, what of its actual cultural authenticity (that is, insofar as this can be established)? Might we speak of the larger-than-life-stature of mother-figures in national self-representation as plastered together using raw matter delved from women's lives? In Africa, where families are traditionally extended, where most women of a marriageable age will be required to marry, and where mothers and matrons accrue status as they grow older, the noun or name, 'mother', may refer to a wider generic category than is the case in societies which feature predominantly nuclear families. Motherhood, its responsibilities and interests, will be diffuse, ranging across a wider group of children than that comprised by immediate offspring. Again, as Unterhalter and Gaitskell have observed, though in rather general terms: "in vernacular African languages...the word for adult woman and the word for mother are the same."[59] In cultures which allow women power in accordance with their age and position in the community as well as with reproductive capacity, 'mother' becomes an honorific title for a woman, designating high

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[58] Bernal 20-21, 51-53.

[59] Deborah Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter, "Mothers of the Nation," Woman-Nation-State 72.

status. The gender construction is again different from the biological role, though its basis lies in fecundity.[60] The pre-eminence of 'mothers', therefore, can be connected to what is in effect their numerical predominance - and also to the dominance of the noun. 'My mother', need not be only 'she who bore me', but also 'she who cares for me' (not necessarily coinciding roles), as well as 'she who mothers or mothered my mother/father', across an expanding network of association. Practically speaking, too, women - or mothers - have also become the veritable guardians and keepers of the African earth. Due to the socio-economic pressures of urban migration, and (in the South especially) migrant labour, men leave women on the land where they work to produce Africa's food: 'mothers' hold the earth in safekeeping.[61]

The canonisation of motherhood in nationalist myth, therefore, would seem to be at least to some extent grounded

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[60] Barrenness, as many African writers testify, is said to be the worst fate that can befall a woman. This is an important theme in the work of Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. It appears in such novels as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's A Grain of Wheat (London: Heinemann, 1982), and Petals of Blood (Cape Town: Philip, 1982), in Mbella Sonne Dipoko, Because of Women (London: Heinemann, 1984), and Asare Konadu, A Woman in her Prime (London: Heinemann, 1981). Mbiti 109-121 has noted that barrenness for African women is an "irreparable humiliation."

[61] Christine Obbo, "Sexuality and Economic Domination in Uganda," Woman-Nation-State 80-81, points out that, in what remains a predominantly agricultural continent, women - most of them no doubt reproducers also - are the major producers of Africa's cash crops and household food.

in the life of societies. Yet, as the prevalence of names and titles may have intimated, and the archetypal and/or stereotypical overlay of the various images of the African mother confirms, the ideal remains in the first instance a symbolic construct, a fiction of real experience, not that experience itself. What is most striking about the tales and myths of the African mother is their literariness: the effects of romance, and nostalgia; the fictional constructions of loss and of the recapture of significance. Buchi Emecheta's fond memory of her "big mother," her father's elder sister, occupies an important emblematic place in her autobiography, identifying the author's own allegiances as a woman.[62] In Ngugi's novels the respected older and elderly women of the community are, conventionally it seems, called "mother"; with age the title is expanded to "mother of men."[63] In the dedication to Not Yet Uhuru, a personal account of Kenyan nationalism in the years before and after independence, Oginga Odinga commemorates the efforts towards independence of Margaret Kenyatta and Anna Wanjiku, bestowing upon them the generic, compound title, "Mama Uhurus".[64]

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62 Buchi Emecheta, Head Above Water (London: Fontana, 1986) 6-12.

63 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat 70.

64 Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru (London: Heinemann, 1984) xvi.

Without refusing its importance, the honour accorded the figure of the African matriarch must in the first instance be seen as attesting not to the centrality of the mother in African society, but to the centrality of the concept of mother-worship in African nationalist imaginings. The myths may be real insofar as they are believed, yet they are at the same time also cultural artefacts, made in history, the recent part of which has been dominated by colonialism. This history inevitably had an effect on nationalism and its symbols. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o acknowledges: "Yet imperialism in both its colonial and neocolonial stages, is the one force that affects <u>everything</u> in Africa - politics, economics, culture, absolutely every aspect of human life [his emphasis]."[65] Confronted once again by this notion of nationalism as historical construct, the question of the colonial input to African nationalist iconographies must finally be addressed.

Post-colonial nationalisms are in certain ways self-contradictory and collusive, replicating the coloniser's codes of meaning in order ultimately to repudiate them, learning his language in order to refuse him entry. If Europe, through colonisation, propagated a worldwide process of social transformation, it was unavoidable that certain defining

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65 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Role of the Scholar in the Development of African Literature," <u>Research Priorities in African Literatures</u>, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Munich: Zell, 1984) 8.

concepts of modern society and nationality, as well as, more generally, ontological principles and symbolic conventions, such as in politics for example, would be drawn from European prototypes. Nationalism, therefore, to quote Partha Chatterjee, is "a different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another."[66] As was explained in Chapter One, referring to the theory of Homi Bhabha, doctrinal replication of this kind may be spliced and displaced by the double perspectives which operate across the coloniser/colonised divide. Such notions of displacement, however, do not yet pay sufficient attention to the gender dynamics which underlie the replication: the fact that those in a position to confront and mimic the coloniser in public forum were by and large male, or that replication was intended to claim or to enforce existing forms of gendered authority. The point to be made here is that the two processes of replication and resistance which have operated concurrently in nationalist movements - though not necessarily with equal force at any one time - have had specific dichotomous effects, either of marginalisation or of

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[66] Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 42. Nelly Richard, "Post-modernism and Periphery," trans. Nick Caistor, Third Text 2 (Winter 1987/1988): 5-12, also discusses the mimicry which characterises the thought of the colonial Other - the imitation, in particular, of rationalist Enlightenment principles. Despite her use of the modernisation paradigm, Kumari Jayawardena, "Introduction," Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World (London: Zed, 1986), offers useful insights into some of the paradoxes nationalist mimicry represents for women.

idealisation, on the representation of women in post-colonial nationalisms.

The redemption of the image of Africa by early nationalists trained in European educational systems, demanded an initial revision, or, more immediately, a reversion, of the myths used to justify the colonial enterprise. Following Fanon, Abdul JanMohamed and others have characterised the symbolic opposition of coloniser and colonised, as instated by the coloniser, as a Manichean allegory:[67] where Europe was represented as the centre of rationality, intellection, sweetness, light, Africa appeared as its exact antithesis, instinctual, barbaric, destructive, black.[68] Heart of the world's darkness and blank continent, space lost in time, Africa and the African were synonymous with the elemental and Dionysian in 'man'. Brought into opposition with Europe, the symbol of Africa illustrated and perpetuated those well-

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[67] See, for example, Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," "Race," Writing and Difference 78-106.

[68] There are many, by now legendary, characterisations of Africa as primeval darkness by European writers and thinkers, one of the most notorious of which must still be Hegel's: "For countless centuries, while all the pageant of history swept by, Africa remained unmoved in primitive savagery." Quoted in Basil Davidson, Africa in History: Themes and Outlines (London: Paladin, 1984) 13. V. Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa, gives an elaborate survey of the ways in which Europe's representations of the Other formed part of the constitution of the Self, the discourse of the Same. See also Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans," "Race," Writing and Difference 185-222.

rehearsed dualisms which organised European systems of thought: the chain of body/soul, emotion/reason, woman/man.... Dense concentrate of negative terms, the multiple significations of 'Africa' could be mixed into a variety of contexts. To cite two representative examples: Freud, drawing on what had clearly become a well-established cultural metaphor, spoke of the sexual life of adult women as a "'dark continent' for psychology" (the phrase appears in English in the original German).[69] Much earlier, Mungo Park, in the journals of his travels, on more than one occasion portrayed the behaviour of African women towards him as the incarnation both of kindness and hospitality (emotion), and also of sexual provocativeness and availability (the body).[70] To attempt a revision of the European intellectual inheritance, therefore,

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[69] See Freud, On Sexuality 326.

[70] Mungo Park, Travels in the Interior of Africa (London: The Folio Society, 1984) 29, 36-37, 97, and, especially, 106-107. The sexualisation of the Other, the portrayal of the distant and unknown (East or South) as exotic and physical, place of the body and sensuous licence, has been exhaustively demonstrated by Rana Kabbani, Europe's Myths of the Orient (London: Pandora, 1988). Though male-centred and vulnerable to several of Rana Kabbani's charges, Ronald Hyam, "Empire and Sexual Opportunity," JICH 14.2 (1986): 33-89, also maintains that sex was a fact of empire: far-flung lands encouraged a release of Victorian repression. Angling the situation away from female representations, Philip Curtin, The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1790-1850 (London: Macmillan, 1965), points out that Europeans gave "Negroes...credit for extraordinary sexual prowess" (46-47). An imperial vocabulary of exploration, penetration, and opening up, obviously added to the sexual overtones of European imaginings. For related observations (in this case on the narrative of the Australian wild) see, for example, Schaffer 79 (the image of the land as blank space available for possession), and also 59 (of the Aboriginal woman as bestial).

African nationalists began with a switching of value within the existing binary framework: what had been denigrated as primitive and backward was now heralded as the triumph of a beautiful African sensuality. It was an annunciation evocatively celebrated and for that reason also pre-eminently associated, as will be seen, with the Negritude movement of the Forties and Fifties. A similar switching of terms also governs Cheik Anta Diop's theory: in relation to Africa, the centre of the world's civilisation, Europe is located at the outer reaches of moral and spiritual darkness.

If it is generally the case that the female stands as metaphor for other second-rank terms within, as Hélène Cixous has it, notional couples, inversions in the name of nationalism would have a direct effect on the portrayal of women. As Joan Scott and Maurice Godelier pointed out earlier, gender is used to symbolise authority.[71] The classic binary relationship of power, the Hegelian opposition of master and slave, is subtended by a gendered allegory of domination and submission. On the one hand is placed a disciplined, controlling force; on the other, an incontinence,

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[71] These ideas, however, were current before feminism directly politicised them. As David V. Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire - A Poet's Interpretation of the History of his Own Times, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) 226-242, has correctly pointed out, William Blake, in his A Vision of the Daughters of Albion, identifies the Demon whose code separates bodies from souls, as a father figure, and has personified the effects of repression in Oothoon, a female slave.

a passiveness, requiring control. The same allegory plays itself out in the Manichean drama of coloniser and colonised. Casting about for ways of charting, categorising, and understanding new worlds, as well as seeking justification for their actions, colonisers relied on such gendered topoi, these being not only familiar, but potentially resonant also with indigenous significations.[72]

In African nationalism, such inherited dual patternings, reinforced by vernacular gender significations (and often fostered by colonial education), shaped the processes of resistance and reversal in two apparently contradictory ways. On the one hand, to present a sufficiently formidable front to the colonial enemy and to issue a decisive call for self-determination, revolutionary and resistance groups favoured an openly aggressive - that is, masculine - show of strength.[73] This point will be developed later. Yet on the other hand, where the object was to overturn European value-systems - in Chatterjee's words, "question the veracity of colonialist

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[72] See, for example, J.M. Coetzee, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (London: Yale UP, 1988). Though relatively uninterested in gender, Coetzee shows how Europe set about thinking Southern Africa by applying to it schemas and mythical patterns familiar from other contexts.

[73] Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1983), for example, informs us that where imperial culture in India had styled itself as masculine in relation to what was perceived as the feminine of Hindu culture, Hindu separatists began by adopting a combative approach in their expressions of resistance.

knowledge, dispute its arguments...reject its moral claims" - signifiers of femaleness, especially when coupled with other marked terms such as 'black' or 'irrational', underwent a concomitant reversal, so swinging into a stronger, positive position, at least at the level of myth.[74] Where the African woman had formerly been dismissed or downgraded as the prototype of African primitiveness,[75] she was now acclaimed as the essence of a proud resurgent Africanness (such as in Diop's evocation of African matriarchy). She was the incarnation of Africa, its beloved earth and its instinctual culture.

Though the nationalists' icon of the revered African woman need not necessarily have been maternal, it was not

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[74] The difference between these approaches bears comparison with Chatterjee's Gramscian characterisation of a "war of manoeuvre" as full-scale assault, as against the more incremental, 'slant-wise' progression of a "war of position". See Chatterjee 36-53.

[75] To cite examples as a way of putting flesh on the stereotyped images already described, Karen Blixen, Out of Africa and Shadows on the Grass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) 95, compares the attitude of Gikuyu women to that of a "worn-out mule, or other patient beast of burden." D. Crawford, Thinking Black: 22 Years without a Break in the Long Grass of Central Africa (London: Morgan and Scott, 1912) xii, 5-6, addressing "Africa, the land, and the African, the man," portrays himself as interacting only with the male colonised and records the colonised's comparison of a goat to a woman. Crawford's book is dedicated "To the first lady who ever penetrated these wilds. My wife." Assumptions of the bestiality and/or carnality of the black woman were encouraged and endorsed in the early nineteenth-century 'exhibition' of the "Hottentot Venus". See Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality," "Race," Writing and Difference 223-261.

surprising, given the social attitudes and economic developments outlined above, that this was her primary designation. To bear the burden of idealisation, the most prominent and worthy representative of womanhood - the mother - was chosen. A measure of compensatory promotion may have contributed to the process, whereby that which had been most denigrated, most ravaged by the coloniser and at the same time most reverentially loved by those colonised, was offered up for redemption. The image of earth as mother again comes into play here, in that woman, having - like the land - been exploited and maimed by invasion, requires - again like the land - conservation and an excess of tender care.[76] Yet, equally influential in formulating this rhetoric may have been: first, the Victorian Christian values which, widely disseminated by a colonial missionary education, portrayed the good woman as married and as constituting the core of her family; and second, in a rather different way, the metaphoric patterns bequeathed by British imperialism's own idea of England as mother country, or of Victoria as Imperial Mother.[77] Interesting parallels between the image of the Imperial Mother and the Pan-African ideal of the Mother

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[76] As Chapter Five will demonstrate, Nuruddin Farah's Maps draws explicit analogies between the ties felt with the earth and with mothers, and between the experiences of hurt and violation suffered by both.

[77] Madge Dresser, "Britannia," National Fictions 26-49, traces the changing dimensions of the woman icon in British nationalist history.

continent as englobing nations, suggest themselves. On the strength of such evocative symbolism, an imputed mother-rule would not only seem more authentic, cohesive and all-embracing, it would also, in part paradoxically, serve as a direct contravention of certain of colonialism's patriarchal ways.[78]

The effort to legitimate Africanness in a world that has denigrated all things African requires not only a thoroughgoing reversion of existing stereotypes, but also, in many cases, a reification of that reversion. What this means is that after existing normative value has been turned inside-out, the new state of affairs must be declared as itself normative, and so, by implication, innate and authentic: in this way its rightness becomes unassailable. According to this logic, the mother may be described as being quite naturally the focal point of African society, may indeed be hailed as the very spirit of that society, her spirit coterminous with its own: the real Africa in other words is woman and mother; and the real African woman, like Okot

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78 Radical African feminists and/or women critics tend to heap more blame on colonial rather than indigenous patriarchies. Such arguments work with particular effect at a time in which the term 'patriarchal' expresses considerable opprobrium. In addition to Ifi Amadiume, see, for example, Micere Mugo, "Interview with Micere Githae Mugo," with Brenda Berrian, WLWE 21 (1982): 521-531; Lauretta Ngcobo, "Editor's Note," Let It Be Told: Essays by Black Women Writers in Britain (London: Virago, 1988).

p'Bitek's Lawino, for example, is of the land.[79] In reciprocal fashion, Africa, the land, the continent, becomes all the more home - own ground and sanctuary - because this is where the mother presides. Here indigenous myths of powerful, originary mothers - Mumbi of Gikuyu legend, or Moremi of the Yoruba - might act to give definition and force to the trope. Most usefully, in a continent where national boundaries are in the main a foreign imposition, the product of Berlin in 1884, and where national state traditions are not much in evidence, transferring national feeling to what might well be one of the most unitary and least controversial of symbols - the mother as custodian of the land, embracing national families - enables a conceptualisation of continental unity. The filial loyalty of national elites becomes a major determinant of African identity, overarching cultural or linguistic differences. On this symbolic terrain, Pan-Africanism overlaps with African nationalism, and assimilates its gender biases.

Under the appearance of a fundamental change in the social and/or symbolic system, in Pan-Africanism, as in African nationalisms, gender stereotypes would appear to persist. Neither the activity of swopping signifiers nor the attempt at revisionary myth-making effects a significant

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79 Okot p'Bitek, Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol (London: Heinemann, 1984).

displacement of the controlling male presence. Outside the realm of symbols, on the field of political action, the activity of self-determination features a similar domination. For movements seeking a transformation of the inherited status-quo, the implications of this entrenchment, which is also a hegemony, are serious. Because, as Chatterjee points out, the representational underpinning of nationalism "[corresponds] to the very structures of power" and "procedures of knowledge" that it wants to repudiate, nationalism should, in theory, assert itself against this inheritance. In the alembic of a changed history, nationalism wants to open up new political possibilities, selecting and translating key ideas within its own discourse (dichotomies of master/slave; modernisation paradigms; the idea of nationalism as state-related; notions of particularity and difference).[80] Gayatri Spivak, too, has spoken of the crucial moments of change in a particular social order as "signalled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems," that is, a break and a "relinking" in the codes of meaning through which the world is understood.[81] But, as Terry Eagleton has explained, concurring with Chatterjee, nationalist struggle, like sexual and class politics, draws its proponents into a conundrum or

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[80] Chatterjee 38, 42-43.

[81] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (London: Routledge, 1988) 197-221.

> double optic, at once fighting on terrain already mapped out by its antagonists and seeking even now to prefigure within that mundane strategy styles of being and identity for which we have as yet no proper names.[82]

In African - and generally, too, post-colonial - nationalisms, as has been shown, the gender dichotomies which continue to organise experience, make up a substantial part of this dreary weight of circumstance, or mapped-out terrain. As Spivak says in another context, woman "syntaxes patriarchal continuity."[83] What this means is that within the circumscribed spaces of such dualities, of gendered relations of power, or more specifically, of relations involving a 'masculine' authority and 'feminine' subordinates, the possibilities of functional change or discursive displacement, and of the projection of a new reality, will be severely restricted.

This problem of a gender-marked inheritance can be further unravelled. We have seen that male domination, the intersection of indigenous and imported forms, became the medium of colonial and of national rule. The men trained in the colonial system, the colonisers' favoured sons, became the ruling elite, the fathers of the nation (and one another's

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82 Terry Eagleton, Nationalism: Irony and Commitment, Field Day Pamphlet 13 (Derry: Field Day, 1988) 6. Spivak 199-201, 207-209, observes that deconstructive practice, borrowing from the old structures of language, cannot effect an absolute break in sign systems.

83 Spivak 220.

brothers).[84] New masters in old administration blocks, they were the ones who had the education, the savoir-faire, influence and wealth, and also the requisite maleness to command. Their being in charge, however, meant not only that the structures of state power continued to be male-dominated, but also, perhaps even more significantly, that it was they who had the task of re-interpreting or perhaps inventively translating nationalism, effecting discursive displacement. Admittedly, as far as functional change was concerned, they had succeeded in transforming the racial character of political rule. Yet, at the same time, what the new national leaders had to work with were categories of thought transferred from Europe, specifically-gendered systems of value which portrayed Europe's conquered as other, deviant, dumb, close to animal nature, and as female.

The problem was in part one of self-image. To master the nation, the new national leader sought to capture for himself the privileged positive position in dichotomous oppositions, to take energetic possession of the 'masculine' meanings available, symbols of manly power from both indigenous and imposed cultures. He had, in other words, to

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[84] The title, 'Father of the Nation', has been used, for example, of Kenyatta and of Kaunda. The same idea of originary leadership and of authority as fatherly underpins the names of the Pilgrim Fathers, and of the Fathers of the American Constitution. Chinua Achebe, The Trouble with Nigeria (London: Heinemann, 1987) 13, uses the same term of Nigeria's leaders at independence.

lay claim to the coloniser's own image and role of father and master. Once again, he used colonial schemes of power and of thinking about power precisely in order to resist that power; in this case the outcome was that authority in the new nation was portrayed as manifestly male. Concomitant with this process was the idealisation of archetypal Mothers. If the image of woman was overdetermined as other, either as nature or as sacrosanct image, the male elite was able categorically to differentiate itself, or its newly dominant selfhood, from that which was female. In this way it could the more emphatically refuse weakness and submission, to portray itself as powerful and so effect its own psychological and symbolic liberation. The new nationalist system, therefore, depended on women being confirmed in a secondary, unmarked position as reproducers or comforters. The national family trope, fitting in smoothly, once again conveniently apportioned roles: men were allowed the powers of decision, were Nestors of Nations and brothers in arms; women were confined to iconic and to domestic roles.

In the field of literature, the convergence of nationalist fervour and masculinity found particularly forceful expression, being bulwarked by yet another role model of maleness advanced and encouraged by a colonial education - that of artist or writer. Some consideration of this development will form a fitting coda to the present chapter,

highlighting some of the salient points in the process of nationalist image-making. One of Chinweizu's chief grievances against his fellow-Nigerian Wole Soyinka is that he forms a prominent part, if not being one of the leaders, of the "obscurantist" Euro-modernist (or Euro-assimilationist) school of African writers which was in part nurtured by University English Departments in the Sixties and which propagated itself through a process of radical dissociation from the cultural life of African people.[85] Chinweizu's terms of abuse, however, may not be entirely well-chosen. The stereotype of the writer as male creative genius which, in contemporary modernist guise, was disseminated from northern metropolises in the course of the twentieth century, informed the literary practice not only of Soyinka, his followers and imitators, but of most first-generation African writers.[86] As Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate in The Madwoman in the Attic, an Anglo-

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[85] Chinweizu et al, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics, (London: KPI, 1985), in particular, 163-238. See also Chinweizu, "Introduction: Redrawing the Map of African Literature," Voices from Twentieth-Century Africa: Griots and Towncriers, ed. Chinweizu (London: Faber, 1988) xvii-xl.

[86] These ideas will be further developed in the next chapter, drawing on some of the motifs outlined in the sequel to The Madwoman in the Attic: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The War of the Words, vol. 1 of No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century (London: Yale, 1988). For the purposes of the present argument, let it suffice to say that the maleness in modernism is expressed in the early modernist emphasis on virility and aggression, on traditionally gendered roles in myth, and on a regenerative male sexuality, and is also manifested in the predominantly fraternal constitution of modernist coteries in the various European capitals.

American literary tradition casts authorship as male engendering. 'Misreading' Harold Bloom, they emphasise that it is exclusively and by definition the generational relationship between male writers which Western culture represents as Oedipal romance: in the words of Stephen Dedalus, literary filiation and creation make up a "mystical estate" of paternity.[87] The intersection of such significations with images of male leadership and authority from within indigenous and national culture, had the effect of creating an unambiguously masculine image for the new post-independence or post-colonial writer. As was seen with Serote, but as the next chapter will show more clearly, modern African writers, like nationalist leaders, openly and perhaps also self-consciously identified themselves with this image: it became a means of proving themselves worthy of the name of artist, and as significantly creative. Okot p'Bitek, using an obviously phallic image, speaks of the "true African artist" as having

> his eyes firmly fixed, not to [sic] some abstract idea called beauty 'up there' as it were, but on the philosophy of life of his society. His voice, the thunder of his drums, the vibrating of her [that is, beauty's] buttocks and the slashing of the sky with his horn...are his contributions to the celebration of real life here and now.[88]

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87 Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic 3-7. For a discussion of the normative masculinity of the image of the visual artist, the master, see Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (London: RKP, 1981).

88 Okot p'Bitek, Artist, the Ruler (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986) 23.

The assumed maleness of elite literary activity in Africa may also have contributed to the European perception of the African artist (as also of the archetypal African) as lustily male. Jean-Paul Sartre, heralding the efflorescence of African poetry that was Negritude, praises the black man as "the great male of the earth, the sperm of the world." The black poet, in Sartre's view, encompasses in his poetry both elements required in coition, the male and the female. Negritude art thus becomes a parthenogenic or "spermatic" process where the male artist is both "Nature and its male," entirely sufficient to himself.[89]

If, as has been asserted throughout this chapter, nationalist politics are manifested as male drama, the script of this drama is aptly endorsed and developed by ideas of literary patrimony. In nations as in narrative, sons wrest authority from fathers, and perform obeisance before a mother, who becomes, as in Robert Graves's matri-focal paean, their priestess, prophetess, queen-mother - their Muse.[90] The dominant masculine self-image of the African artist dovetails

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[89] Jean-Paul Sartre, Black Orpheus, trans. S.W. Allen (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976) 41-47. For the last quotation, Sartre's actual words were "il est tour à tour la femelle de la nature et son male," and his conclusion: "Ainsi la négritude, en sa source la plus profond, est une androgynie." See Jean-Paul Sartre, introduction, "Orphée Noir," Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache de la Langue Francais (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1948) xxxiii.

[90] Graves 490.

neatly with the artist's sense of self-appointed nationalist mission and the nationalist goal of self assertion. The orientation to nationalism is there in Okot p'Bitek's description as it is in Chinweizu's call for a truly African literature; it is explicit in Kole Omotoso's injunction to writers to "[help] to defend a nation in decay or to build a nation in the process of being, of becoming," his idea being that African writers have an essential role to play in the process of "nation-building."[91] The African novelist, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasised in 1969, is - or should be - "haunted by a sense of the past":

> at his best, [he] must feel himself heir to a continuous tradition. He must feel himself...swimming, struggling, defining himself, in the mainstream of his people's historical drama.[92]

From the foregoing argument it can be deduced that if the artist is to be as much a nationalist as he is an artist, then he is also to be that much more assertive, dominant, and indomitable, that much more male. Or, to put it the other way, to dominate 'like a man', to have authority, to be a 'legislator' of his world, a male artist must also be vigorously nationalist. The set of linked identities - of nationalist, modern leader, artist, man - makes a coherent

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91 Kole Omotoso, lecture paper, "Fiction Rebuked by Reality: the Future of the Novel in Africa," St. Antony's College, Oxford, 24 November 1988: 2, 3.

92 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Writer and His Past," Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics (London: Heinemann, 1982) 39.

matrix; it is a configuration in which woman, if she is not to be solely icon, if she is, for example, writer or nationalist or even ordinary mother, is explicitly not counted.

CHAPTER THREE

New Yams and Modern Patriarchs: African Writers as Artist Heroes and Nationalist Sons

He remembered the African fetishes he had seen at Halliday's so often. There came back to him one, a statuette about two feet high, a tall slim elegant figure from West Africa, in dark wood, glossy and suave. It was a woman, with hair dressed high, like a melon-shaped dome....He remembered her: her astonishing cultured elegance, her diminished, beetle face, the astounding long elegant body, on short ugly legs, with such protuberant buttocks, so weighty and unexpected below her slim long loins. She knew what he himself did not know. She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her.[1]

'No,' replied Mhudi, 'though I have lost my people I have not lost my manners. Men first; you have the right of way. You tell me, brother, how you came here in time to save me...and I will give you my story afterward.'[2]

FIRST [AWERI]: The emphasis of our generation is - youth. Our image therefore should be a kind of youthful elders of the state. A conclave of modern patriarchs.
THIRD: Yes, yes. Nice word patriarch, I'm glad you used it. Has a nice reverend tone about it. Very nice indeed, very nice.[3]

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[1] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 285.

[2] Solomon T. Plaatje, Mhudi (London: Heinemann, 1977) 38.

[3] Wole Soyinka, Kongi's Harvest, Collected Plays 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 71.

The dominant voice of a highly specialised literate elite, conversant with the coloniser's culture and proficient in his language, the first generation of African writers, in attempting to redeem their Africanness and "define themselves in the mainstream of their people's historical drama," confronted the dilemmas of a cultural dissociation of sensibility. Their narrative or poetic media appeared distanced from their subject matter; their European literary education hardly served as conduit back to African origins; in presuming to speak to and for Africa, they addressed themselves, in Soyinka's words, to a "small erudite coterie," a distanced or exiled "bourgeois intelligentsia."[4] As with the exiled Udomo, it was to traverse such gaps of cultural and historical estrangement that the new African writers laid claim to the rich rhetorical clusters embedded in nationalist symbolism: the image of the dominant and devoted African son working with his pen for the rehabilitation of his people; or of the continental or Pan-African mother, adored object of that son, signifying home, and nurturing earth, and also, very importantly, cultural unity across colonial divides. Within the composite analytic fiction of the nationalist family

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[4] Wole Soyinka, "The critic and society: Barthes, leftocracy and other mythologies," Black Literature and Literary Theory, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (London: Methuen, 1984) 30. The essay is also printed in Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture, ed. Biodun Jeyifo (Ibadan: New Horn, 1988) 146-178. Hereafter ADO.

drama, literary sons were able to string together narratives of belonging, social significance, and cultural harmony.

Having looked in some detail at the national family paradigm, and set it in a colonial context, the object of this chapter is, in the first instance, one of substantiation and enlargement, that is, to find instances of the staging of the drama across a wider literary field: in the work of an Anglophone Caribbean writer, in early Francophone African writing, and in the fiction of the Kenyan, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. This broader range of evidence will vouch for the ubiquity and prominence of the trope, and show under what divers forms it may appear. However, the main body of the chapter, to which this illustration will serve as backdrop, will seek to expand on the hypothesis suggested at the end of the last chapter: that of the coincidence in what is identified as nationalist literature between conceptions of the nationalist literary mission as a masculine activity and of the committed artist as male.

It has been suggested that writers with nationalist convictions may tag their identity as male in order to prove themselves the more fitting as partners to the National Mother. And, further, that during the years of colonial education, this identification may have been reinforced by the discourse of virile self-expression and forceful iconoclasm

that characterised canonical European modernism. It is here that the Nigerian Wole Soyinka steps into focus. As this writer is, by his own admission, not a proponent of nationalism as conventionally understood, his work may not at first appear to offer suitable examples for the idea of the artist as fraternal nationalist - though Soyinka takes as read that he is explicitly a male artist. Yet, despite the fact that he rejects nationalism as ideology, the contention will be that Soyinka's own particular philosophy of art and the artist relies not simply on masculine stereotypes, but, specifically, on elements of the gendered drama of a wider pan-nationalism. These elements or figures, arguably elaborated by normative definitions of artistic practice, Soyinka smuggles into his own personal mythology, the interrelation being clearest in his characterisation of the artist as fraught and devoted redeemer, the seer of his people. Soyinka may therefore be seen as an interesting test case: the seepage of nationalist significations into his work witnesses to their spread and potency.

1. Edward Brathwaite, Negritude and Camara Laye

The Barbadian Edward Kamau Brathwaite allows convenient access into this survey: his stance on cultural nationalism has been unambiguous and strong. As a poet of the African diaspora, Brathwaite offers an external perspective on an

African heritage to which he is fervently committed. As he shows in The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820, Brathwaite treats self-determination on the part of (in this case) ethnic or cultural communities as basic, a first principle of cultural life. His belief is that "populations exhibit a natural built-in drive or gravitational tendency towards cultural autonomy."[5] However, this drive would seem to be more innate in men than in women. The actual business of nationalism as depicted in Brathwaite's poetry - that is, the search for roots, the discovery of authentic meanings, the process of 'selving' - is very much the enterprise of heroes, of father figures and their sons.

Male filial figures experience the gravitational pull to the national ground, women constitute part of its gravid mass: such dualities are most clearly brought into play in Brathwaite's significantly entitled Mother Poem (1977) and Sun Poem (1982).[6] The poems form the first two parts of a trilogy (in which X/Self (1986) makes up the third). In both of these compound pieces, Brathwaite's use of verbs guides the reader to the telling gender distinctions. In the former, the repeated use of the copula to be identifies the mother with

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[5] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 309.

[6] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Mother Poem (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) and Sun Poem (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982).

the substance of the land; as with Wordsworth's Lucy, a female spirit is seen as interfused with the natural (and national) environment: she is a pool, the island, mud (me mudda/ mud/ black fat/ soft fat/ manure).[7] In contrast, male figures, especially in Sun Poem, act, move and exercise force; the self that seeks wholeness and renewal is also the subject and prime mover of the island's history - its son. While the maternal presence remains diffused, anonymous, inanimate, the son strives to lay claim to the land which was "mudda": it thus becomes "manscape" (MP i), "i:land" (by analogy also with "i:ron" - SP 93).

In Sun Poem, through his adaptation of patriarchal sun-god myths, Brathwaite indicates that the controlling principle of life is male, an idea which is reinforced by his puns on 'sun/son/sum' (sum = personality = experience), as also by the generous salting of first-person pronouns. It becomes clear that the will to power and individuality, represented by the sun, is passed through fathers: the birthing of Brathwaite's island nation involves androcentric genesis. As with the gender elision which Sartre read into the practice of Negritude writers, the nationalist mission of writer depends on the elimination of women from the creative gestation cycle. At first, in Brathwaite's representation,

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[7] "Nametracks" MP 56. See also, in MP, "Alpha" 3-5, "Lix" 19-21, "occident" 22-24, "Driftwood" 112-117.

the mother, the land, is dry rock alone, without water, "unmothered mother" ("Fever," SP 16-18). But with the return from exile and the rise to power of her sons - in this case specifically the poet - the island obtains identity (i:dentity?). Where in Mother Poem he wrote out his quest for roots beneath the rubric of 'mother', Sun Poem has the poet projecting his personality upon the land, giving it new life: the process, Brathwaite indicates, is a "man/oeuvring." In the act of cultural redemption, as Bev Brown notes, "'son' does, 'mother/woman' is."[8] The mother is that which the son manoeuvres; it is he who engenders and supervises renewal (SP 19, 53).

Brathwaite adopts the persona of growing and maturing son and son(g)-singer of his island in order to call that land into full being. Drawing on the recuperative power that is found in sun symbols, the poet seeks a cultural integrity which is already anticipated in the form and harmonies of his song. Appropriately, too, in naming himself as nationalist son and in self-consciously seeking to bond with a maternal earth, Brathwaite is acting within what could be termed a

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[8] Bev E.L. Brown, "Mansong and Matrix," A Double Colonization 71. Robert Graves in The White Goddess characterises the poet-Muse relationship in similar terms. Sue Thomas, "Sexual Politics in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's Mother Poem and Sun Poem," Kunapipi ix.1 (1987): 33-43, also discusses the "pro-family patriarchal ideology" of Brathwaite (34), and his idea that the recovery of nam or 'i-ness' is associated with reawakened male potency (40).

patrilineal tradition. The exile's route of cultural self-assertion and yea-saying which led back to Africa was plotted some decades before by the group of Francophone African and Caribbean poets who were associated with the Negritude movement or tendency. To these poets, both in generational and in ideological terms, Brathwaite stands in the position of son.

Also self-consciously African and proudly so, the Negritude writers of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties were the first men of Africa to refuse en masse and in literature the negations imposed by the colonial experience. It was a refusal that sought not so much a complete break with the past as an overturning of the conceptual system introduced by the European coloniser. Negritude attempted to exorcise the white ghost of European culture by rejoicing in everything that had been identified as negative and inferior by the colonisers - the instinctual and the mysterious of 'darkest Africa'. Having effected what must be the first wholesale inversion in African literature of the cultural meanings imposed by colonialism, Negritude demands a place in an account of nationalist and gender iconography.

Brought up in the rigorous intellectual tradition taught in various satellite écoles and lycées in the French colonies of Africa and the West Indies, the Negritude writers - among

the most prominent, Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Léon-Gontron Damas (Guyana), Birago Diop (Senegal) and the slightly younger Bernard Binlin Dadié (Ivory Coast) - encountered one another in the Thirties (mainly) in Paris, where their quest for higher education had taken them. In the alienation of their exile and through medium of their colonial lingua franca, they banded together to resist the denigration of African culture upon which the French colonial policy of assimilation - inspite of its apparent egalitarianism - was predicated.[9] Yet their protest was paradoxically contained (and ultimately constricted) by their continuing preoccupation with Manichean stereotypes and ideas of essential blackness. They deplored the subjection of the so-called primitive Other to the Western authoritative Self, yet their poetry was built upon such dichotomies. In its most reductive formulations, the African world of Negritude poetry is the old ebony heart of darkness glossed with a brighter polish. Africa is still the centre of subliminal and liminal body forces, of vitality and visceral power.[10] To redeem

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[9] On French colonial policy, see Dorothy S. Blair, African literature in French: A history of creative writing (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 8-12; Anderson, Imagined Communities 58-61, 86-89, and, especially, 104-120. Richard Dowden, "France's Africans feel the cold wind of change," Independent (19 June 1990): 17, comments on the fate of the special relationship between France and her former African colonies.

[10] See A. James Arnold, Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire (London: Harvard UP, 1981) 33-44. Arnold asserts that Aimé Césaire was strongly influenced by the ideas of Leo Frobenius concerning black

Africa, the Negritude writers resolved to begin by inverting its negative image; but because such inversion precluded a thoroughgoing deconstruction, they ended by reifying rather than dismantling the stereotypes, by reiterating, though in new tones and reawakened rhythms, familiar binary terms.[11]

Yet, if one of the main objects of Negritude was to speak out for Africa - to be "the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth"[12] - and to enact its own cultural vindication in poetry, then the Negritude writers may be said to have attained that object. It was Senghor himself who in response to Soyinka's much-quoted comment that the tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, observed, as Achebe has quoted the

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essence - black, instinctual culture as a manifestation of païdeuma, a prehistoric power shaping civilisations. Later in his career, however, in statements made in 1969, 1970, and 1971, Césaire distanced himself from the essentialist Negritude still associated with Senghor (37, 44).

11 For further discussion of the phenomenon of "nativism" as reinforcing colonial distinctions, see: Edward W. Said, Yeats and Decolonization, Field Day Pamphlet 15 (Derry: Field Day, 1988) 14-15, and also, Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World 64. Hereafter MLAW. The indebtedness to colonial forms continues also on a stylistic level. Senghor, for example, writes in highly crafted literary French while at the same time filling his poetry with African resonances and references to African musical instruments. See, for example, Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Que m'accompagnent koras et balafong," "Chants pour Signare," "Chant de l'Initié," Poèmes (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973) 26 ff, 169 ff, 190 ff.

12 Aimé Césaire, The Collected Poetry, eds. and trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (London: University of California Press, 1983) 45.

words, that "a tiger does not talk."[13] As Sartre also pointed out, the Negritude poets felt the need to articulate their experience of negation in order to understand and so exorcise it. Their poetry was that articulation: the negation of a negation. Negritude confronted that difficulty which Terry Eagleton has already described, namely, that "positive identity evolves <u>within</u> oppressive conditions, partly as compensatory for them...and will always be to some extent collusive with its antagonists."[14] Or as Soyinka concedes, in the same statement also denoting the historical, political, and also (significantly and less consciously) gender determinants of Negritude:

> Both for Africans on the <u>mother-continent</u> and for black societies of the diaspora, Negritude provided both a life-line along which the dissociated individual could be pulled back to the source of <u>his</u> matrical essence, and offered a prospect for the coming-into-being of new black social entities [my emphasis].[15]

Soyinka's reference to a matrix of cultural essences knitting together African cultures, directs us back to the matter of Negritude itself - specifically, to the theme of matri-

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[13] Chinua Achebe, <u>Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays, 1965-87</u> (London: Heinemann, 1988) 16.

[14] Eagleton, <u>Nationalism: Irony and Commitment</u> 16.

[15] <u>MLAW</u> 64. These views are expressed at greater length in "The External Encounter," <u>ADO</u> 221-246. See also, Lewis Nkosi, "Negritude: new and old perspectives," <u>Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature</u> (Longman: Harlow, 1981) 10-29.

focality and its place within the cultural world of the poetry.

Negritude writing - which is in the main poetry - commemorates an ideal African past, the first origins of black life and culture. The mode is lyrical and the mood nostalgic: poems are composed in homage to what is lost or missing. In chilly Northern climes, the exiled poet seeks to recall Africa, its landscapes, people, and traditions, and so calls up the presences which dominated his childhood. The images are predictably pristine, pastoral, often Edenic; womanly forms - beloved bosom or tumuli of the fecund earth - abound. In continuing to draw on dualisms that conventionally defined the imaginary space called Africa, the gender opposition is not left out of play. As was shown in the previous chapter, where 'European' is read as civilised, and where 'woman' stands for the primitive and the physical - which are also seen as quintessentially African - Africa, as earth and primitive, seems to be most itself and is most passionately honoured when incarnated in womanly form. For Negritude, however, the adored African woman does not appear exclusively as mother. As in the poetry of Senghor, she is also memorable as fertile femme, whose sinuous shape recalls the topography and by implication the beauty and the mystique of the African earth. Thus love and loyalty to the land is transmuted both into filial adoration - reconciliation and rededication to the

mother[16] - and into sexual desire. There is a need to cleave with a/the body of the land that is at once maternal lap and lapping flesh of the desired woman.

These metaphoric matrices - woman identified as Africa, which is locus of essential blackness, which is beauty and sensuality - appear prominently in the yearning lyrics of Léopold Senghor, the poet most often quoted as the spokesman of Negritude.[17] In the poem, "Black Woman" (which begins "Femme nue, femme noire/ Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté!")[18], the woman is apostrophised as Beloved, as desirable body ("Fruit mûr à la chair ferme"). Yet her form is also maternal. She is like the nurturing presence of his past: "J'ai grandi à ton ombre; la douceur de tes mains bandait mes yeux" ("In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of your hands was laid over my eyes"). This is the same comforting gesture which in "Nuit de Sine"[19] the poet begs from the woman whose presence he again invokes. Desired

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16 See, for example, Bernard Dadié's "Dry Your Tears, Africa," The Heritage of African Poetry, ed. Isidore Okpewho (Harlow: Longman, 1985) 46-47.

17 Though Senghor is cited as the Nestor of Negritude, it was in fact Aimé Césaire who coined the term. It appears in Cahier d'un retour au pays natal 47 (first published in 1939 but written some years before that time).

18 Senghor, Poèmes 14-15 and Léopold S. Senghor, Selected Poems, trans. John Reed and Clive Wake (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964) 16-17. Reference is to both volumes interchangeabl

19 Senghor, Poèmes 12-13 and Selected Poems 5.

and nurturing, the beloved is also of the earth: in "Black Woman" she is "Terre promise" ("Promised land"), "savanne qui frémis" ("savannah shuddering") beneath the homecoming force of the poet's East Wind. So much of what the poet adores is contained in her that, in the time-honoured tradition of poets, he undertakes through his poetry to transform her into an ideal form, immovable and unchanging as a mask, symbol of the African sacred: "Je chante ta beauté qui passe, forme que je fixe dans l'Éternel" ("I sing your passing beauty; a form I fix in Eternity"). In "Nuit de Sine," she is transmuted into a kind of familiar, a presence at once tangible and potent through which the poet may make contact with the ancestors; in "Masque Nègre" she has become the mask, the image of beauty.[20] As "Chant de Printemps" makes clear, the life force which the essential woman of Africa incarnates is felt also in the promise of spring and seedtime and resurges with the return to the loved motherland.[21]

The poet comes to be seduced by the vision he creates in text. If Senghor began by wedding his love for Africa to his

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[20] Poèmes 15-16. Might this be compared to the fixing or embalming of woman as perfect image in the work of other male writers, what Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic 13-15, have described as "killing the woman into art"? Or, again, does the idealisation of the woman represent an influence from Medieval courtly love poetry, and therefore a self-conscious signalling of the acquisition of French culture?

[21] Poèmes 83-85, and Selected Poems 44-46.

love of an African woman (Naëtt of Chants pour Naëtt, or the generic Creole woman, Signare, of the later "Chants pour Signare"[22]), this beloved Africanness (Africaine) in the poetry expands into a composite figure, neither purely physical woman nor purely Africa. Instead of projecting a simple copula construction which would equate woman and Africa, Senghor conceives rather of an idealised interpenetration of earth, land and female body, of sensual desire and of love for the continent. He has significantly observed of himself that "je confonds toujours l'enfance et l'Éden" (the one being so closely identified with the other).[23] Felix Tchicaya U Tam'si (Congo), whose work is sometimes set alongside that of the more well-known Negritude poets, expresses the mother/earth identification more simply:

> Tête debout, qui me perce de ses yeux aigus.
> Et je renais à la terre qui fut ma mère.
>
> (Head held high, her sharp eyes going through me.
> And I am born again to the earth which was my /mother.[24]

The Francophone Guinean writer, Camara Laye, has in the autobiography of his childhood, L'Enfant Noir (1953), given similar lyrical, even rhapsodic expression to the nostalgia

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22 Blair 155.

23 Poèmes 146.

24 See Wilfred Cartey, Whispers from a Continent: The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa (London: Heinemann, 1971) 225.

for an untainted prelapsarian Africa.[25] Without taking the orthodox Negritude position of fierce negation, Laye testifies to the ritualistic richness of African life, previously presumed missing, and so adds his voice to the Negritude challenge of European prejudice. In contrast to a poet like Senghor, however, Laye's hankering for the African heart(h)land is, as befits a vision of childhood, more specifically mother-bonded. His work, therefore, provides a very sharply-realised instance of dedication to an African Mother.

A passage often remembered from the novel is the imaginatively-charged, mystical episode at the beginning, in which Laye describes his goldsmith father at work, marrying spirit to metal. The episode stands out from the tale, almost as a monograph: it is itself, like the jewelry wrought by the father, a highly-crafted construct. Yet through reiteration and epigraphic citation (AC i), the narrative proper insists also on the pre-eminent position of Laye's mother: she is there as a constant within the diachronic progression of the memoir, a still point - though far from voiceless - to which the wandering and increasingly more alienated Laye returns for sustenance. If the father is associated with a calling and a

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25 L'Enfant Noir first appeared in English as The Dark Child (1955). References here are to: Camara Laye, The African Child, trans. James Kirkup (London: Fontana, 1980). On the history of the novel, see Blair 193-198.

craft; the mother entity is metaphoric, representing home and land. Whereas a European presence resides in the city down at the coast, and dominates the cold north, the hinterland, its warm heart or bosom, is suitably presided over by the spirit of the African mother.

Given her centrality, the novel begins appropriately with a dedication which is also an invocation, a call to "my mother," who is also a Mother, a generic "Black Woman, woman of Africa," a muse of nostalgia (AC i).[26] As the autobiography unfolds, Laye will fulfill the promise of this dedication by paying tribute to his mother's undisputed authority, albeit formally unsanctioned, within the compound (AC 54-57, 143). His father relies on a totem to guarantee the powers of his craft as smith; his mother, in addition to her totem, is said to possess the mystical powers of the blacksmith caste (AC 61-62). As the secrets of initiation are kept from women, Laye's reunion with his mother after the requisite period of seclusion is described with self-conscious poignancy. An unbreakable umbilical cord would seem to connect them, son to African mother. As though to emphasise this bond, Laye has his mother herself insist upon it with the force of her sorrow when he seeks to leave for studies in France (AC 151-152, 154-157). Of Europeans she asks:

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[26] This recalls Madingoane's Africa My Beginning. See Chapter Two, footnote 30.

> Have they no mothers, those people? But they can't have mothers, of course. They would not have gone so far from home if they'd had mothers (AC 155).

Laye's mother, as Wilfred Cartey points out, seeks "to tie [the child] to her, to the Africa of which she is the eternal symbol."[27]

Negritude writing, like the poetry of Brathwaite, finds in motherly/womanly figures avatars of the beloved earth. Yet, to demonstrate the reach and variability of gendered nationalist tropes, it is appropriate to draw on one more example, in this case from the work of a slightly younger and politically more radical writer. The sentiments expressed by the poets and novelists quoted above might be characterised as typically 'high' nationalist. Beginning with accounts of the separation of gifted sons, the first-born and the inheritors, from their African homeland, these writers compose the first chapters in the nationalist narrative of alienation and liberation, of exile and return. The distinguishing features of their approach are cultural pride and indignation, a deeply-felt nostalgie, and a strong tendency to simplify and generalise, to tell grand heroic tales of a new world and to fantasise about home. Home is the place where, to describe the situation in its simplest terms, mother resides, the hearth is, and the umbilical cord or fluids are buried.

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[27] Cartey 6.

How do these feelings and ideas translate in the work of one who belongs to a slightly younger generation of nationalist writers, who would still strongly espouse nationalist principles, but, influenced by new circumstances and other ideologies, would also perhaps have begun to move away from the singleminded concerns of a Senghor, or the Abrahams of Udomo? Here the work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, revolutionary and nationalist, may be taken as paradigmatic. From the point of view of the bien passant ideology of Africa's post-independence elite, Ngugi provides the template to Soyinka's resistant matter, the control to his experiment. This applies not only to Ngugi's convinced socialism and nationalism, but also to his efforts at a reformed gender representation. Yet what is probably most significant about Ngugi in this context is that his work has remained as typical as it is. For though his Marxist commitment to the liberation of marginalised social and political groupings - peasants, women - has become more distinct over the years, this commitment has modified but not displaced his nationalist beliefs. Eager anticipation may have given way to a post-colonial cynicism, nationalist fantasy become dark and parodic, yet for Ngugi liberation is still seen as taking place within the edifice of a Kenyan nation-state. In fact, it might be said that his revolutionary ideas have worked to consolidate and more precisely define his Kenyan nationalism.

2. Ngugi wa Thiong'o

For Ngugi, it is through the formation of a truly national culture - that is, through the reconstitution of the people's history and identity - that oppressed groups are restored to themselves. This commitment to a national people's culture he has enacted in his fiction in two main ways: structurally, by transposing oral forms into text, and on a thematic level, by dramatising his populist revolutionary ideas in parody and in parable. His concern with gender has been expressed chiefly at this second level, through dominant tropes, and in his most recent novels has been translated as a fascination with what might be called the New Woman figure in African literature. Describing the process of writing Devil on the Cross, Ngugi observes that he sought to create in that novel "a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle."[28] However, as this image of a dominant woman in part suggests, he has tended to see the recuperation of the woman figure in African literature and

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[28] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary (London: Heinemann, 1981) 10. It is for this reason that Ngugi has received critical acclaim for his representation of women. See, for example, Eddah Gachukia, "The role of women in Ngugi's novels," Busara 3.4 (1971): 30-31; David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writings (London: Heinemann, 1983) 135-136; Charles A. Nama, "Daughters of Moombi," and Tobe Levin, "Scapegoats of Culture and Cult," Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves (Trenton: Africa World, 1986) 139-149, 205-221.

history as requiring, in the main, the remaking of icons. As in the first novels of his mature phase, A Grain of Wheat (1967) and Petals of Blood (1977), Ngugi's gaze is fixed on single "remarkable"[29] personalities, 'true' Kenyan women, mothers or prostitutes or both.[30] Mumbi of A Grain of Wheat (whose name is the same as that of the first mother of Kenya in the national mythology) is at the end of the novel depicted by her carver-husband Gikonyo as big with child. In a narrative dominated by disillusionment and betrayal, this image of fertility and revived motherhood is intended to represent a significant new beginning. At the end of Petals of Blood, Wanja, like a Mother Kenya presiding over and reconciling differences, bears a child who signifies future hope and a reconciliation with history. Like Mumbi, she stands as symbol of a new national way.

In Ngugi's two most recent novels, Devil on the Cross (1982) and Matigari (1989; in Gikuyu, 1986), both of which might be said to prefigure phases in the struggle towards a liberated Kenya, the heroines are again self-sufficient and "alone of all their sex."[31] Though not conventionally maternal, they too hold positions which are symbolic or

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29 Detained 46.

30 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood. See Chapter Two, footnote 60.

31 Ngugi, Matigari, trans. Wangui wa Goro (London: Heinemann, 1989).

metaphoric rather than metonymic. In contrast, the male characters - Muturi the noble worker, Matigari the grizzled guerilla - are assigned specific roles and tasks, as they were in earlier novels. They are shown to participate fully in the day-to-day business of life and, as important, to interact with one another as equals in doing so. The women on the other hand are always in the first instance identified with their bodies: through their female nature or biology they interact with the world. Guthera, Matigari's companion, is a reformed prostitute; Wariinga is seen as desirable object. Following from this, as is especially the case with Wariinga, they react upon rather than with their male associates.

The gender situation in Ngugi's novels shows clear parallels with the scenario of nationalist dreaming and endeavour depicted in the pre-independence work examined earlier. Again, the ideal of the nation is predominant; in Ngugi's case it may in fact overtop the commitment to a revolutionary struggle. For him, a revolutionary future, however much it may teem with people's art, involves a necessary subjection to the single overarching idea of a People's Nation, and participation in a homogeneous national culture.[32] In relation to these higher ends, the gender question cannot but be underrated or else evaded by means of

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[32] See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Barrel of a Pen (London: Heinemann, 1983) 98-99, for his blueprint of an "education for a national patriotic culture."

symbolic elevation. The female body again serves as a means of imagining the ideal and of resolving contradiction - that, for example, of the differences in gender power which would exist in the revolutionary state. Women characters are either promoted to the conventional position of mascot at the head of the peasant and workers' march (conforming with the conventional metaphoric trope) or enlisted 'as a body' in the ranks of the struggle (that is, as suppressed metonym). Wariinga of Devil on the Cross is the exemplary female revolutionary: simultaneously a fighter, a "heroine of toil," and a "black beauty," she is, as it were, made to order, as are her clothes (DoC 216-221).

Ngugi's most recent novel Matigari confirms these tropes of patriotic identity. Once again, the generic figure of the true Kenyan is the male fighter, the comrade and brother. That margin of liberatory potential which Wariinga as a woman revolutionary represented is left to one side. She flung off the last pages of Devil on the Cross brandishing her gun; Matigari walks into the tale which bears his name carrying his AK 47 rifle - he declares his presence as at once archetypal guerilla fighter and popular patriotic leader. Matigari's full name, which means "the patriots who survived the bullets," designates his symbolic status as the people's collective hero (M 20). He speaks of the nation as his family, and the land as his house.

The characterisation of Matigari thus confirms the tenacity of time-honoured nationalist tropes: most obviously, that of the loyal nationalist as soldier, and of national fighters as a band of brothers; and, more generally, that of the national movement as a male-dominated family drama. Ngugi's very genuine interest in new images of women and women's power, therefore, does not work to alter what is clearly for him a more fundamental configuration of power - that involving national agency and authority. In this context, the representation of Guthera, Matigari's helper, is significant. Like Wariinga, Guthera doubles up as strong woman and desirable object - her clothes are said to fit her "as though she was created in them" (M 28) - yet she also supports Matigari courageously into his final moments. In the familial triad she forms with Matigari and Muriuki, the boy-supporter who survives the final disaster, Guthera, acting as both prostitute and surrogate mother, can be seen as a representative of all Kenyan womanhood. Yet the logic of family and generation would suggest that, unlike in Devil on the Cross, the child (Wanja's baby grown-up?), and not the woman, prefigures the free Kenyan citizen of the future. The true successor of Matigari can be neither a mother nor a reformed prostitute. For if Matigari, people's hero, is a man and a fighter, and if he returns to his people so that his people in turn will become matigari, then the conclusion which

seems inevitable is that Matigari can bequeath his AK 47 to no one other than a son.

3. Wole Soyinka

Soyinka's criticisms of the Negritude position are by now well-known and have invited tracts of excoriating response from his opponents.[33] Audacious, combative, and individualist by inclination, Soyinka has continued undaunted, by turns satirising and lamenting those who would in his view seek to preserve Africa as an anthropological exhibit and as a monument to the pre-colonial past. To him, the colonial heritage should be as little denied as it should be endorsed. What is crucial for Africa, despite the tales of sorrows that make up its history, is that the continent's peoples engage fully with a present that should be seen as a conjuncture of colonial and of pre-colonial histories. History, with both its autochthonous and its foreign infusions, is the determinant of Africa's multifarious contemporary reality. In his writing, Soyinka enacts this concern with the present, and with the political health of his nation, bearing vigilant witness to the foibles of post-independence Nigerian society and denouncing corruption. At times, indeed, his energetic attacks have drawn him into politics in a way that some,

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33 Most obviously in Chinweizu's two books, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature, especially 199-203, and the Faber collection of African verse. See Chapter Two, footnote 85.

including Nigeria's leaders, have found uncomfortable. Most notably, his opposition to the Biafran war led to his detention by Federal forces for twenty-seven months from 1967 to 1969.[34]

From his record of political involvement, as from his incisive essays of social and literary criticism, it seems unjust to allege, as do some of his critics, that Soyinka has compromised his African identity or shown himself to be a European sycophant. It is true that no amount of manipulation of the facts would enable one to press him into an immediately recognisable nationalist mould. Yet he cannot rightfully be called antagonistic to certain tenets of a broad-based African nationalism. The intensity with which he condemns injustice on the continent, and urges the need for a free, unpoliced revival of African culture, shows a fierce concern for the

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[34] What follows is a necessarily incomplete though representative list of Soyinka's political activities. In 1965, he was arrested for making a radio call to Akintola to quit the country and, as he describes in The Man Died: Prison Notes (London: Arrow Books, 1987), was later detained during the Biafran War. After Shagari was elected to a second term at the end of 1983, Soyinka flew to London to expose in the British media what he saw as the corruption and mismanagement of the elections. See his report, "Why Shagari couldn't last", The Third World Review: Voices from the South, eds. Victoria Brittain and Michael Simmons (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987) 32-37. More recently, though having at one time admired Nigeria's present military governor, Soyinka has added his voice to those condemning repression under the Babangida administration. See Tunde Obadina, "The Human Rights Conundrum," West Africa (October 3-9 1988): 1827. See also James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka (London: Macmillan, 1986) 1-17; Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, 3rd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1988) 18-19.

self-affirmation of African peoples.[35] He speaks of cultural flexibility and adaptability as priorities - as self-reconstructive means of resisting the depredations of Africa's history. Given the relative unorthodoxy of his position, however, further elucidation of Soyinka's position on the subject of nationalism and of nationalist cultural practice seems justified. Such a discussion should also begin to indicate how gender is placed in his political and aesthetic vision.

Soyinka is willing to take on the historical fact of nationalism in Africa and recognises, though regretfully, that this fact finds concrete expression in national and linguistic boundaries. Yet in his writing on nationalist issues, he also indicates that the content and application of the ideology in Africa must be substantially reworked. For him, the validity of nationalism as a political belief would appear to be modified both by his particular reading of the recent African past and by his humanist ideals.[36] Discussing nationalist

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35 MLAW vii-xii is quite clear about this. His concerned opposition to cultural repression and its deleterious effects on "nation-building" are unambiguously expressed in the essay, "Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa's Culture Producers," PMLA 105.1 (January 1990): 110-120.

36 For examples of humanist assertions from Soyinka, consider his stated sympathy for the "humanistic ideology" of Brecht, "Between Self and System," ADO 66, and his comments on humanly true art and the individual artist, "Drama and the idioms of liberation," ADO 57, 59. As revealing are his claims in "The critic and society: Barthes, leftocracy and other mythologies," Black Literature and Literary Theory, ed.

manifestations on the continent, he points in particular to the bankruptcy or "moral dereliction" of the ideology, the lack of fit between the nineteenth-century European idea of the nation and the cultural ethos of the peoples who have adopted that idea. Axiomatic to this interpretation is his belief that the imposition of national identity in the African context is confining, and in consequence destructive of human nature. In addition, nationalism is the product of a "the cavalier arrogance" and "the exploitative motivations" of colonialism and of the "complications of neo-colonial politics."[37] He stresses:

> In the politics of this continent, I have no patience with any national strategy which in any way, overt or covert, solidifies the meaningless colonial boundaries which have created and are still creating such intense havoc on the continent among African nations and peoples. With C.L.R. James...I believe that "the nation state, as an ideal, belongs to the last century". To consolidate untenable geographical boundaries with the linguistic is not merely stagnation in essence and effect; it is sterile and retrogressive.[38]

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (London: Methuen, 1984) 41-51, (also ADO 161-173), about ineffable human essences, in particular, the will to power and love of music.

37 Soyinka gives an extended account of his attitudes to nationalist feeling in The Man Died 174-183. Despite his sympathy for Biafran grievances, Soyinka seems to have rejected the option of splitting Nigeria. See also "Language as Boundary," ADO 132-145, in which he bemoans the association of nationalist self-determination with ideas of linguistic exclusivity.

38 "Language as Boundary," ADO 137.

More severe than his historical objections to nationalism, and basic also to those objections, is Soyinka's refusal of ideologies which would seek to impose artificial restrictions on the human personality. He is of the opinion that the "causes for human association" are "eternal".[39] If, then, as he indicates, nationalism presupposes division, it follows that his faith must always rather be in people seen as human beings - their ways of communion and being together (ritual, music, drama) - than in peoples divided into nations. Soyinka believes at once in the constancy and the boundless potential of the character or spirit of 'man', its unflagging restlessness, its endless creativity, its "play-making."[40] He therefore wholeheartedly endorses efforts to make whole the African's human image, damaged by a history of slavery and colonialism. Insofar as nationalism overlaps with a philosophy of race retrieval - what he calls "the conscious activity of recovering what has been hidden, lost, repressed, denigrated, or indeed simply denied" - he supports it.[41] In that he seeks also to expand that philosophy onto a continental stage, in the interests of forging an Africa-wide cultural accord, his 'nationalist' tendencies take on the

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39 See "Language as Boundary," and "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 138, 108-109.

40 "Drama and the idioms," ADO 43. 'Man' is marked off in this way to indicate Soyinka's often gender-specific use of the term.

41 "Twice Bitten" 114. See also "The traitor's plea," Brittain and Simmons 68.

colour of Pan-Africanism, an ideology which, as the previous chapter showed, attempts to erase national boundaries and the European state-based inheritance of nationalism, yet retains the ethic of self-pride - as well as the tendency to conceive of cultural potency by way of gendered images.[42] Nationalist undertones, then, co-exist in Soyinka with the outspoken rejection of retrogressive and prescriptive nationalisms, ideologies which have encouraged petty atavisms, sectarian and hegemonic state leadership and restrictive formulations of national identity.[43]

The inventiveness of 'man' is Soyinka's abiding pre-occupation, and a controlling theme of his dramatic and non-fictional work. In an ironic move which simultaneously betrays and justifies partisan loyalties, he has in several writings nominated the eclectic and animistic vitality of African and specifically Yoruba culture as providing an illustration of the variability and richness of the human spirit. He contends that the "deistic approach of the Yoruba is to absorb every new experience, departmentalize it and carry on with life" - an approach which is demonstrated when, for example, Sango, "Dispenser" of lightening, is honoured

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42 See, in particular, "Language as Boundary," ADO 132-145.

43 "Language as Boundary," ADO 141.

also as god of electricity.[44] Yoruba cultural practice, therefore, becomes for Soyinka a conduit into "a continental accord," a "coming together" "to create a new unifying [but not unitary] culture from the uneasy amalgam of diversified ones."[45] The attempt is to dissolve the capsule of the nation from within as well as from without. Elsewhere he speaks in similarly corroborative terms of the assimilative aesthetic of Africa and of "the holistic impulse of the African, an organic sense of unit-and-totality."[46]

In the context of his philosophy of universal 'man', Soyinka's ethnically-specific emblem for organic consciousness, though it might at first appear anomalous, is redeemed by the concept of unity as plurality, or of necessary difference within sameness. It is this which allows him to speak of the eclectic though "universal catalogue of metaphors of art,"[47] in which the actual metaphors or vehicles of comparison would presumably be various, but their meanings

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[44] "From a Common Back Cloth," ADO 9. This adaptability and creativity Soyinka demonstrates with Kola's pantheon in The Interpreters (London: Heinemann, 1986) 224-225, 233. On correspondences between deities from different cultures, see "Between Self and System," ADO 62-85; MLAW 1-36.

[45] "Language as Boundary," ADO 142, 139. The interest in regional self-expression as co-existing with continental association, invites comparison with the aims and vision of Nuruddin Farah.

[46] "Between Self and System," ADO 78, and see also "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 100-109.

[47] "Between Self and System," ADO 77.

generally shared and understood, embedded in interwoven archetypal matrices.[48] Soyinka needs this concept each time he places stress on the wonder and essentiality of syncretic and hybrid cultural forms, or refers to African art in terms of Yoruba art works. It is this idea, too, which underpins his belief in continental association, and which legitimates his own attempts at cross-cutting between cultural traditions, "[taking] critical note of colonial and alien contributions to the creative sensibility of the modern African."[49]

Given his view of the vibrant "holism" of human sensibility, Soyinka would endorse the struggle towards self-retrieval by a people only in so far as that experience is dynamic, tolerant, and oriented upon the future. That he does, however, fully support such effort is never a matter of doubt. Like his West Indian contemporary, Wilson Harris, Soyinka believes that a social vision should be a corrective to the present, earnestly regenerative, "[preventing] the entrenchment of the habitual, the petrification of the imaginative function by...past or present reality." The progression towards self-realisation of a people is valid and necessary, but only if it is always in process, celebrating heterogeneity, resisting stasis. The problem at the root of

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48 "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 104-106, discusses the rather unspecific term "matrix," a term which appears also in the contemporaneous MLAW.

49 "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 88.

the nationalist literary project has been that the worthy cultural imperative of colonial resistance - the demolition of the obscene creations of colonial history - has lent false credence to later attempts at simplistic cultural reclamation and to the propagation of what Soyinka views as an unsubtle and insular ethnocentrism.[50]

If one was to venture a summary definition, Soyinka's syncretism might be said to bear the marks of proto-nationalism, in the sense in which that term is used by Hobsbawm,[51] and of pan-nationalism. In a statement in which the parenthesis is revealing, he has himself admitted to the need for "racial (national) self-retrieval....lacking in contrivance and not dominated by external categories."[52] Yet, to turn his ideal of holism against him for a moment, it is notable that the concept of self-retrieval for Soyinka does not at any stage signify - or not explicitly so - the reclamation of women's experience, or the resuscitation of female deities. So we also assume, by dint of his silence on the matter, that his pan-nationalist ideal of the creation of a unifying Africa-wide culture, is predicated upon the idea of male agency. Strenuous efforts at transcending geographical,

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50 Ibid 86-109.

51 That is, in effect, as signifying nationalist self-assertion without the demand for state sovereignity. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism 46-79, 163-183.

52 "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 107.

linguistic, or cultural boundaries do presumably not extend to dismantling gender differences built into cultural and national iconographies. Admittedly, it need not necessarily have been the case that the tradition of identity politics with which he grew up engendered or encouraged Soyinka's patriarchal attitudes. Yet it is also true that such traditions, being in themselves male-dominated, far from challenging those gender biases, co-operated with them. Significant, therefore, is the fact that we find Soyinka referring in tender terms to Africa as "mother continent," an image quite in line with the icons of the nationalists considered thus far.[53] He has spoken of the "common mother in all our women," and would thus seem, provisionally at least, to have taken on the generic image of African womanhood which has been associated with the other nationalists - the bonds of gender in this case perhaps proving as strong as ties of nationalist affiliation.[54] Remembering the metonymic role of nationalist as artist, also significant are Soyinka's efforts in a recent essay to set up Léopold Sédar Senghor, "poet and statesman," and Julius Nyerere, "poet, translator and nation-builder," as archetypes of cultural "development":

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53 "Language as Boundary," ADO 139.

54 The Man Died 199. In contrast to this, the Bill that promulgated a republican constitution for Nigeria in 1963 referred to the nation as the "Fatherland." See Maxwell Nwagboso, "25 Years of Republicanism," West Africa (26 September-2 October 1988): 1772, and "The traitor's plea," Brittain and Simmons 67.

he names them "symbols" of "the rapture of the creative soul within the convulsions of nation-building."[55]

Still bearing in mind Soyinka's commitment to a "unit-and-totality" approach, these charges may appear somewhat superficial. To obtain a clearer sense of the relationship between gender and cultural expression in his thought, a more extended account of his aesthetics must be given, for it is here that the concept of self-retrieval, and of the artist as agent of retrieval, is most fully realised. It is here, too, that Soyinka's putatively modernist tendencies become important or, more precisely, the connections between these tendencies and his cultural and gender attitudes. His education in English literature as liberal humanist discipline may well have encouraged or reinforced, for example, an earlier vision of the autonomous self-determining (male) subject as being in control of history and writing, or of the potential intersection between local and universal cultural forms ("history is now and in England"). Examining the overlap between his work and the modernist interests and stereotypes of the literary establishment, therefore, might uncover reasons for Soyinka's (gender-marked) representation of cultural self-assertion. It is true that his views were formed within an indigenous (and Christian) tradition of male domination, and might be explained as 'simply patriarchal'.

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55 "Twice Bitten" 120.

Yet it might equally be the case that these views were stimulated and endorsed by the gender-marked collaboration, as described in the previous chapter, between, on the one hand, ideas of committed national art held by the African literary elite, and, on the other, modernist and humanist trends in the colonial establishment. Seen on occasion as competing tendencies, these movements and trends are developments of eighteenth-century humanism, which conjuncture gives a preliminary indication of the relation which they might have with gender.

Soyinka's eclectic mythmakings bear resemblance with the "mythical method" of an Eliot or a Joyce, while his personal academic history shows evidence of possible influences from modernist writers and New Critical theorists and instructors. Of course, as in the discussion of nationalism, to pin a modernist label to Soyinka's lapel requires qualification. Contrary to the imputations of his critics, he does not so much form part of a modernist group or tendency as show signs of having received his training in a educational system which took recognisably modernist literary values - complexity, irony, a sense of tradition - as authoritative. The independence generation of Anglophone colonial writers of which Soyinka forms a part, were educated in the Forties and Fifties, pre-independence days, at various university colleges, clones and sub-sections of metropolitan British

universities. They received, as a major part of their degree in English, a formalised, streamlined - and probably simplified and more conservative - course in the Anglo-American New Criticism which had evolved in the academy during the course of the century. Soyinka, after a first degree at University College, Ibadan, came to England, to Leeds University, for graduate studies in English, where his M.A. supervisor was the New Critical Shakespearian scholar, G. Wilson Knight. In his academic career Soyinka was encouraged, as his earlier work certainly shows, to interpret the poetic as that which was modernist, that is, as allusive, dislocated, impacted. Though the differential contributions of the various contributors should not be forgotten, his affiliation is recognisably to principles of the literary and critical school of difficulty, hermetic form, and high seriousness inspired by Matthew Arnold and I.A. Richards, and advanced by T.S. Eliot, William Empson and F.R. Leavis, amongst others.

The interrelations between modernism, the academy, British imperial ventures, and Soyinka's position with respect to these, if they do exist, will be deeply infolded, and should therefore be spread out a little and examined. Such a survey, however, runs the risks of oversimplification encountered in any synopsis. One of the underlying questions which can only be very generally addressed, for example, is how concepts and techniques associated with modernism, a

movement identified in its early stages with avant-garde iconoclasm and repudiation of the status quo, were incorporated into the colonial academy, to become part of its efforts at cultural legitimation. To forward the 'civilising' or educative ends of the colonial venture, what colonial colleges and schools sought in the first instance to promote was a certain received image of Englishness, and an accompanying set of English cultural values. Where literature, following Matthew Arnold, was presented as the highest expression of a humanist moral vision, English studies became a mode of inducting such principles into the colonised elite, to facilitate the business of administration, political suasion, and general social management.

In an inquiry into cultural hegemony and literary studies in British India, Gauri Viswanathan takes this idea further, arguing that "the subsequent institutionalization of the discipline [of English literary studies] in England itself took on a shape and an ideological content developed in the colonial context."[56] Where, in British India, Christianising

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[56] Gauri Viswanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India," OLR 9.1-2 (1987): 2. Viswanathan's argument should not, however, be allowed to override other important contributing factors, such as the nineteenth-century interest in English (vernacular) literary studies as an expression of a national spirit, or the widespread idea that the knowledge acquired through literature would redeem the destructive effects of, for instance, industrialisation, Mammonism, and philistinism. See, for example, Edward Baugh, "English Studies in the University of the West Indies: Retrospect and Prospect," Caribbean Quarterly

activities were strictly controlled, English literature was seen, in a compensatory way, to represent universal (or trans-historical) moral themes and secularised Christian principles. Therefore English literary studies, Viswanathan contends, became an intellectual discipline in which the native was encouraged to use methods of rational investigation to extract from the 'great works' of the literature ideal forms of Englishness and 'timeless' human values - forms and values far removed from the clamorous hurly-burly of the colonising enterprise.[57] Speaking of British colonies in general, Michael Thorpe notes in support of this that English literature in British colonial possessions assumed a classical standing: "it was natural to quote English writers, imitate their poetic styles and adopt the novel form."[58] A recipient of a colonial literary education, Meenakshi Mukherjee, reports: "students of literature learnt to operate within the restrictive frameworks of mime and ventriloquism, attempting

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16.4 (December 1970): 48-60, and D. J. Palmer, The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature (London: Oxford UP, 1965).

57 Viswanathan 20-24.

58 Michael Thorpe, "How much is Everything? English Language and Literature in the Developing Nations of the Commonwealth," The Commonwealth: A Common Culture?, eds. Richard Maltby and Peter Quartermaine (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1989) 43.

desperately to convince themselves of the universality of all literary values."[59]

The attempt to create an academic discipline out of English literary enquiry and philology, begun in the nineteenth century, was brought to fruition in the early and mid-twentieth century by those who became known as the Anglo-American Practical or New Critics. Developing an analysis focussed on the autotelic text, on formal complexity, paradox and conceit, these critics found encouragement and inspiration not only in the pedagogic ideas and literary programmes that percolated in from, for example, Working Men's Colleges and colonial institutions, but also in an intellectual alliance that was forged with modernist poetry, most notably through the work of T. S. Eliot. Modernist obsessions with the autistic social forms of the new metropolis encouraged a scholarly interest in linguistic and formal complexity, in the attempt to mould and condense language to encompass a new reality. The "great variety and complexity" of modern civilisation is most comprehensively expressed, as Eliot put it, in a poetry of "variety and complexity," "more allusive, more indirect."[60] Yet, though the interest in difficulty and significant form may have initiated a productive encounter

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59 Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Two Views of the Periphery," Kunapipi xi.2 (1989): 41.

60 T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Prose, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975) 65.

between the new art and the academy, the nostalgia on the part of leading British modernists and opinion-makers for classical form, for "ordering...the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history,"[61] no doubt soldered the alliance. This yearning for coherence goes some way towards explaining the modernist retreat into conservatism, and hence also the separation from earlier avant-garde agitations and iconoclasm. Then, too, as Raymond Williams points out, with the world-wide dominance of the metropolitan centres where modernism flourished, modernist trends, once innovative and diverse, became conventional and orthodox.[62]

Early modernism and English literary studies grew up alongside the consolidation of British colonial acquisitions in Africa. With the study of literature as civilising activity formalised in other areas, it was predictable that New Critical methods, as well as an associated literary canon, would be exported to the African colonies. These methods would then be adapted by educational institutions in a reverse process of induction to that which Viswanathan described. Despite intensive missionary activity in Africa, supporting techniques of inculcating timeless human values came in handy.

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61 T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," Selected Prose 177.

62 See Raymond Williams, "The Emergence of Modernism," and "Culture and Technology," The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989) 46-47, 130-132.

Advanced also by study abroad and the expansion of the trans-national media, it was no doubt as a result of this diffusion that modernist aesthetic values came to be seen as normative within the literary elites of British colonies.[63] Additionally, apart from the persuasive power of fashion, the interest of those elites in modernist poetry may also have been encouraged by the reflection in modernist bricolage of 'exotic' artefacts and of the broken shards of cultures damaged by colonialism.

As described thus far, the relationship between modernism and imperialism develops through the agency of a third party, the academic discipline of English studies. Yet, a closer relationship should also be postulated, something more of a complicity. It may be that the idea of the modern world as being a panorama of anarchy was in part suggested by the images of inexplicable landscapes and social spaces introduced to (what was seen as) a more coherent social world

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[63] A cursory survey of English syllabuses taken from a rough sampling of colonial universities/university colleges - The University of Melbourne, the (at that time) University College of the West Indies, and Rhodes University, South Africa - for the arbitrary period 1953-1958 shows: that Yeats and especially Eliot define the field of modern poetry, almost to the exclusion of others; that practical criticism features frequently on programmes as a taught course; and that little or no indigenous literature is on offer. The Rhodes University Calendar (1953-1958); The University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts Handbook (1953-1957); The University of the West Indies Department of English Syllabuses (1952-1958). See also, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Literature and Society," Writers in Politics: Essays (London: Heinemann, 1981) 3-33.

by way of imperial enterprise and its spoils - or, equally, by the fact that the underside of British society, the Other against which it defined itself, which might previously have been another European nation, or the lower classes, was now located elsewhere, was unrepresentable.[64] The imperial experience, and the development of the modern city to which it contributed, therefore, bequeathed to European modernism not only certain of its ideas and motifs - non-representational art forms, symbols for the unconscious, the echolalia of many voices speaking in unknown tongues.[65] It also, to speak schematically, brought twentieth-century metropolitan society in confrontation with an unresolvable incoherence in its own state of being, showing it its own self-division, its incompleteness. Modernist art forms expressed and accentuated certain of the dilemmas and contradictions of the colonial experience even as it tried to resolve them.

Where disjunction was seen as a controlling concept of modernism, the potential existed for the colonised, too, to adopt modernist forms, whether these were introduced through academic channels or by a process of indirect transference, in

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64 See Frederic Jameson, Modernism and Imperialism, Field Day Pamphlet 14 (Derry: Field Day, 1988) 12-19.

65 See Raymond Williams, "Language and the Avant-Garde," The Politics of Modernism 78. In a rather unresolved essay, David Trotter, "Modernism and Empire: reading The Waste Land," Futures for English, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988) 145-149, looks at frontier-myths in The Waste Land.

this way giving expression to their own experiences of negation and self-splitting. Therefore, though it is important to remain aware that a Nigerian "modernist" trend, as Charles E. Nnolim asserts, may have developed out of - or, one might add, been influenced by - "the use of fantasy and exaggerations we find as the staple elements of our folklore,"[66] it is as important to acknowledge, along with A. James Arnold, that colonial writers were profoundly aware of, and influenced by, modernist ideas. Because it raises a number of themes pertinent to this discussion, A. James Arnold's comment on the relationship between modernist art and Negritude is worth quoting in full:

> [T]he negritude writers paralleled and prolonged a mental set that existed, sometimes diffusely but occasionally with a remarkably similar focus...in the work of the foremost modernist writers of their own and the preceding generation. There is probably no direct connection to be made between Césaire and Pound, Yeats or Malraux. Yet Césaire had at his disposal the same European intellectual tradition as these writers when he set out to become the poet of negritude. He did not dredge up Mother Africa from some atavistic racial memory, despite some early claims to the contrary, nor did he in his surrealist phase gratuitously distort reality through automatic writing.[67]

When Soyinka encountered modernist influences at university and elsewhere, how might he have "paralleled and

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66 Charles E. Nnolim, "Trends in the Nigerian Novel," Literature and National Consciousness, eds. Ebele Eko et al (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1989) 64.

67 Arnold 52.

prolonged" them? To find close fit between the modernism of 1910-1930 and Soyinka's putative 'modernism' is hardly possible,[68] yet, as suggested, the modernist influence in his work is clearly revealed in such features as his interest in myth and in the linguistic density of his poetry. In the manner of, for example, a Joyce or a Yeats, Soyinka has worked to refashion myth to "give shape and significance" to his work (as is perhaps most obvious in The Interpreters). Yet it is important to remember that a relationship such as this is not simply a case of one-way influence. Myth for Soyinka is probably less synthetic or exotic than it was for the European modernists. Therefore, to characterise the situation in a sentence: if Soyinka experiences as an (in part constructed) reality what are dominant motifs in modernism - of the dark unknown, the loss of self, and of mythic structure - modernism influences him, as will be seen, in making of his syncretic metaphysics a myth-fiction.[69]

Because his interpretation of local culture is determinedly individual, Soyinka's mythmaking is also to be distinguished from that of more conventional nationalists.

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[68] The inevitable time-lag in the dissemination of ideas from metropolis to the colonial periphery to some extent accounts for the apparent belatedness of his interest.

[69] Ben Okri, review of Aké, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Boy," West Africa (16 November 1981): 2716, observes that we are constantly aware of Soyinka creating out of the facts of his life, a fictional "Soyinka landscape."

His reading of the Ogun legend and its place in Yoruba culture, for example, is unambiguously and self-consciously a personal reinvention - a fictional narrative. Though he might annex elements of that culture as part of an aesthetic paradigm, he makes no claim for his interpretation as being in itself authoritative or authentic. Soyinka weaves between cultural traditions, as did the modernist writers, and is therefore quite aware of the invention or reconstruction work that goes into tradition. Rounding on his "ideologue" critics, he has proclaimed his commitment to the mythical method in very certain terms:

> Wole Soyinka wishes to announce his intention of continuing to recreate his own myths, unscrupulously, in images - consciously selective - of vapour and matter, for his contemporary needs.[70]

Linked with his efforts to marry myths and images from different cultures and periods, Soyinka has evolved a style which, though again highly idiosyncratic, displays characteristics which might also be termed modernist, in particular a tendency to allusiveness (which Soyinka calls the African "love of the allusive"![71]). Also in autobiographical

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70 "The critic and society," Gates 45.

71 "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 100.

work such as in Aké[72] and The Man Died, his language is dense, gnomic, at times portentous, this style being the product of a wide range of cultural reference combined with a predilection for elision and concentrated adjectival construction. In Soyinka's terms, however, the esoteric vision of the artist is in keeping with his role as the heightened consciousness of his community. The artist is a truth-seer whose vatic voice must work in "provoking, mystifying" ways to "[enlarge] the perceptive social being."[73] Though this is an idea not foreign to the classics Soyinka also read in the course of his studies, one is here reminded, for example, of Yeats's view of poetry as visionary, or of Eliot's conception of the poet as privileged speaker, and as one who bears a special relationship with the literary tradition of the past.[74] A parallel with the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, too, suggests itself. Influenced, like Soyinka, by an English humanist education received in the context of a rich indigenous culture, like him, Harris sees the artist as penetrating the

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72 Wole Soyinka, Aké: The Years of Childhood (London: Collings, 1981). For examples of the syncretic interfusions of culture and belief that marked his growing-up, see 1-3, 8-9, 31-34, 139-148, 217.

73 "Aesthetic Illusions" ADO 100, and also 101-109, "Climates of Art," ADO 256 ff.

74 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Prose 37-44.

"sacred stases of appearance" that dominant homogeneous cultures tend to enforce, and "[unravelling] their biases."[75]

Yet it is perhaps in his humanist universalism that Soyinka's most thoroughgoing, though least conspicuous affinity with the thought of the colonial academy and the discipline of English literature is manifested. Through the medium of this universalism he extrapolates from Yoruba myth to a putative global culture. Yet, once again, the relationship between Soyinka's belief and the New Critical and modernist conception of 'man' as transhistorical entity, is not simple. His Christian upbringing at Abeokuta could well have bequeathed to Soyinka the concept of a universal human character or soul. Indigenous belief could have been equally influential: according to Soyinka's own estimation, Yoruba cosmology would rate 'man' as the measure of all things. All that it is possible to assert with any conviction, then, is that the modernist (à la Eliot), or perhaps more accurately liberal humanist,[76] image of the human character as constant

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[75] Wilson Harris, "The Frontier on which Heart of Darkness Stands," Explorations 135. See also Tradition, the Writer and Society (London: New Beacon, 1967) and The Womb of Space. When Harris pronounces his faith in "the universal spirit of mediation" and acclaims "a profound, complex and searching dialogue" between cultures, this is also close to the spirit of the praise Soyinka lavishes on Ogun. See "The Complexity of Freedom" (significantly, an analysis of Soyinka's The Road), Explorations 113-124.

[76] These terms should perhaps be distinguished because of the powerful infusion of anti-humanist ideas in early modernism, as promoted by the work of T.E. Hulme and taken up,

and transcendent, brought into relief the lineaments of Soyinka's own image of 'man', his belief that humanity is united by certain common essences.

Yet, to recall the gendered features of that 'timeless' image, what Soyinka may have found as congenial as the so-called universality of the humanist ideal was its masculinity. For modernist and New Critical writers, as for Soyinka, the poetry that gives expression to the full human condition is a male poetry and tradition a patrimonial inheritance marked by the rivalry of fathers and sons. To assert only this, however, is to say very little, patriarchal assumptions being widespread: indeed, the stereotype of the poet as male must be as old as patriarchy. Therefore, a suggestion that a modernist stress on maleness might have had some effect on Soyinka, will be chiefly persuasive if that maleness is seen to have had particularly pronounced expression in modernism.[77] This is the case argued by Gilbert and Gubar in The War of the Words, vol. 1 of No Man's Land, their exposé of modernism as an early twentieth-century "reaction-formation" against the New Woman and women's newly-achieved expressiveness. Though their study is marred by oversimplification - as reflected in the tendency to rate the male backlash as the single most

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for example, by the Vorticist and Imagist movements.

77 In particular, in the canon exported to the colonial universities.

powerful determining factor in modernism - their compendium of modernist chauvinisms is, to borrow a phrase from Barbara Hardy, an effective "thematic demonstration" of what Samuel Hynes has also described as the pronounced response in literature to the immense changes that were taking place in relations between the sexes.[78] They suggest that a general disintegration in patriarchal authority, fueled by fin-de-siècle anxieties and the trauma of the Great War, aroused in male artists a profound paranoia and anger against women, feelings often expressed as misogyny.

Taking a very general view, it does seem true that modernism, of which the majority of noted or canonical writers are male, is, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, characterised in certain areas by an insidious misogyny, manifested as virility and aggression (Vorticism, Futurism), disgust or fastidious distaste (one thinks of the edited sections of The Waste Land[79]), and in displays of potency, or, as the inverse to this, fears of impotence (the novels and the non-fictional writing of D.H. Lawrence). In a study of the proto-modernist writers Henry James and W. D. Howells, Alfred Habegger presents supporting evidence for this idea of modernism as a

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[78] Barbara Hardy, review of No Man's Land, vol. 1, "The Struggle for Language," TLS (3-9 June 1988): 621; Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968).

[79] T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber, 1971).

male rallying.[80] He notes that, with women dominating novel-writing in mid-nineteenth-century America, James and Howells were concerned to win the field for their sex, establish themselves against the "maternal tradition," and assert their identities as male.[81] Based on this sort of evidence, it may be argued that Soyinka, mediating between modernist influences and indigenous art forms, found his personal ideas of male authority confirmed by the ethos of masculine potency which pervaded the modernist literature taught in the academy. Though not necessarily a direct influence, modernist evocations of maleness may have represented to him an invitation to collude.

"His concern is with <u>man</u> on earth [my emphasis]"[82]: arguably reinforced through his links with modernism as well as through his identification with a doctrine of nationalist recovery, Soyinka's gender-biases are best illustrated by giving some account of his theory of drama and creativity, and in particular of his conception of Ogun, Yoruba male god of transformation and aggressive defiance and the playwright's patron deity.[83] In his interpretation of the Ogun myth,

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[80] Alfred Habegger, <u>Gender, Fantasy and Realism in American Literature</u> (New York: Columbia, 1982).

[81] Habegger ix-xi.

[82] Jones 12.

[83] <u>The Man Died</u> 41.

Soyinka puts into practice his claim that "the universal verities" of a doctrine may be "contained in, or can be elicited from the world-view and social structure of [one's] own people."[84] Through his recreation of the legend, Soyinka has set up a kind of personal philosophy: the god represents states of existential daring Soyinka admires; he is the artist-hero in godly form. The doctrine of Ogun may then be taken as an important part of Soyinka's own project of cultural self-retrieval - an attempt to balance his identity across indigenous and exogamous cultural structures. If anywhere, therefore, it is in his image of Ogun as primal artist and chthonic hero that the various strains or tendencies in Soyinka's thought will come together - proto-nationalist urgings with universalist humanism, Yoruba fascinations with modernist myth-making. Further, given that these tendencies tend to carry a clear mark for male gender, it is here that we may expect to see most clearly how Soyinka translates the term self-retrieval as referring always in the first instance to the male self.

In Soyinka's view, the originative drama of human existence, which is the germ of ritual and of theatre, enacts the god Ogun's challenge to the infinite and in so doing represents 'man's' ontological quest. One of the reasons why the Yoruba pantheon recommends itself to Soyinka is because of

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84 MLAW xii.

the concessions it makes to the fallibility of the gods of men. Inherent in this interpretation of divinity is the idea that the gods are essentially no more than the externalisation of man's intuitions or the projection of his desires. According to this definition, Ogun becomes one of the foremost of the deities. He is the god who in Soyinka's myth takes mortal existence to its ontological extremes; he strives to transcend the abyss of non-being by attempting a reconciliation with the eternal. This constitutive act as godhead marks Ogun as the chief creative principle in the pantheon: any act which represents "disintegration and reassembly in the universal womb of origin" is singled out as his; his tools, "forged from the ore of mountain wombs," are made of iron - note the repetition of the female image to signify source and primal energy.[85] All ritual drama, in effect any aesthetic creation, becomes a vicarious re-enactment of Ogun's first act of transcendence. Yet, as the reference to disintegration suggests, Ogun bears a dual character - he is besmirched by the blood of men from the time when, in a fit of drunkenness, he slew his own comrades on the battlefield. Therefore he is the god also of road carnage and of retribution: his creative being is confirmed in negation.

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85 MLAW 25-36, especially 29-30.

As the primary "artistic spirit," Ogun fuses elemental and disparate forces, both "womb-energies" and the Promethean instinct of assertion and defiance, thus representing 'female' as well as 'male' powers of invention and re-creation. Throughout, however, he remains unequivocally and robustly a male god, an "embodiment of Will."[86] This would seem significant. Soyinka's conception of Ogun suggests that the entire Yoruba cosmogony (as he interprets it) is dominated by a male principle. Indeed, the three representative deities governing the human cycle - Ogun, Obatala and Sango - are all phallus-bearing: there is no countervailing female presence. Between the three of them they also represent the entire gamut of human experience or "arc of the human psyche": Sango is hubris and justice; Obatala "patience, suffering, peaceableness"; Ogun incarnates choler, audacity, Nietzschean will, and energy.[87] Taken together these qualities are not only primary but entire - the male deities have it all. It is predictable, therefore, that, in Soyinka's pantheon, the "first deity Orisa-nla" - who first made contact with mankind

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[86] See "The Fourth Stage," ADO 24-25, 27. Henry John Drewal, "Efe: Voiced Power and Pageantry," African Arts Periodical 7.2 (1974) 62, points out that in pageantry Ogun's virility is represented by a "lengthened" phallus.

[87] MLAW 13.

through a "continuous activation of man images" - is also male.[88]

With a male protagonist in the garb of Ogun presiding at the centre of his world stage, it is to be expected that Soyinka's characterisations of humanity and of human bonds - whether national, African or communal - will display a similar bias. One could go so far as to say that in Soyinka's terms human solidarity is always in the first instance that of gender - human community means brotherhood. The concept is closely related to the nationalist image of cultural redeemers as male. Indeed, in his first novel, The Interpreters (1965), the male friends who through their various qualities of ambition, hubris and brilliance dominate the action, form a coterie emblematic of Nigeria's first independence elite. Again, the assumption that cohesive social groups will tend to be fraternal is inserted quite as a matter of course in Soyinka's evocation of a moving moment from his time in detention. When the prison inmates break out into song, Soyinka speaks of a "brotherhood sacrament of blood and guilt

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88 "The Fourth Stage," ADO 24. The religion taught in Soyinka's parental home also might have encouraged the gender-bias of his myth-reading. One might compare Soyinka's view to that of E. Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religion: A Definition (London: SCM Press, 1973). Idowu admits that by characterising the supreme Yoruba god as male, he "rejected offhand the fact of the persistent [rival] tradition that [the god] was a female" (101).

and pain" which bound the listeners and performers "in one common humanity."[89]

For Soyinka, as for the early African nationalists, cultural or aesthetic self-retrieval is undertaken by a brotherhood of artists. In the essay, "Climates of Art," he speaks of post-colonial artists as ideally "secured in a creative fraternity that [fills] the vacuum of ruptured individual identities."[90] Yet, not only is the labour of artistic reconstruction allotted exclusively to men, but, in addition, art and artistic endeavour, as with the modernism characterised earlier, is represented as an assertion of male potency. To follow through the comparison with modernism, it would appear that Soyinka, too, has something to feel defensive about: "Women's Lib.," he has observed, "is inimical to tragedies of impotence or infertility."[91] In an unambiguous refusal of a female contribution to art, Soyinka describes the dramatic artist, the Ogun figure, as encapsulating male and female creative principles: he is "illusionist, conjurer, agent of release and control, a medium of primordial chaos, yet midwife of beginnings."[92] In another essay the poet or artist is identified at once with universal

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89 The Man Died 111.

90 "Climates of Art," ADO 250.

91 MLAW 47.

92 "Between Self and System," ADO 68.

matter, "the womb of the re-creative essence," and with the symbol of penetrating perception, "the fragmenting and recombining eye."[93] This imagery recalls the parthenogenic logic of artistic invention in Black Orpheus: the male artist is granted control over the entire cycle of creation, fruition and re-creation. Woman is effectively excluded from being and from art.

It now remains to be seen whether the assertions made on the basis of Soyinka's critical writings are borne out in his creative work. How do his masculinist biases translate into his plays? The contention is that, far from being gratuitous, or due simply to a monolithic patriarchy (though the latter should not be disregarded), Soyinka's gendered ideas are closely related to the early post-independence imagery of nationalist self-retrieval. What this implies is that, with respect to gender, Soyinka's views may be as reductive as those of the nationalists he frequently criticises. It has been seen that he deems the self-recovery of oppressed peoples to be extremely important. He has urged that African artists honour the "replete" cultural reality of their continent. Yet, influenced at least in part by the nationalist trends that have shaped modern African society and also, putatively, by ideological trends in the colonial academy, Soyinka has

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93 "Aesthetic Illusions," ADO 103. It is also noteworthy that in his references to the work of individual artists, Soyinka never includes a woman writer.

tended to interpret self-retrieval and aesthetic practice in a restricted way, as having reference primarily to men.[94] In the study of the two plays Kongi's Harvest and A Dance of the Forests which follows, therefore, attention will be directed not simply at Soyinka's rendition, at times indirect, of national themes, but also, specifically, at his presentation of the artist figure, the Ogun protégé and prototype, who acts to restore people to their history.

3.1 Kongi's Harvest

Kongi's Harvest (first performed 1965; published 1967) represents with Death and the King's Horseman (1975) what is probably Soyinka's grimmest dramatisation of the brutal machinations within a single authoritarian regime.[95] The "Ismaism" of the potentate Kongi, though primarily a state-orchestrated personality cult, operates as a kind of tyrannical nationalism in the style of Africa's post-independence dictatorships. The nation is called Ismaland; Ismaism represents the single acceptable ideology of Kongi's state. The action of the play involves Kongi's attempt to appropriate for himself the rituals of authority of the past,

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[94] It is in keeping with this interpretation that, according to Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, review of Aké, ALT 14 (1986): 142-146, in Aké Soyinka presents the "highly organised" anti-taxation Women's Movement of 1947-1952 as "an unplanned, impulsive, gut reaction" to the colonial administration.

[95] Collected Plays 2 59-141.

and so, as is the way also with nationalisms, to secure a powerful language of political legitimation. What is also significant, illustrating a feature of state systems which has by now become familiar, Kongi's statesmen form a fraternity of elders, called the Reformed Aweri Fraternity, a "conclave of modern patriarchs" (KH 71). Though his understanding of power does not always exhibit the same awareness of gender, Soyinka shows that authoritarian politics bear a fatherly face.

The drama of Kongi's Harvest is occasioned by the courageous though doomed attempt by the hero, Daodu, to free the nation of Kongi's rule. The play is left open-ended: at the final conclusion the audience witnesses an ominous reassertion of the dictator's power; it is not known for certain whether Daodu and his helper Segi have escaped hanging. For Soyinka, however, the act of purgation - of submitting to a ritual of voiding evil without immediate positive results - can in itself be meaningful. The saviour figure is as, in The Strong Breed (1964),[96] a "carrier," and therefore also resembles Ogun. He helps to expose and to relieve a society's sin or hurt. Like Ogun, he thus elects to brave the chthonic divide between states of being, between life and death.

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[96] Collected Plays 1 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 113-146.

But Daodu's role goes beyond the emblematic one of "[erecting] a pulpit" against the tyrant, or serving as symbolic "antithesis to [the] Messiah of Pain" (KH 99). He also represents the possibility of reconciling the past with the present, of legitimating modern political forms and institutions, such as those which Kongi dominates, by honouring and reinstituting older rites of responsible rule. Kongi, too, would want to forge links with the past, but pursues his ends violently, by coercive and disrespectful usurpation. During the Harvest Ceremony scene which forms the focal point of the play, he attempts to force the old and dignified Oba Danlola to cede him his spiritual office. Daodu, by contrast, in the words of Segi, wants to "[p]reach life" (KH 99); to restore people to themselves and to their history, he seeks a harmonious alliance with the past.

Highly influential in promoting Daodu's campaign for regeneration is Segi, a prominent representative of the dangerous group of leading-ladies who dominate Soyinka's work.[97] Like Iriyise of Season of Anomy (1973) and Simi of The Interpreters, Segi represents potent sexual desire made flesh; she is mysterious, inscrutable, baleful, a "right cannibal of the female species":

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[97] On Soyinka's stereotypical representation of women characters, see Carole Boyce Davies, "Maidens, Mistresses and Matrons: Feminine Images in Selected Soyinka works," Ngambika 75-88.

She has left victims
On her path like sugar cane pulp
Squeezed dry (KH 104).

For Soyinka, the sexual force of woman transcends the boundaries of the individual personality. Unless channelled and directed, it would seem, the carnal power of woman will be not only indiscriminate in its effects, acting either for good or ill, but also emasculating, as it is in the work of male modernists like Lawrence and Eliot (KH 104). Soyinka's important female figures, when they act alone, are by and large whores, temptresses, courtesans, "[witches] of the nightclubs" (113), voracious and wayward Cleopatras,[98] rather than life-promoting figures: Segi has been the lover of Kongi. In his portrayal of women, then, Soyinka's immediate allegiance is to popular/patriarchal rather than to national stereotypes.[99]

Unsurprisingly, while her father is the great Oba who is finally offered as Kongi's harvest sacrifice, Segi herself, in contrast, wields power vicariously, and certainly does not have spiritual authority. In their joint efforts to depose

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[98] See "Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist," ADO 204-220, especially 211.

[99] Sylvia Bryan, "Images of Woman in Wole Soyinka's Work," ALT 15 (1987): 119-130, discusses the stereotype of siren in Soyinka in the context of Yoruba culture. It is also the case that Soyinka's women characters show parallels with the prostitute and cash madam figures of the urban, popular work of such Nigerian writers as Cyprian Ekwensi, Festus Iyayi, and Chukwuemeka Ike.

Kongi, Segi submits to Daodu her advice, energy, and inspiration. Daodu's stature as opponent to Kongi is built and sustained through what she has to offer. After instructing him to preach life and generally directing his actions, Segi, together with her women helpers, a corps of rehabilitated prostitutes (KH 87), ceremoniously bows to Daodu, draping the robe of authority upon his shoulders (KH 98-99). She also seals her act of homage by promising Daodu the rich soil of her body - "I am opened tonight," she says, "I am soil from the final rains" (KH 98). She offers to be the seedbed of his "swollen...prize yam"[100]. As yam, however, it is he who will determine the ultimate success of the harvest. This imagery of regeneration not only recalls Soyinka's characterisation of artistic creativity in the personality of Ogun, but also, more particularly, shows affinities with the androcentric evocations of new life in the last chapters of A Man Died and in the poetry collection A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972).[101] Here Soyinka makes reference to a male chrysalis, the source of the new life, as being sheltered in a womb-like crypt (echoes again of "womb-energies").

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[100] Though the culture is different, in Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1981), yam is said to be a traditionally male crop.

[101] See A Shuttle in the Crypt (London: Collings, 1986) 47-57.

Segi thus promises to ensure with her body, her femaleness, the successful outcome of Daodu's harvest ritual - which is also the plot against Kongi - and at the same time to guarantee his malehood. Neither in the syntactical structure nor in the symbolism of the relevant scenes are these two levels of meaning distinguished. It is clear that Daodu requires and also realises his masculinity in standing up to Kongi. Ogun-like, his virility is his creativity and his strength. As against this, the redemptive change in Segi is signalled by the familiar earth-woman trope. By collaborating with Daodu - literally, fostering his plans, becoming his fructifying earth - she has shed her image as femme fatale and become a force for good, "[m]ilk of all mothers" (KH 87). She has stepped into the trope of national allegiance and, appropriately, the agent of her transformation is male. Ofeyi's conception of Iriyise in Season of Anomy expresses this idea in starker terms:

> Vision is eternally of man's own creating. The woman's acceptance, her collaboration in man's vision of life results time and time again in...periodic embodiments of earth and ideal.[102]

When woman collaborates in man's vision of life, she is earth and ideal, purged of her innate negativity; but it remains the man, whether Kongi, the Oba or Daodu, who, as sanctifying presence, takes charge of the (cultural) harvest

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102 Season of Anomy (London: Collings, 1980) 82. I am indebted to Florence Stratton for this reference.

and its fruits. Again, his role is metonymic, in the terms in which this was earlier defined. Therefore, if the representation of the female is 'classically' patriarchal, Soyinka's image of the male artist is closer to gendered conventions in nationalist imagery. Filled with mounting passion (KH 99), as the "bridegroom" (KH 123) of the New Yam Festival (shades here of Udomo, of Cathleen Ni Houlihan's bridegroom, of Negritude), Daodu has the power to make new meanings, eject old rulers and erect different pulpits. Though his schemes fail, the implication is that a future harvest led by a man like Daodu would regenerate the nation (or the people). If the play looks forward to a new ideology of the state - one that is more coherent and non-tyrannical - there is no question as to its gender basis. For Soyinka, the composer of a new politics, or the director of self-retrieval, is, like the composer of poems, gifted, domineering, endowed with visionary power, and so also male. In contrast once again, it is Segi who, recalling Salome, brings to Kongi's abortive ceremony the perverted harvest offering of her father's head. As server in Daodu's purgation rituals, Segi gives expression to both sides of her femaleness: through him, she has been restored as natural woman of the earth, yet she remains associated with destruction.

3.2 A Dance of the Forests

The same principle is manifested in the earlier, more symbolic A Dance of the Forests (1960).[103] Staged as part of Nigeria's Independence Celebrations,[104] this play presents a "Feast of the Human Community," which brings together daemons of the forest with the various estates of being - living, dead, and unborn. The action is thus directly concerned with the interpenetration of the past with the present, and, as a corollary to this theme, with the immense effort of will required if humanity is to reconcile itself to the burden of its own history. Marshalling the witnesses of history to the arena of the historic present, the play was appropriate for the first occasion of its performance: while staging a celebratory feast, it also seeks to warn against the folly of excessive optimism. As is characteristic in Soyinka, the ideal social state is finally seen to exist only in the province of the visionary. An extremely complicated, multi-levelled play, the ambitious scope and imaginative adroitness of A Dance of the Forests are, for one who admires Ogun, suitably Promethean. For the purposes of the present study, however, analysis will have to be confined to the iconography

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103 Collected Plays 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 1-77.

104 "Who's afraid of Elesin Oba?" ADO 112.

of the male and female characters and their representation of the "continuity of human nature" over time.[105]

Of the three main human protagonists in A Dance of the Forests, the only woman is Rola: a courtesan to the feudal ruler Mata Kharibu in her last life, in the present, like Segi, she is a prostitute. Though another member of the human threesome, the Council Orator and erstwhile Historian, Adenebi, is also characterised as self-interested and mean-spirited, Rola is more calculating in her selfishness and deliberately cruel in her actions (DF 17, 24). Both in this life and in the last she rejects the promptings of her human nature - she refuses traditional family ties (DF 9) and the claims of love (DF 24). If Adenebi, in his indecisiveness and self-centredness may be said to represent an unproductive and therefore relatively passive human state, then Rola, by contrast, is human malignity in active form. As the former Madame Tortoise, she ordered men to be emasculated and destroyed.

Completing the triad of chief human characters is Demoke, the carver, whose patron deity is, predictably, Ogun. As is also appropriate in a follower of Ogun, Demoke has had to destroy in order to create: in fulfilling his commission to carve a totem for the Festival, he murdered his apprentice,

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105 Jones 57.

Oremole, in a fit of jealousy. Immediately after "[plucking]" Oremole down, Demoke's creative energies are liberated: he carves as a man set free (DF 26-27). However, despite the release he achieves, when prompted by the spirit or daemon, Forest Head, it is Demoke alone of the three human protagonists who is willing to confess his crime, confront his history and so achieve expiation (DF 10, 20, 26). In a play that presents in synchronic form the ceaseless, Nietzschean-type repetition of the ages, this coming to terms with the past is important. Within the historical cycles, redemption can come only through accepting rather than refusing the true course of history, through acknowledgement of sin, rather than liberation from it.

The self-delusions of the living are dramatised in their responses to the advent of the dead. Two representatives of the dead, a couple, who have been called up to celebrate the Festival of Reunion, are ostracised because they threaten rather than reinforce the society's view of itself (DF 28-31). They remind the living of that which is ignoble and corporeal in their nature. Demoke, on the other hand, acknowledges the presence of the dead, and their presentness, and realises that they represent past wrongs come round again. Appropriately, then, it is given to Demoke to struggle on the side of Ogun for the symbolic Half-Child at the end of the play. Reminiscent of Tutuola's stories of the Half-Bodied Baby in

The Palm-Wine Drinkard,[106] the Half-Child in this play signifies the spirit in Yoruba lore who refuses to live a full life-span. It represents not only unfulfilled potential, but a life-denying and unconfessed burden of guilt or evil, as also an inability to be.[107] The Half-Child is carried by the Dead Woman. Thus saddled with an abortive offering at the Festival, woman is again identified as antagonistic to life and fulfilment. Significantly, the Dead Woman is said to have a "branded womb" (DF 65) and a "branded navel" (DF 70): she bears the guilt of the child's truncated life because she committed suicide while pregnant. She is therefore not in a position - and not of the right gender - to liberate the frustrated potential which the Half-Child symbolises.

Protected and inspired by Ogun, Demoke the carver is equipped for the task of redemption. Though he finally returns the child to the Dead Woman, its mother, it remains significant that, as the master-craftsman of an unmistakably phallic totem (representing both male power and, in its various motifs, history), Demoke has held the future in his hands. In contrast, the trial ceremony which enables him to come into his own as a force for regeneration, does nothing more than "[chasten]" Rola (DF 73). In a play intended as a

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106 Amos Tutuola, The Palm-Wine Drinkard (London: Faber, 1952).

107 Jones 70.

warning against the deceptions of unrealistic expectation, Demoke's action alone represents hope. Once again in Soyinka, male artists, Ogun-avatars, are the historic protagonists who will effect fulfilment. As epigraph to Soyinka's conception of artists' leadership position and of the mystic bonds of perception and brotherhood which link this elite, one might well quote - albeit slightly out of context - the words of the Warrior at the court of Mata Kharibu. Resisting the machinations of Madame Tortoise, he declares:

> there is no leader who will not feel a stronger tie of blood with soldiers than with a stranger he took to wife. My duty is to my men (DF 49).

If early African nationalism required that true freedom-loving writers and artists be nationalist, Soyinka has reversed the terms of the equation: for him, those who seek self-retrieval for their people should best be artists.[108] In the reversed mode, however, the gender co-efficients of the equation remain firmly embedded. Whether as Ogun-hero, or as warrior-artist, we are in Soyinka's work again confronted with the metonymic figure of man as actor of history, the author of his people's future.

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[108] The figures of the artists, Sekoni and Kola, dominate The Interpreters.

CHAPTER FOUR

The conversation that never ends: Responses from African women writers

...they knew that silence was golden and speech silvern, for, as one of them had explained...their women perforated their lips so that when annoyed they could lock up their mouths and check their loquacity by inserting a piece of stick through the holes.[1]

When the baby was five days old, Ajanupu told her sister that it was time to put alligator pepper in her mouth so that her tongue will be free. If this was not done, Ajanupu said, the baby might be deaf and dumb. So early the next morning, some alligator pepper was brought and Ajanupu chewed it very well and then put it under the tongue of the baby. The baby yelled and yelled. She was quickly breast-fed, and she stopped crying.

"Ajanupu, my daughter will talk like you. I am afraid she will be very talkative." Efuru's mother-in-law teased her sister.

"That is all right. Aren't you lucky that I am near to put alligator pepper in her mouth. Who wants to be quiet these days. Don't you know that if you don't lick your mouth the harmattan will lick it for you. You stay there and talk of being quiet these days."[2]

If nationalism does not explicitly recognise women as nationals, then the achievement of nationhood in Africa - as elsewhere - far from being a glad occasion, still presents women with a number of ontological puzzles. How are they to

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[1] Onuora Nzekwu, Blade Among the Boys (London: Heinemann, 1972) 11.

[2] Flora Nwapa, Efuru (London: Heinemann, 1987) 33.

approach the concept and experience of nationhood when that concept and experience are consistently cast in a gendered shape? How, too, do they relate to the superwoman image of their brothers' mother? Where are they to situate themselves in the 'motherland' if that land is masterfully occupied and governed by fathers and sons? How, in straightforward terms, are they to legitimate themselves when existing legitimating traditions admit them as stereotypes, not as full citizens?

Women find that the territory of identity politics bristles with the stakes set by men. This is so whether they seek definition or representation as self-determining subjects, as citizens of a new nation or, more specifically, as women writers. The previous chapters have shown that the nationalist ethos of selving - of recovering or healing the battered ego of the colonised - lays emphasis on the male personality. So for women such selving can confirm only a lack of self, their difference from national wholeness. Where, in nationalist rhetoric, as in the official discourse and history of the nation-state, masculine identity is normative, and where the female is addressed in the main as idealised bearer of nationalist sons, woman as such, in herself, can have no recognised place. In effect, the weighty presences of National Mothers disguise the actual absences of women in national life.

What this means is that a woman seeking to claim a place in any field of national activity faces multiple perils of self-contradiction. Literature here offers a representative case. It has been suggested that for African nationalists, especially in the immediately pre- and post-independence periods, writing formed an important ground of national myth-making and dreaming. For a writer to be nationalist was to be that much more a worthy writer, as well as that much more a loyal nationalist. It was also, by implication, to be that much more male. The circle of mutually reinforcing identities shut - and still shuts - women out.

A woman might choose to crack this centripetal ring of identity by repossessing African matriarchal myths and so capturing one of the texts of nationalism from its male authors. For some women, the reclaimed and embellished myth of an age-old, long-abused Mother holds out much promise of communion and liberation. This is the myth which Alice Walker, for example, has sought to inscribe into the "500, 000 years" of human history covered by The Temple of My Familiar.[3] In a recent poem, the South African, Gcina Mhlope, too, expresses her loyalty to this mythical maternal entity,

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[3] See again Walker, The Temple of my Familiar 262, 264. In a discussion of images of motherhood in Walker and Buchi Emecheta, the Afro-American woman critic, Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987) 247, wedges her belief in self-determination deep into a concept of a central African motherhood.

speaking of the "Women of my country" as "Mother Africa's loved daughters."[4] Yet how is a reworked myth of the Mother to be differentiated from those which continue to shore up a system of gendered national authority? Without a concerted recasting or revision of such apparently redemptive symbols, women might find themselves, even if unintentionally, continuing to subscribe to the lineaments of patriarchal desire, to find themselves enclosed within an old stereotyped discourse. To compound these difficulties, the idealisation and possible fetishisation of single mother figures bears uncanny resemblance to the monologic or one-dimensional aspects of male-centred nationalism and its tropes. This implies that the reinscription of a unitary icon may threaten the women's objective of seeking and affirming a distinctive belief-system and mode of being.

If women would choose to rewrite the family dramas that have typified nationalist histories, similar problems would apply. The difficulty is to represent the neglected figures of daughters in ways that are decisive and memorable but which

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[4] Gcina Mhlope, "We are at War," LIP from South African Women, eds. Susan Brown et al (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983): 159-160. I am indebted to Cherry Clayton for this example. Other instances of the canonisation of mother images by women were quoted in the Introduction. That African women have generally not been as actively involved in this process as black women elsewhere may have to do with such factors as the political expediency of nationalism on the Continent, relatively weaker matriarchal traditions in certain areas, a greater burden of poverty, and illiteracy.

at the same time avoid those tendencies to excessive adulation and consequent reification which bedeviled the portrayal of women in earlier literature and histories. To what extent does the canonisation of dominant icons not bloc the richness of the ordinary and the various in women's lives? Do histories of Major Events not disregard women's self-representation? It may be neither feasible nor very useful for women simply to remake existing nationalist epics and tropes. Given that men have monopolised the field of nationalist identity and self-image, women may have to evolve other strategies and stories of selving: perhaps less unitary, perhaps more dispersed and multifarious, perhaps simply more alive to the contradictions involved in the process of self-making. By representing themselves, in text or otherwise, by unsettling one-dimensional (or male-focussed) narratives, and counterposing gender morphologies, women begin to confront the patriarchal provenance of nationalist myths, icons and histories. The aim of this chapter, then, will be to consider what women, in this case in particular women writers, have suggested by way of such recoding and redress - or what Frederic Jameson, recalling Bakhtin, has referred to as the "restoration of an essentially dialogical...horizon."[5]

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[5] Jameson, The Political Unconscious 87. Jameson speaks of rewriting the individual text in terms of "antagonistic dialogue" (85-88).

To append a qualification to the discussion, however, it should be stated that resistance to gender-biases in nationalism, in literature and elsewhere, need not imply unitary or discrete action - need not, in other words, be pitted against nationalist formations per se. As has been seen, nationalism historically developed out of earlier and contingent patriarchal structures. With a male presence being prominent at all social levels, it is then at least theoretically conceivable that a broad-based refusal of gender-domination will challenge - if not necessarily eliminate - the gender-specifics of nationalism also. Indeed, certain manifestations of male-control in nationalist structures (most obviously the general prominence of men and under-representation of women) might be addressed simply as such, as instances of gender discrimination, rather than as a complicated expression of the gender domination built into nationalist politics or ideology. Yet because of the particular forms that male-rule has taken in nationalism - in the interpretation of tradition and history, for example, or in the reification of motherhood - it remains true that certain types of opposition to its gender-biases will be more effective than others. Particularly effective should be the strategies which target precisely those gendered forms most characteristic of, though not necessarily exclusive to, nationalism - again, the grand narrative of male heroes, the idealisation of a mother earth, the fetishised mother. This

should not be read as implying, however, that the attempt to reshape, say, mother symbols, should be equated with their outright suppression. It remains the case that the experience of motherhood is important in the construction of women's - and men's - identity (as will be seen in the section on Mariama Bâ).

As medium of self-making, rich with a potential variety of readings, writing presents itself as a particularly fruitful area of resistance to power and to singleness. If African literature has in the past constituted a nationalist and fraternal preserve, then, by writing, women are able directly to confront this male prerogative, to break open the impacted identity code. In writing, women have the potential to articulate their own reality and so challenge received notions of national character or experience. But writing is also more than this. To write is not only to speak for one's place in the world. It is also to make one's own place or narrative, to tell the story of oneself, to create an identity. It is also therefore to co-opt a typically nationalist strategy for oneself. As Simon Gikandi has put it:

> To write is to claim a text of one's own; textuality is an instrument of territorial possession; because the other confers on us an identity that alienates us from ourselves,

> narrative is crucial to the discovery of our selfhood.[6]

To this idea of self-articulation through narrative may be connected the Kristevan notion of excess and disruption in writing. Writing, as Kristeva observes, speaking of Barthes's criticism, is "transformative," operating through the displacement of what is already signified.[7] Every moment in the writing of the Other represents a liberation from the already written, the previously inscribed, the normative. Also indebted to Bakhtin, but relating her concepts to women's expression in particular, Kristeva maintains that language - the symbolic order, syntactic completion - is threatened by the irruption of the heterogeneous, the disorderly, that which lies outside language though can only finally be conceived of within it (the semiotic).[8] Such irruption, which for Kristeva constitutes the poetic in language, comes about, amongst other methods, through a process aptly demonstrated by certain of the writers considered below, namely, that of "transposition," the shift between literary or linguistic media that creates

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[6] Simon Gikandi, conference paper, "The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing," ACLALS Conference, Canterbury, 24-31 August 1989: 1-20. James, In Their Own Voices 44, has spoken of writing as "keeping track of one's own being."

[7] Julia Kristeva, "How does one speak to literature?" Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora et al (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) 92-123. As Kristeva might also point out, there is a rapture of liberation in this rupture of law.

[8] See Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," The Kristeva Reader 89-136.

possibilities for polysemy (the transfer "from a carnival scene" or village square "to a written text, for instance" or the shift between texts).[9] This is a process inimical to dogma. Through their writing, through claiming a text and a narrative territory, and also through displacing old texts, women impact their presence upon a nationalist narrative that has excluded them as negativity - as corporeal, unclean and insignificant.

Drawing on the insights offered by Gikandi and Kristeva, one can see the possibilities for the subversion and/or transformation of a patriarchal nationalist text as operating in two main ways in women's writing: the 'textual' and the (very broadly) 'temporal/territorial'. The first, which might also be called linguistic, would occur through the medium of the text, in the substance of writing, and would involve irrupting into the language of official nationalist discourse and literature what might be called a women's vocality. With nationhood as bound up as it is in textuality, in 'definitive' histories and official languages and mythologies, to transpose and mutate, or to compose a substantially different kind of text, using vernacular, non-literary and phatic forms, is already to interrogate the normative experience of nationhood. In effect, simply by speaking out in writing, women intrude upon the nationalist scene with their voice and presence. By

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[9] Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language" 111.

articulating a position outside of that occupied by male nationalist writers, the exclusions which operate in a nationalist politics begin to be uncovered.

National identity rests on received and idealised images of national history and also of topography, so the second method of contestation is also important. This would involve what is in effect a defiance of the official subjects of the nationalist text - and implicitly of the concept of the nation as sole subject of history. Where women tell of their own experience, they map their own geography, scry their own history, and so, necessarily, interrupt and contest official nationalist representations of social space and of the past.[10] They implicitly challenge both the nation's claim to a determinate, distinct (perhaps 'undisputed') territory and its reclamation of history. At the same time they also oust the icons of heroes and mothers from their dominant positions as mascots and symbols of the typically national experience. These two methods, obviously closely allied, bear resemblance to techniques of literary subversion in which women writers have long been engaged. Yet because African literary

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[10] As Kristeva, "Women's Time," The Kristeva Reader 187-213, points out, the order of verbal communication, conventionally linear and consecutive, has been used by fatherly authority to tell its single-stranded history (of the nation, for example). Therefore, where women bring in their own memories and images of their lives, they effectively break open this order. Kristeva's confident hope, expressed in this essay, that the age of nationalism has ended should of course be questioned.

narratives, in particular those of the Fifties and the Sixties, depend so heavily on nationalist discourse, and so also on gendered interpretations of social reality, techniques involving "transgressive" writing and a shift in symbolic systems, have particular relevance here.

To demonstrate how such techniques work in practice, the work of two Nigerian women writers, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, will first be examined. For reasons suggested earlier, Nigeria has again been chosen as main area of interest, though in this case the need to provide a counterpoint to the discussion of Soyinka was a determining factor. Focus will be in particular on Nwapa's two early novels, partly because of their historical context and importance and partly because of their narrative method.[11] Nwapa's early writing can be interpreted in such a way as to show both techniques of contestation in operation: that of textual subversion through the introduction of a women's vocality, and that of the modification of history and of subject positions in history. In contrast, Buchi Emecheta, effects an occupation of androcentric history by recoding, in the form of a personal fantasy of a woman fighter, the conception of Nigerian national identity. In the latter part

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[11] Published during the first decade of Nigerian independence, a time featuring robust and cocksure if also embattled, nationalisms, the novels represent the first narrative appearance from a woman on the broader African literary stage.

of the chapter, in order to enlarge upon the potential and significance of these techniques, attention will turn to the work of two other African women writers, Mariama Bâ and Bessie Head.

1. Flora Nwapa

Like Elechi Amadi or Nkem Nwankwo, her male counterparts of the first post-independence decade, Flora Nwapa has written 'after Achebe', both chronologically and in terms of literary influence. Like Amadi's, like Achebe's, Nwapa's narratives re-member and recreate the Igbo village past. Period generalisations, however, tend to obscure the significant differences that exist between Nwapa and her male cohorts. If nothing else, Nwapa's gender focus has demarcated an area of communal life that was elsewhere, in texts by male writers, forgotten, elided, or ignored. In both Efuru (1966) and Idu (1970), Nwapa's interest is in the routines and rituals of everyday life specifically within women's compounds.[12] Women press into Nwapa's narrative as speakers, decision-makers, brokers of opinion and market prices and the unofficial jurors of their communities. But Nwapa's specific intervention as a writer goes beyond her interest in female subjects. What also distinguishes her writing from other work in the Igbo school are the ways in which she has used language to enable and to

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[12] Flora Nwapa, Efuru, and Idu (London: Heinemann, 1987).

empower her representation, creating the effect of a women's verbal presence within her text.[13]

On two counts, therefore, Nwapa's early texts can be rated as transformative. Though she works chiefly on what was called the textual or linguistic level, her gendered angle on the Igbo past implicitly challenges the normative authority and confident subject position of male-authored historical narratives.[14] Nwapa chooses to engage neither with the manly adventures and public displays of patriarchal authority described by male writers from her community nor with the narrative conventions of their accounts. Instead she

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[13] See Bernth Lindfors, "Introduction," Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe 5-6, for further comment on the "School of Achebe." Nnolim, "Trends in the Nigerian Novel," Literature and National Consciousness 56, has referred to Nwapa as one of "the sons of Achebe."

[14] A word here on history. The emergence of Nwapa's 'choric' texts was enabled by the critical conjuncture in the Nigerian colonial period between very rudimentary market formations - such as in publishing - the colonial system of education and the persistence of pre-capitalist collective groupings. In later writings where Nwapa moves further towards the atomised perspective of the urban dweller and loses touch with rural orality, this shift gives expression to the post-independence industrialisation and urbanisation of Nigeria. Nwapa's colloquial and oral forms might then be classified less as the chosen style of a woman writer, than as the narrative of a rather different social formation. The question which then arises, however, is, why male writers do not evince the same kind of oral style in their novels? Is this again because of hierarchies of gender preference in education and economic life? For his suggestive comments on style as "a middle-class phenomenon," see Frederic Jameson, "Criticism in History," Situations of Theory, vol. 1 of The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986 (London: Routledge, 1989) 121-123.

concentrates, and at length, on what was incidental or simply contextual to male action - domestic affairs, politics of intimacy - dramatising or foregrounding this subject matter by evoking the dilatory phatic vocality of women's everyday existence.

Nwapa's narrative style, in particular her reliance on conversational techniques, has been variously dismissed as "sociological," "claustrophobic" and limited.[15] One might equally argue, however, that the apparent lack of conventional novelistic complexity in Efuru and Idu, far from being a deficiency, rather clears the space for the elaboration of another kind of narrative entirely: a highly-verbalised women's collective biography, "transsubjective, anonymous" and transgressive.[16] This narrative method bears comparison with

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[15] These epithets are a distillation of opinion articulated or recorded in James Booth, Writers and Politics in Nigeria (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981) 80-81; Eustace Palmer, review, "Elechi Amadi, The Concubine and Flora Nwapa, Efuru," ALT 1 (1969): 56-58; Adeola A. James, review, "Idu, Flora Nwapa," ALT 5 (1971): 150-153; Kirsten Holst Petersen, "Unpopular Opinions: Some African Woman Writers," A Double Colonization 112-113; Oladele Taiwo, Female Novelists of Modern Africa (London: Macmillan, 1984) 47.

[16] See Kristeva, Desire in Language 104-106. Nwapa's facility in creating the effect of conversation in text has been noted by other critics, including Lloyd Brown, Women Writers in Black Africa (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981) 122-157, and, although he is somewhat patronising, Ernest N. Emenyonu, "Who does Flora Nwapa write for?" ALT 7 (1975): 28-33. Nwapa has herself "traced the genesis of her first novel...to conversations overheard in her mother's sewing shop." Jane Bryce, seminar paper, "Inventing Autobiography: Some Examples from Fiction and Journalism by Nigerian Women Writers," ICS, London, 15 January 1990: 5.

Zora Neale Hurston's recreation of porchside comment and of gossip on the road.[17] It is a style which also fits, though the terms are perhaps unnecessarily pejorative, Arlette Chemain's definition of a women's writing of compromise rather than defiance; or of what she has called "l'enregistrement passif du quotidien" in Francophone African women's writing.[18]

The precise contribution represented by Nwapa's writing can perhaps be more clearly demonstrated when set in contrast, on the one hand, with a historical narrative by Elechi Amadi and, on the other, with Ifi Amadiume's anthropological account of her Igbo community. In his novel The Great Ponds (1969), Elechi Amadi, one of the writers said like Nwapa to be influenced by Achebe, has depicted Igbo communities as being controlled by the forces of war, rumour, and disease.[19] Over war and rumour, it soon becomes clear, men hold undisputed sway; of disease, the gods decide, but they too - as in Soyinka - are all male.[20] Quite predictably, the story is

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17 Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (London: Virago, 1987).

18 Arlette Chemain, paper, "Emergence d'une Littérature Feminine de Langue Francaise en Afrique Sub-Saharienne," Conference on Francophone African Literature, Institut Francais, London, 26-27 November 1988: xxi.

19 Elechi Amadi, The Great Ponds (London: Heinemann, 1982).

20 The deity of earth and fertility who in Achebe's Things Fall Apart is female, is male in Amadi's pantheon. Achebe is not to be exonerated on this score, however, for as

told from the point of view of men in the community, and, as in Achebe's Things Fall Apart, focusses on the male trials of strength and endurance exacted during times of crisis. Again as with Achebe, The Great Ponds is not uncritical of the social values which have may have contributed to and exacerbate crisis. The conflict and hardships suffered by the community call into question the ethical soundness of the male leaders' counsel and policies of governance. Yet, unlike in Achebe, no alternative locus of value is suggested which might form the rallying point of a new order: the male characters represent different types and gradations of manliness, but their actual position of authority remains secure. There is no equivalent to the 'feminine' Nwoye. The women characters form a marginal and passive group: they are predicated of male subjects; are desired, taken in marriage, captured as booty in male wars, and are heard speaking when spoken to. From the point of view of the male hut in the compound, the women are present but apart, self-respecting and respected insofar as they fulfill their maternal function, otherwise ignored.

Superficially this arrangement would seem hardly to differ from conventional gender divisions of power and cultural space. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it would appear that in Amadi the meanings attached to the gender

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Amadiume, Male Daughters, Female Husbands 121, points out, he "masculinises" the water goddess.

separation are such that to speak of strict dichotomy and thus to imply some sort of conventional binary relationship is inaccurate. The physical distance of the gender groups from each other, their extreme social and political non-equivalence coupled with the figuration of all significant value as masculine, suggests that one would want to speak more correctly of radically distinct gender categories, which, rather than being related, even if antagonistically or unequally, are independently reproduced and regulated. It is a view of society thus split by gender that allows Amadi in The Great Ponds to represent the male side of Igbo life as though it were not only normative and authoritative but entire.

Yet, the writer's individual bias aside, it does not follow that this sort of exclusivity is necessarily the sign of a lack of power or self-determination on the part of women. It may just as well be the case that the distance between genders signifies and allows an autonomy for women: the women possess jurisdiction and authority over an area of social life which though separate is coherent, cohesive and similarly preoccupied with its own concerns. Contrary to appearances, the representations of writers such as Amadi and Achebe, rather than defining the whole compass of the Igbo world, describe only one section of it. That another independent sphere of social existence exists is intimated only once, and

then very briefly, in the Amadi text. It does however, represent a significant break in the narrative when, in confrontational tones reminiscent of some of Nwapa's speakers, a senior wife, though nameless, comments on the folly of the protracted war and its goals:

> Why can't men take advice?....They think they are wise but they are as foolish as a baby in arms. Look at all the suffering of the past month. What good will that pond [the site of contention] do us? (GP 72)[21]

Ifi Amadiume offers a corroborative perspective on the self-reliance of Igbo women, and on one of the chief conditions of that self-reliance, what might be called the mutual exclusivity of gender groups. In her study Male Daughters, Female Husbands, she shows that women obtain a great deal of power in Igbo - and specifically Nnobi - society from the separation of gender from sex roles. Amadiume does not always deal satisfactorily with the continuing predominance of de facto patriarchal authority in the community - and the consequent status commanded by the roles of son and husband.[22] Yet she does present evidence not

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[21] Carole Boyce Davies, "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers," Ngambika 241-256, also finds in the Chielo-Ezinma episode in Things Fall Apart the traces of a "suppressed larger story."

[22] As her Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations also showed, Amadiume's thesis is that Nnobi - and Igbo - society, originally matriarchal, was invaded by a patriarchal people (Male Daughters, Female Husbands 19, 109 - title abbreviated hereafter). It is clear, however, that in the present and near past, despite possibilities for women to switch roles,

simply for the existence of a clearly-demarcated women's sphere (which after all says relatively little), but also for the autonomy and self-coherence of women's lives within that sphere. She shows that in pre-colonial times political and economic roles, as well as compound space and village ground, were divided according to conventional sex dualities, with family units being matri-centric.[23] She goes on to argue, however, that these dualities were mediated by the cross-gender roles available to women. Women were thus granted a range of powers with the appeal to Idemili, the water goddess, as offering the highest sanction of their authority.

It is the autonomous and self-validating women's world delineated by Amadiume that Nwapa embodies in Efuru and Idu: Nwapa thus extends the boundaries of the African novel to include the women's side of the compound, a domain of village life which writers like Amadi have neglected for reasons not only of patriarchal uninterest but also perhaps (a fact not given sufficient attention) of a simple lack of knowledge, their remoteness from and possible fear of this unknown

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the male gender category is and has been predominant: femaleness carries a strong stigma (See, for example, Male Daughters 53, 84, 90, 111-114).

[23] For examples of women's rights and jurisdiction over their own affairs, see Amadiume, Male Daughters 38-40, 52, 59-62, 64-67, 86.

territory.[24] Nwapa refracts the women's presence into her text through creating the conceit of women representing themselves in voice. Dialogue dominates in both novels, especially in Idu, as numbers of partly curious, partly phatic and frequently anonymous women's voices meet, interact, and interpellate one another. This vocality, rambling and seemingly unstoppable, pulls against the confinements of the women's lives - their market rivalries, their anxieties about husbands, families, and children. Therefore, if, as Nwapa portrays it, though not always overtly, male values in the society remain normative,[25] women's talk can be interpreted not only as a way of life but as a mode of self-making. The impression of the fullness and autonomy of women's lives which Nwapa creates, must remain partially qualified by the women's acquiescence in patriarchal views and values. Yet, at the same time, in their discourse, even as they speak, not only do

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[24] An extreme and rather stereotyped reading of gender separation, though one that in this sense and in its suggestion of female communality, lends itself to the social picture being drawn, is offered by Freud in "The Taboo of Virginity," On Sexuality 265-283, especially 271. George Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation (London: Oxford UP, 1975) 38, 40-45, notes that "under sociological and psychological pressure" women develop their own "language-world". On women's space, see also, Shirley Ardener, ed., Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society (London: Croom Helm, 1978), Perceiving Women (London: Malaby, 1975), and Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

[25] We find Nwapa's central women characters submitting to the rule of callow husbands and to the circumcision knife and, in every case, taking responsibility for barrenness. See Efuru 53, 55, 63; Idu 91.

the village women share their woes and confirm female bonds, but they also transpose their lives into a medium over which they have prime purchase - they speak out their difference from the men who would presume to master them. The reader is made privy to the women representing and so recreating their lives in speech.[26] The narrative result is that most of the (non-discursive) action in Idu and Efuru happens off-stage and is more or less incidental to the 'spoken' text. What is important are the conversations in which women review and evaluate their experiences, or simply recount those experiences in order to make conversation.

The practice of Yoruba oriki performers offers an apt illustrative metaphor for this kind of verbal self-representation on the part of women. According to the literary anthropologist, Karin Barber, oriki, elaborately-wrought forms of public name-calling or apostrophe, are usually performed in Yoruba society to enhance or to confirm the reputations of, as she puts it, "Big Men."[27] Non-specialist oriki custodians or performers, however, are

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[26] In a way, too, by concentrating in their conversation on the problems of barrenness and the need to please husbands, they enact the restrictions they experience.

[27] Karin Barber, seminar, "Oriki: Dissent and Difference," St. Antony's College, Oxford, 3 November 1988. See also Karin Barber, "Interpreting Oriki as History and as Literature," Discourse and its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts, eds. Karin Barber and P.F. de Moraes Farias (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, 1989) 13-23.

generally women. Because the purposes of oriki are strictly adulatory and do not permit attack or open dissent, this gender division does not breed criticism. On the contrary, women singers apparently work hard to articulate the dominant patriarchal and political discourse to the word. Performing as they do in a public arena, they also do not want to draw attention to themselves as subversive elements or as schemers: the threat of witchcraft as applied to disobedient or dangerous women is very real.[28] All that they may do to impress their presence or opinion upon their art is to praise their own performance as they go along: their self-reference is largely metatextual.

But this is not all. Though expressing the public voice in a highly structured form of address, the women may also manipulate their medium in such a way as to make their mark upon it, to insert themselves within it. They use to their advantage the fragmentary or disjunctive nature of the appellations they inherit. The structure of oriki is polyphonic, a product of a multi-levelled genealogy: each is an incorporative compendium of praises, a bibliography of biographies of old or recent provenance, inherited or newly-invented and drawn from different oral genres. Within the

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[28] As pointed out in Hans Werner Debrunner, Witchcraft in Ghana (Kumasi: Presby, 1959) 19, 54 and 59, those accused of witchcraft in West Africa - as elsewhere - are usually women. The Uhamiri worship described by Nwapa in Efuru might be read as a displacement or transmutation of the threat.

many breaks, turns and lacunae in any one oriki, a professional thus has the opportunity to insinuate her own meanings. She can insert a telling riddle, make a significant juxtaposition, switch personal pronouns and in this way present a personal grievance as communal. Nwapa's women speakers may not be professional oral artists in the same way as Yoruba oriki performers, yet their verbal sufficiency bears comparison with that of the oriki artists. They, too, subscribe to patriarchal injunction, but at the same time succeed in representing and indeed promoting themselves through their use of language. In most cases this may happen through their sheer loquacity, yet like the oriki artists, they make inherited forms their own. Though they may not exhibit the same degree of self-referentiality as oriki women, yet in Nwapa's hands, their talk becomes a decisive vindication of that congenital fault of logorrhea often attributed to 'the sex': "the mouth of woman opens at random or pops like the pod of the oil-bean tree."[29] Or as Idu bemusedly observes: "You know women's conversation never ends" (I 97).

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[29] Amadiume, Male Daughters 69, and see 93. So, too, a character in The Great Ponds observes: "I don't believe much in talking, that is an occupation for women" (23). In the same novel "people" are said to "talk to the right and then to the left, particularly women" (45), and a woman is described as being "all mouth" (42). The odd thing though is that neither in this novel nor in Amadi's earlier work, The Concubine (London: Heinemann, 1970), do women characters display their 'lip'.

Women's verbal facility being granted, how does this mode of self-representation work in Nwapa's narratives? In keeping with the dominant trope of continuous phatic conversation - as also with the anonymity of some of the participant woman speakers - Efuru and Idu are markedly lacking in the temporal co-ordinates of conventional novelistic action.[30] Efuru begins at the time that the heroine marries her love, Adizua, without parental consent: "one moonlit night" they make plans (E 7); the next Nkwo (market) day she moves to his house. With this information in hand the gossipmongers can have their say, and, sure enough, by the second page of the novel speculations are afoot regarding Efuru's movements. These form the first soundings of that hum of conjecture that will run throughout the novel, commenting on Efuru's fortunes, her barrenness, her second marriage, her second barrenness. Against the background of this flow, market days, trade seasons, other moonlit nights, gestation periods, come and go with their accustomed regularity, but have significance in the conversational narrative largely as arbitrary starting points for new fragments of chatter. In Idu the verbal presence of the community would seem to be even more pervasive. Of the novel's twenty-two chapters, fourteen including the first

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[30] Both Efuru and Idu unfold as conversations: the narrative is dilatory, loosely chronological, co-ordinated in the "and then...and then" mode; digressions are frequent and repetitive (such as the incidents in Efuru involving Efuru's maid's parents).

begin in mid-dialogue, and then usually à propos of events mentioned in some earlier conversation. The dialogue thus propagates itself across the pages of the novel, seemingly with little regard for the formalities of chapter and time division.

The social setting Nwapa has chosen for her novels enables this kind of predominant, self-generating orality. In each, the women occupy an enclosed, homeostatic domestic domain: custom and environment are known to each speaker, and few characters are unfamiliar. Conversation here can be intensely deictic: reference to external objects or to habitual activity is elided or abbreviated. From the non-Igbo reader's point of view, this is emphasised when in both novels Igbo words and concepts are left unexplained and cannot always be elucidated by context: ganashi, obo, nsala soup. The names for certain other referents are roughly or very generally translated: a black stuff (E 14), the white disease (E 48), the small cough (I 35). The point is that within the community such meanings do not require elucidation. An insularity and familiarity is also suggested by the frequent repetitiveness of the conversation: comments are echoed, opinions reiterated, events retold. As the definition of the phatic function in language suggests, it would appear that the point of talking is often simply the interaction, confirming the contact, and not an exchange of information. Similar

effects are created by the device of the anonymous speaker unexpectedly introduced into a conversation. Such a character supplies the impetus for further questions or speculation and, by continuing the conversation, again affirms the presence of the community.

Action is so much a function of what is spoken that, especially in Idu, 'plot' developments take place off-stage as the conversation passes. At one moment in Idu, for example, Adiewere and Idu discuss "their" troublesome new wife; within a few pages it is announced that she has left for another man's house (I 49-50, 56). In Efuru Chapter 13, Eneberi, Efuru's husband, expresses interest in taking a new wife; in the next chapter, in the course of a chat between his mother and her friends, we learn that she has a new daughter-in-law (E 195).[31] A particular state of affairs may thus change into its opposite very rapidly and without ceremony - as it were in the course of a few fragments of dialogue. Here Idu observes that market is bad, there that it is good (I 45 and 47, 121 and 131). With dialogue constituting the main action, narrated or conversational time predominates over chronological time. Gossips summarise changes that have taken place over a span of years while also running through community opinion of those changes. Conversation is demonstrated to be the prime medium of communal life. One of

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[31] And that Eneberi has a son in another town (196).

the clearest examples of this occurs in Efuru when the heroine hears of her husband's desertion through overhearing gossip at market (E 54-55).[32] As goes without saying in an oral society, verbal interchange also forms the medium of important rituals and of lineage history.[33] We hear, too, how the past of individuals is recounted as part of conversation or is quoted in praising and in cursing (E 48-49, 144-145; I 4). The community, in particular here the women's community, lives by way of voice, both in the text and, presumably, outside it.

To claim that a women's presence and solidarity is asserted in talk should not be to neglect significant features of that talk as patterned language. Both Idu and Efuru feature interludes of verbal interchange and entertainment on moonlit evenings when tales are told and riddles related. On each occasion, the eponymous heroine, her friends, and the wider circle of anonymous women again do the talking, and with proficiency, moving easily from proverb to story to call-and-response verse. Yet, especially when set against this versatility, it is probably the sheer reiterative quality of their speech which impresses itself most upon the ear/eye - the ceaseless resumption of old complaints, the untiring return to familiar formulae, the echoic corroborative

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[32] See Efuru 208-209 for a similar example.

[33] Commiseration at funerals, for example, involves the recapitulation of the life-story of the deceased.

phrases.[34] As Uzoechi in Idu says, "Sometimes, after discussing something, I like to come back to it and talk it over again." (I 29) Yet rather than reading this as impoverishing - as a dull murmur cutting across the strong flow of their voices - the repetitiveness is rather the sustaining rhythm of everything the women say. To some extent like the oriki performers, it is in their use of the oral forms at their immediate disposal that women make their impress. Through the reflexivity of their speech, they most forcefully communicate the unremitting routine of their lives, the round of birthing, surviving and death, the chronic concerns of market and children, the work that never ends.

Though Nwapa's dialogic approach (in the precise sense of the epithet) appears as the dominant feature of her narrative, its prominence should not detract from that important aspect of her writing which in fact enables the vocality of her style - her focus on women's affairs. Nwapa's women represent themselves in voice, yet their spirit of pride and self-reliance is manifested also in the diverse activity of their everyday lives.[35] On a literal reading, Nwapa's

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[34] Idu is full of such examples, beginning with its first lines, and continuing in particular in the exchanges between Uzoechi and Nwasobi. Towards the end of the novel, these two women go back and recount its important events (199).

[35] As Amadiume's account in Male Daughters suggests, Nwapa could have gone further in representing the range of roles, activities and social positions open to women. In the

novels present a detailed documentation of women's customs, business preoccupations and worries: certain sections, in particular the chapter on childbirth in Efuru (E 20-35), read like extracts from an almanac of women's simples. Through creating a sense of this fullness of Igbo women's lives, Nwapa begins to chart out the neglected gender dimension in the grand narrative of nationalist historical literature told by male writers. More specifically, however, Nwapa delivers her most direct riposte to a male-dominated nationalist tradition - and its androcentric iconography of womanhood - by making available for her women characters roles and symbols of identity which do not correspond to the mother stereotype. She shows that though her women are concerned about bearing children, their lives are not defined solely by their maternal function. Especially in Efuru, Nwapa limns in - although not obviously or perhaps even intentionally - that "prominent place" accorded to women in Igbo life, where "fecundity [is] important, not entire," - the "clearly expressed female principle" largely overlooked by male writers.[36] In this, her practice overlaps to some extent with that of Emecheta. Efuru opens with the heroine marrying without parental consent,

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event, we assume, inherited novelistic conventions, a Christian and colonial education, patriarchal and class strictures - some or all of these factors - continued to set limits on her narrative. Nonetheless, as James, "Flora Nwapa" 114-115, remarks, Nwapa is known for her creation of strong female role-models.

[36] Boyce Davies 243, 249; Amadiume 29.

defiant and unafraid. Later, when her husband proves unworthy, she leaves, as defiant. Though her action is more problematic, Idu ends with the heroine willing her own death so as to join her husband. However contrary this may be to the communal ethic, she decides that the relationship provided by the marriage was more important to her than children. Both heroines are admittedly exceptional figures, yet it is important to note that they are not unique. Characters like the older woman, Ajanupu, in Efuru and resolute Ojiugo in Idu exemplify comparable qualities of decisiveness, outspokenness and self-sufficiency.

In Igbo society, Amadiume tells us, it is in trade as much as in marriage and childbirth that women obtain power. Accordingly, both novels focus on marketing as the chief dynamic of women's lives and the means whereby they obtain status.[37] Attracted by the lure of a good reputation, women like Idu and Efuru structure their lives around market days and keep a vigilant eye for profit. In this way, as well as through sheer audacity and hard labour, they develop the trading prowess for which the community respects them. Two important qualifications should perhaps be made here. One, that the economic abilities shown by Nwapa's women characters are compromised in her later writing when, in a capitalist

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[37] Idu 29; Efuru 125. In James 112, Nwapa herself mentions her concern, as an African writer, to stress the importance of economic independence for black women.

cash system, marketing heroines turn exploitative and conspicuously consumerist.[38] And two, that, even while women command power through economic means, patriarchal law is never waived, even in matters of trade (See E 140-141).

It is only therefore when women take on spiritual power, and so, according to convention, discard their sex roles, that they are able to enter a sphere where male authority has little effect. Nwapa's Woman of the Lake deity, especially in Efuru but also in Idu, bears a strong resemblance to the water goddess, Idemili, described by Amadiume. In Amadiume's account, women wield considerable power as the worshippers and representatives of this water spirit, also referred to as the Great Woman: ritual elites are based on her worship; successful market women are seen to be blessed by her.[39] So too, in Nwapa, Uhamiri, the Woman of the Lake, is held in high regard, as are her followers. Though it may be her last resort as a barren woman, when Efuru at the end of the novel is chosen to represent the deity, this comes as a recognition

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[38] The calculating materialism dramatised in the later stories belongs specifically to an urban context; no admonitory village commentary is possible here. The cut-throat individualism of a heroine such as Amaka in One is Enough (Enugu: Tana, 1981), sabotages the collaborative choric harmonies of the village community. Similar heroines people the pages of Nwapa's short story collections This is Lagos and Other Stories (Enugu: Tana, 1986), and Wives at War and Other Stories (Enugu: Tana, 1984). Of this urban shift Nwapa observes: "My heroines have changed because of the change in circumstances." James 115.

[39] Amadiume 42-44, 53-55, 99-105.

of her status in the community and her success as a market woman. As infertility is a necessary condition of the goddess's chosen followers, Uhamiri's intercession gives Efuru's barrenness new meaning - in a way, makes it fruitful.

Where Amadi recognised only male deities, Nwapa thus puts the community's shrines in order, setting the female goddess back in her rightful place. This readjustment reflects on what should have emerged by now as a more general effect of her writing: that of counterbalancing both in language and in character iconography a postcolonial literary patriarchy and a matri-focal nationalism. In the crucial decade of the Sixties, Nwapa in Idu and Efuru reangled the perspective that was being set by male writing, showing where and in what ways women wield verbal and actual power. If nationalism is typically embodied in patriarchal formations and fraternal bonding, and involves the exclusion of women from public political life, then Nwapa, in choosing not to engage with 'big' national themes, dealt with that exclusion first by reproducing it - by situating her narratives in another place entirely - and then by converting that occlusion into a richness. By allowing a women's discourse apparently to articulate itself in her writing, Nwapa elaborates the text of national experience. Yet even more than this perhaps, Nwapa also begins to uncover the practical, quotidian lived reality of woman/motherhood - she digs into the muddy, grainy

underside of nationalism's privileged icon. The mothers of Africa, Nwapa shows, also have voices, anger, rival aspirations, their own lives. They are as much the subjects of communal history as their nationalist sons.

2. Buchi Emecheta

Though she is often referred to as an African or Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta is more precisely speaking a novelist of expatriate and immigrant experience: her perspective on Africa is projected from London and her personal struggle to locate herself at the heart of the former British Empire informs much of her work.[40] Emecheta's evocations of the African past are thus most accurately described as imaginative or historical reconstructions, mediated not only by temporal and spatial distance but by the inevitable distancing and estrangement brought about by migration. It is not so much an identification with Africa as her commitment to representing the lives of oppressed women in Africa that motivates these evocations. Her method might still, however, be characterised as 'temporal/territorial',

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40 Emecheta, "Lagos provides a Warm Welcome," West Africa (19-25 January 1981): 110, speaks of England as "a place which, though is [sic] not the country of my birth, I have found comparative peace of mind to carry on with my creative work." Some five years later, in James, "Buchi Emecheta" 34-45, she expresses a certain amount of self-satisfaction at being a writer living in England and working in the English language, and, as it were reciprocally, voices her disapprobation regarding contemporary Nigerian mores and social conventions.

according to the definition set out earlier. Like Nwapa, she replots African social space as that space has been lived and worked by women over time. Her style is broadly documentary and sociological, yet it is distinguished by her commitment to converting women's everyday roles into the stuff of fiction.[41] In most of her African novels, Emecheta reworks dominant experiences in the lives of African women to become the organising motifs of her narrative.

Before going on to the discussion of this narrative method, and the attempt to read Emecheta as a writer of African women's experience, more should perhaps be said about her problematic ideological leanings, most obviously expressed in her strictly binary judgments of gender in African society. The ambivalences of her position are chiefly a result of her bicultural history, but have been given particular prominence by her strong class aspirations and also, perhaps, by the encouragement she received from the newly emergent metropolitan (individualist) feminist movement of the Sixties.[42] The experience of surviving in London seems to

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[41] The question "why are women as they are?" Emecheta observes, lies at the centre of her fiction. In accordance with her aversion to full-blown "Western" feminism, however, Emecheta urges that writing itself is sexless. James 42, 40. On the latter point, see also, Buchi Emecheta, "Feminism with a small 'f'!" Criticism and Ideology 173-185.

[42] The acclaim she has received as a black woman writer is vulnerable to charges of tokenism. The simplistic feminist criticism that considers only her articulation of women's subjectivity, has tended to gloss over the ambivalences of her

have brought Emecheta to a compound realisation: she saw that her hardship lay in being a woman and black, she became convinced by her own powers of endurance in combatting that hardship, and she also perceived that those powers were best utilised in the pursuit of individual success. These insights, in particular the concern about women's oppression and the belief in self-promotion, motivated her decision to write and also determined her choice of subject matter.

In the chronological line-up of her works, Emecheta has moved from documentary and highly autobiographical accounts of her life in London (In the Ditch (1972), Second-Class Citizen (1974)), out to the Africa of her youthful memories and her foremothers' stories, and then via historical and futuristic fantasy (Destination Biafra (1982), The Rape of Shavi (1983) back to the synoptic autobiography of Head Above Water (1986)).[43] Though some of her material is obviously remote from the immediate circumstances of her life, it can be argued that - even in her historical reconstructions - Emecheta may often be seen to place herself as the implicit subject of her

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position. For discussion of textual ambivalence in Emecheta, see Cynthia Ward, "What they told Buchi Emecheta: Oral Subjectivity and the Joys of Otherhood," PMLA 105.1 (January 1990): 83-97.

[43] Having come back to base, she is now giving her attention to the experience of second-generation black women in England. Her most recent novel, Gwendoline (London: Collins, 1989), looks at black immigration from the Caribbean. James 42-43.

text. What she has achieved provides the underlying pattern of values for her heroines. Or, conversely, their stories endorse the dominant trends of her own individual history. So she reads into the genealogy of mothering in her family a logic of incremental self-assertion (manifested partially through storytelling), which culminated in her arrival first in Britain and then, more figuratively, as a writer. On this reading, much of her fictional oeuvre becomes either an illustration or an anticipation of her own autobiography, the message of this story being that economic success and class ambition is an effective way for women to beat the exploitation of men.[44]

Considerably reinforced by this personal investment in their fortunes, Emecheta's accounts of the lives of women are heavily weighted against African men. If her writing tells the story of her life and her matriarchal past, it also, reciprocally, reads as a statement of separation from male-dominated Nigerian society, and in particular the Igbo

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[44] This self-preoccupation is reflected in Head Above Water (London: Fontana, 1986), which, despite Emecheta's expressed intention of "[forging] forward" (2), remains a broad synopsis of the story of Adah (Ada means first daughter in Igbo), transferred to the first person, and interspersed with exegetical passages on the other novels. The first chapters of this autobiography are particularly significant. Against the backcloth of the oral community, Emecheta self-consciously situates herself as a "new [woman] of the new Africa" (17), more complex, more assertive than her mothers, but still connected with the past.

patriarchate.[45] To a significant extent, therefore, a version of the old Manichean paradigm impinges upon her representation of African reality. With respect to the situation in Europe, where women are allowed wider freedoms, Africa is a dark and bleak world: male-dominated, oppressive, cruel and unjust. Its most pernicious qualities emerge in the behaviour of acculturated individual Nigerian men in London, who are at times portrayed in an uncomfortably caricatural and racist way. Such representations in Emecheta coexist with her much more positive evocations of Igbo social reality - the strong tradition of mothering and communality idealised, for example, in the descriptions of Emecheta's childhood or in The Rape of Shavi.[46] In Emecheta these two attitudes to Nigeria co-exist; her gender interest dictates which is given prominence. Given that her subject is specifically the disability suffered by African women, this was to some extent predictable. Then again, it may be that the gender separation which Nwapa's narrative outlined, shades into Emecheta's representation also. So, too, the fact that Igbo culture endorses economic assertiveness and market know-how on the part of women might

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[45] This is despite her professions to the contrary: that she "[loves]" men; that polygamy perhaps has its advantages; that she wishes to be identified with Africa, as an African writer. See Davidson Umeh and Marie Umeh, "An Interview with Buchi Emecheta," Ba Shiru 12.2 (April 1987): 19-25, and "Feminism with a small 'f'!" Criticism and Ideology 175-181.

[46] Buchi Emecheta, The Rape of Shavi (London: Fontana, 1985).

compound the represented gender differences.[47] Yet Emecheta's strictly binary vision, relatively unmediated by notions of class or historical change, must be taken into account as an important informing factor in her interpretation of Nigerian experience, whether of the domestic oppression of her foremothers or the national exploits of men.[48] What this implies is that where Emecheta portrays Nigerian society, dominated by men, in a particularly negative light, this will be less of a critique, say, of national character or polity, than of women's oppression at male hands.

From this it becomes clear that Emecheta's contribution to rewriting the narrative of national experience must be located in an area other than that of overt critique. A clue to the nature of this contribution is perhaps provided by her identification with her matriarchal antecedents, in particular her storytelling "mothers," and in her sympathetic reworking of their life-stories in her novels. Emecheta has pointed out that The Slave Girl (1977) is based on her mother's experience (HAW 3). Elements of The Joys of Motherhood (1979) would seem to be drawn from hardships endured by her mother-in-law

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47 Could Emecheta's whole oeuvre be interpreted as a kind of jeer thrown out by a successful 'market woman' at the less economically canny men - and women - of her society?

48 Her binary perceptions condition even some of her references to Nigerian women, whom she has spoken of as "bitching," and as hypocritical and "pathetic." James 35-36, 38-39, 42.

in Lagos.[49] More recently, as Head Above Water makes clear, Emecheta has tried to connect with more than only the subject matter of her foremothers' lives: now she self-consciously links herself into a family lineage of female story tellers. Her youth, she notes, was dominated by the indomitable figure of her "big mother," her father's elder sister, who in her stories told of the "heroic deeds of her ancestors, all our mores and all our customs." It was the example of this woman, Emecheta maintains, that inspired her to become a story teller too, though in text.[50]

Because of her investment in the culture, language and economic system of the metropolis, it is difficult to work out whether Emecheta's professions of loyalty and carefully constructed positive images represent less a wholehearted commitment to a tradition than a rhetorical and strategic declaration of allegiance to the same. By dramatising her narrative function as a woman writer, Emecheta's effort could be to authenticate and so legitimate her own writing practice - in particular, her location as a writer in the North. Yet in Emecheta's case the point of the reworking of the past is probably not so much what she concludes about the significance

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[49] "Feminism with a small 'f'!" 176; The Slave Girl (London: Fontana, 1981); The Joys of Motherhood (London: Heinemann, 1985).

[50] This account is more or less a paraphrase of HAW 7-16. See also "Feminism with a small 'f'!" 173-174.

of that past, as the fact of the reconstruction. In the writing of her novels she consistently works to bring the female subject back into recent Igbo history and to do this by extracting significant symbols or moments from those subjects' lives. In Emecheta's intervention in the literary duologue of colonial and nationalist, unlike in that of Nwapa, theme and controlling image predominate over writing style and voice. Especially in her stories of Africa, she has worked to develop and to elaborate what one might term a lexis of metaphors for the experience of women.

In comments made on her writing method, Emecheta has drawn attention to the single-issue quality of her individual "sociological" fictions. She has observed:

> I always deal with my subject from a social angle. I form the social theory, then I expand the theory in the novel. I look for a problem strictly from a woman's point of view.[51]

And again:

> My first discipline is sociology. In sociology we learn about a lot of concepts. My books are based on various concepts.[52]

On the basis of these pointers, one may venture a methodological observation. Emecheta, it is possible to argue, develops representative conditions from the lives of

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[51] Davidson and Marie Umeh 20.

[52] James 43. Reporting on an interview with the author, Taiwo 101 notes: "She conceives of an idea and devises the episodes needed to put the idea forward".

women she has observed into fictional metaphors or tropes for those lives. The titles of the relevant fictions - The Bride Price, The Slave Girl, The Joys of Motherhood, Naira Power, Double Yoke - read as indices to this approach. That Emecheta isolates her themes by focussing on definite phases of historical development or on particular decades in Nigeria's recent past, further clarifies the method.[53] Taken as a whole, her fiction presents a series of defining images for the condition of eastern Nigerian women over the past sixty-odd years. The oeuvre can be read as a more or less chronological collection of narrative essays on the subject of women's oppression, or, alternatively, a general sociological discourse on the same, divided into exemplifying sub-themes. Emecheta's response to a male-dominated narrative of national experience has thus been to tackle the male-domination of the subject matter head-on - in short, to change its subject - and to do so in a distinctively pictorial or image-based way. She thus adopts for her own purposes the Achebe-type technique of highlighting in each novel a different era in the history of Nigeria. As with Achebe, Emecheta's individual narratives can be read as theme-chapters in the recent history of Nigeria.[54]

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[53] The Slave Girl concerns the Twenties and Thirties in rural and urbanising mid-eastern Nigeria, The Joys chiefly the war and the immediate post-war period in Lagos, The Bride Price the Fifties, Naira Power the oil-boom period, and Double Yoke the academic sexploitation characteristic of the Eighties.

[54] See Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm Oil with Which Achebe's Words Are Eaten," Lindfors and Innes 47-48.

In this, her project also runs parallel to that of Nwapa: the attempt is to recast history to fit the patterns of women's experience.

This method of socio-historical intervention is perhaps best demonstrated in her novel of the Biafran War, Destination Biafra (1982), which, as Emecheta's expressed intentions in writing the novel suggest, was designed as a fictionalisation of received history, told from a woman's point of view.[55] Here she places a female subject squarely in the middle of that most male of subjects, war. As we have seen, she is not entirely alone in her role as woman interpreter of the nationalist past - nor even in her venture of re-counting the Biafran conflict. Nwapa's novella Never Again (1975), for example, portrays the part played by Biafran women as wives and market women in the war.[56] Emecheta's subject, however, is larger and more far-ranging than Nwapa's - she is also more confrontational with respect to the existing histories of the

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[55] Buchi Emecheta, Destination Biafra (London: Fontana, 1983).

[56] Flora Nwapa, Never Again (Enugu: Tana, 1986). The body of Biafran War fiction is growing. Marie Umeh, "The Poetics of Thwarted Sensibility," Critical Theory and African Literature, vol. 3 of Calabar studies in African Literature, eds. R.Vanamadi et al (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1987) 204, mentions war fiction by three other women writers: Catherine Acholonu, Into the Heart of Biafra; Terisa Meninu, The Last Card; Leslie Ofoegbu, Blow the Fire. Male Civil War writers include Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chukwuemeka Ike, Eddie Iroh, Festus Iyayi, and Ken Saro-Wiwa.

period.[57] Beginning with Nigeria's pre-independence elections in 1959, she sets out to tell the entire story of the war, depicting its causes and describing its battles. The Biafran War material was not particularly tractable: unlike the Zimbabwean War, this conflict did not put female soldiers in the frontline.[58] Her solution is a type of direct guerilla attack aimed at the heart of the situation. She has invented an idealised and perhaps improbable heroine, a "dream woman" (HAW 1), and placed her, again improbably but also uncompromisingly, in the thick of the politicking and warmongering of the time.

On a surface level, Emecheta has made Biafran history her own chiefly through deploying the conventional techniques of rewriting - changing names and modifying the course of key events, the latter mainly to facilitate the entry of her heroine. For the rest, because the novel covers a long, 'historical' decade, she relies heavily on documentary summaries of the action; these read much like the journalistic reports which might have appeared at the time. One of the problems with the novel is that Emecheta seems unclear as to what position to take on the struggle as civil war and how far to depart from the more official histories. Despite the

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[57] Marie Umeh 194-206 commends the credibility and topicality of Emecheta's account.

[58] Though, as Girls at War shows, women did form part of the militia.

superficial changes, she by and large sticks to the general shape of the war developments and the idea of Nigeria as national entity. The novel thus works at two imperfectly reconciled levels: that of 'fiction', which concerns Debbie's war effort; and that of 'fact', which draws on the (necessarily) synoptic documentation of the 1959-70 period. The mix can be confusing. The field of action is littered with a bewildering variety of proper names, many of which are not realised as concrete personalities or characters in the text, but which can also not immediately be checked against 'reality'. What this means is that the opaque and at times unstructured narrative must of necessity cohere around the character and action of Debbie Ogedemgbe.[59] The history in Destination Biafra privileges her because, in effect, Debbie's story knits together the history. Her mission of national rescue is a function of her personal pilgrimage of self-discovery: the conjunction is significant.

If Biafra threw into stark relief the contradictions of nationalism in post-colonial Africa, Emecheta attempts to reconcile some of those contradictions in the person of her heroine. This is not to imply, however, that Emecheta's own attitude to nationalism is free of ambivalence. Towards the end of Destination Biafra, Uzoma Madako, one of the women with

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[59] Note that Debbie's name, as compound, suggests an integration of British and Igbo experience and language.

whom Debbie is travelling across war-torn Biafra, comments on the stark contrast between the hopes of peace and the present harsh reality of war:

> A few years ago it was 'Independence, freedom for you, freedom for me.' We [women] were always in the background. Now that freedom has turned into freedom to kill each other, and our men have left us to bury them and bring up their children (DB 214).

From a women's point of view, it would seem, nationalist politics as administered by men make up a harsh tale of internecine conflict and betrayed hope in which women have a place only at the entry and exit points of birth and death. Even if unintentionally, the confusion of massed detail in the novel adds to this impression of a meaningless recurrence of conflict, the end-result of nationalist campaigns administered by a corrupt and alienated leadership and masterminded by foreign powers.

To this bleak situation, Emecheta counterposes the figure of Debbie Ogedemgbe as prefiguring another form of national being entirely - more integrated, more tolerant, more committed, but as assertive. It is probably true to say that Debbie's status exceeds that of women's representative of the existing nationalist ethos. Rather, she stands for a 'better', more egalitarian kind of nationalism. Marie Umeh reflects something of the sentiment which went into the creation of the character when she observes that Debbie "is symbolic of Nigeria in search of its rightful place in world

history."[60] The point is that Emecheta is not critical of Nigerian nationalism as political belief or outlook, only of its flawed incarnations in sectarian violence or corrupt government.[61] So, in her foreword to the novel, she lays stress on a crucial and symbolic aspect of Debbie's public identity: Debbie is "neither Ibo nor Yoruba nor Hausa, but simply a Nigerian" - she is the sign of a better nation, "the Nigeria I would like to see" (DB vii-viii). Unsurprisingly, Debbie's mission in taking up arms, too, is to forge a reconciliation between the Biafran and Federal leaders (her mission is to travel to Biafra to persuade the leader, Abosi (Ojukwu), to end the war). For Emecheta, then, the first condition of Nigerianness - a concept which is taken as both self-evident and possible - is to be non-partisan. She stresses that her sympathy is all for cross-ethnic affiliations - hence her admiration for Soyinka's role in the war (DB viii). Hence, too, her actual but also symbolic attachment to her home town of Ibuza, which was attacked by

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60 Marie Umeh 203.

61 Speaking of her return to Nigeria after a long absence of eighteen years, Emecheta, "Going Home: Calibar, Contrasts and Complaints," West Africa (12-18 January 1981): 72, describes herself as susceptible to feelings of national loyalty, but indicates that the sentiments would come more easily to her in a new-look Nigeria (one less corrupt, parochial, and "indisciplined," yet still recognisably Nigerian): "Somehow amidst the chaos I felt uplifted because to me the new National Anthem with the drums in the background is more the Nigeria I would like to see."

both sides and thus experienced to its fullest extent the cruel absurdity of the conflict.

However, in a tale which charts the various depredations of a nationalism gone awry, the concept of Nigerianness can only ever be theoretical. Just after her capture by Federal troops, in what becomes a symbolic scene, Debbie declares: "I am not on anyone's side. I am on the side of Nigeria. I want Nigeria to be one as we have always been." (DB 175) She adopts the familiar rhetoric of national independence struggles, recognisable by its declared intention of implanting a nation, a 'true Nigeria' dating from pre-colonial times. Taking the text as a whole, this is an isolated and embattled assertion, one which is then immediately and, in this respect, appropriately contradicted by Debbie's captor, the Hausa officer, Salihu Lawal, who mocks Debbie's idealism with the comment: "You are wrong, young lady from England. Nigeria has not always been one." Privately, Debbie recognises that "Nigeria was only one nation as a result of administrative balkanisation by the British and French powers" (DB 175). Yet she doesn't have much time to pursue this line of thought. Lawal drags her away and rapes her, only to back off in disgust soon thereafter when Debbie informs him that she was earlier gang-raped by Nigerian (Southern) soldiers.

Lawal's comment on an impracticable Nigerianness, emphasised by his gesture of aversion, is left suspended over the rest of the text, also laying bare the problems of gender and national affiliation. If Debbie's status as Other to the Nigerian national entity is emphasised by her English education and foreign perspective, her distance from mainstream nationalism is then confirmed by Lawal's humiliation and rejection of her. This rejection, however, takes an interesting shape first in that she is punished for her visibility, her being in the thick of things, literally and crudely, a site of male bonding. Yet, at the same time, in what might be unconscious irony on Emecheta's part, her ordeal demonstrates that, as before, it is only as body that woman plays any part at all in national experience. Nationalist politics remain divisive and divided: Debbie is doubly rejected, both for having mixed together Northern and Southern Nigerians, and, as female body, for having acted as the conduit for that mixing.

The ideal of a future Nigerianness, then, remains far from simple, or is simple only insofar as it is a single, defined ideal. As ideal, it is espoused by Debbie alone, and her own symbolic stature, as self-proclaimed "daughter of Nigeria" (DB 258), as a woman of the future, and as outsider, reflects back on its ideality. Like the concept of Nigerianness, the character representing that concept is

highly imaginary or idealised. Debbie is a woman soldier in a conflict which featured few such; she has a foreign name, education, and boyfriend, yet is said to be fully Nigerian; she operates on both sides in a civil war, but without double-dealing; on every front she attempts to resist the barbarities of men, yet also magnanimously refrains from judging those who assault her. It is clear that what we have to deal with here is a version of the trope of the bionic woman as new national fighter familiar from nationalist texts by writers like Ngugi. The gender of the fighter becomes the signifier of an alternative sort of nationalism or a new national ideology. On one level, it is true, this may be an inspirational symbol. Yet, looking again at the text of Destination Biafra, it seems that the chief significance of the character in the novel - and its difference from similar tropes in texts by male writers - comes where the history and the fantasy of the narrative split in two -or where the fictionality eludes the fact. Because the story of Debbie is only imperfectly and improbably connected with the broader history, Emecheta seems to indicate, even if unintentionally, how far present conditions depart from the desired state of the nation and how illusory that state may be. The difficulty in the text betrays the difficulty of the ideal. This is even more the case when that ideal is beset not only by gender but by ideological contradictions and divided cultural loyalties. As Lawal points out, Debbie's ideas carry the mark of a Western

education. She might be a daughter of Nigeria and a professed woman of Africa, but she must still learn "to back" a baby (DB 188).

Thus far, this chapter has concentrated on attempts by two Nigerian women writers to reshape the national narratives and social spaces previously inscribed and defined by men. It might then be appropriate to find choric corroboration for their work by looking at writing by women from two different and also representative African regions - Francophone Muslim Senegal and Southern Africa. Right the way across the continent, women writers, encountering the contradictions of male-led nationalisms, have begun to offer new readings of national and nationalist experience. Yet, though other names might be mentioned,[62] the choice of the two writers discussed is motivated not simply by their different cultural perspectives, but also by their overt references to the perplexities of emergent male-dominated nationalism. Mariama Bâ's first novel, So Long A Letter, is an open denunciation of the powers of patriliny enshrined in nationalist tradition in Senegal, and also of the collusion of women in their own

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[62] Most obviously that of Ama Ata Aidoo who, in Our Sister Killjoy (Harlow: Longman, 1982), puts out a pungent and compelling endorsement of the strength and resourcefulness of African women. However, as African nationalist and also as a voice from Anglophone West Africa, Aidoo does not exactly meet the criteria mentioned here. In Chapter Six, Tsitsi Dangarembga, a 'woman representative' of a new generation of African writers, will be discussed.

oppression. The second writer, the South African exile, Bessie Head, similarly wary of the link-up between an African patriarchate and nationalism, is also to be remembered for her re-enactment in text of village voices recounting a communal history.

3. Mariama Bâ

Though its date of publication is much later, Mariama Bâ's Une si Longue Lettre (1980), or So Long A Letter (trans. 1981),[63] like the Sixties novels of writers such as Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi, addresses itself to the travails and contradictions of early African nationhood, though in this case from a woman's point of view. Together with the posthumously published Un chant écarlate (1981),[64] So Long a Letter represents a frank and sobering contribution from a woman writer to the post-independence literary discourse of national experience. During meditative interludes, Bâ touches on questions of national definition and belonging. That nationalist sentiment is grounded in a particular territory or a feeling for place is, for example, shown to be important for her modern women characters: their emotional geography here

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[63] References will be to Mariama Bâ, So Long a Letter, trans. Modupé Bodé Thomas (London: Virago, 1987).

[64] In English this appeared as Scarlet Song, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (Harlow: Longman, 1986). Representing cultural conflict in the relationship between a French woman and a Senegalese man, this novel is not as concerned with problems of power and affiliation experienced within a new national community.

would match that of their male partners (SLL 21). But, as has been suggested above, there are realities of new nationhood which are not as easy for women to assimilate. Bâ's narrator or letter-writer, Ramatoulaye, recounts the difficulty and pain experienced by Africa's New Women in reconciling Western-style demands for self-determination with a respect for an inherited faith and morality. National independence has in no way modified that male right to exact pleasures and privileges which Bâ depicts as entrenched in custom and convention. These problems are exacerbated where the clutch of tradition is not simply that enforced by male hands. One of her main themes is that women may effect the oppression and unhappiness of other women by upholding the patriarchal status quo to secure advantage. Bâ's participation in the discourse of national experience is to be distinguished for its honest presentation of this often painful theme. Plotters and schemers both, the two powerful mother figures of Bâ's chronicle are far removed from the icons enshrined in the early texts of male nationalists.[65]

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[65] In truth, "Tante/Aunty Nabou" and "Lady Mother-in-Law" are not in fact biological mothers and might, in a strictly mythical interpretation, be more accurately represented as step- or wicked mothers. On the power wielded by the African 'patriarchal mother' and the treatment of younger women, see: Mbye B. Cham, "Contemporary Society and the Female Imagination: A Study of the Novels of Mariama Bâ," ALT 15 (1987): 89-101; Awa Thiam, Black Sisters, Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Pluto, 1986) 84-86.

As the title suggests, So Long a Letter is formally an epistolary novel, but the letter Ramatoulaye composes to her childhood friend, Aïssatou, manifests itself rather as an internal conversation, an interchange with an alter-ego who on occasion also merges into the remembered figure of her late husband. After what has been said about women's vocality, the dialogic form here is significant. Yet the narrator's actual silence is also to be noted: though she is mentally invoking Aïssatou's sympathetic ear, Ramatoulaye's words are all in her mind. Her silence is the normal condition of her being as woman, especially now that she is a widow. The alliance between the two women, however, is thematically important, especially as a sign of past collaboration and solidarity. Ramatoulaye begins her letter by plotting out the matriarchal antecedents she shares with her friend (SLL 1) - as does Buchi Emecheta in her autobiography. For Ramatoulaye, it is a way of affirming their long relationship and the parity of their past roles and fortunes - both are members of the educated elite, the group who became Africa's first independence generation. But it is also a way of introducing the idea that lineage relationships not only bind but divide: the bond with Aïssatou will act as a foil for the rivalry and resentment generated between women in one household by polygamy and traditional family demands.

Ramatoulaye's immediate reason for beginning the letter is to inform her friend of her husband's death. The new bereavement has given her cause to dwell on the past she and Aïssatou shared together with their husbands: she recalls mutual trials, in particular their very different ways of resolving marital crises. The letter develops into a bitter recitation of grievances, of the humiliations of widowhood, of the outrage of abandonment in favour of a younger woman: "To think that I loved this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child" (SLL 12). For Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou, the denigration involved in such experiences has been particularly painful because of their commitment to promoting the position of the African woman, that is, "[introducing] modernity within our traditions" (SLL 18-19).

But not all women address tradition as a "bog...of superstition and custom" (SLL 15). To some it is precisely the progressive opinions of the younger generation which have become a defilement - a threat to communal and ancestral integrity. Aïssatou's mother-in-law, Aunty Nabou, for one, holds this view. She has invested her life in her son's good fortune, status, and happiness: he is her "one and only man," she swears by his nose, "the symbol of life" (SLL 26), and rejects her daughter-in-law, especially because Aïssatou is from a lower caste. Vigilantly aware of tradition, "the truth

of the law of blood" and lineage (SLL 28), Nabou resolves to honour this law and at the same time to obtain revenge by finding a wife for her son from his own caste. As she travels back to her ancestral village to carry out her plan, the landscape she passes through, in particular the "family domain," is evoked as though inscribed with memory and old sentiment; place names are incantated like familiar rhymes. Bâ gives recognition to a woman's emotional investment in territory made significant by time:

> Thiadiaye, Tataguine, Diouroupe, then Ndiadiouf, and finally Fatick, capital of the Sine. Puffing and steaming the bus branched off to the left....Finally Diakhao, the royal Diakhao, Diakhao, cradle and tomb of the Bour-Sine, Diakhao of her ancestors, beloved Diakhao, with the vast compound of its old palace (SLL 27-28).

Nabou's gaze is "marked with sadness and filled with history" (SLL 28): in this earth her present is reconciled with the family past; she pours her libations into the river to appease her ancestors' spirits. Her sentiment is in several ways reminiscent of nationalist attachment to originary soil.

In her capacity as "elder sister of the master of the house" (SLL 28) - a significantly genitive and yet powerful position - Nabou duly finds a more suitable wife for her son and proceeds to instil in her attitudes of obedience to ancestral law and Islam and, before anything else, customary docility, that "first quality in a woman" (SLL 29). Aïssatou's response is to walk out. In contrast, when her own

mother-in-law finds a second wife for her husband, Ramatoulaye acquiesces in the arrangement despite her distress. Whatever the response, however, it becomes clear that aside from the fissiparous forces of class or nation, the female gender in the modern African state is divided by conflicting generational definitions of social position and authority. For the younger generation, status lies in a presumedly progressive individualism, and so, at least initially, in friendship with the ruling fraternity. For older women, social standing still resides in the custom, in family hierarchies and rituals. Yet in depicting such differences and divisions, Bâ's intention is not merely to desacralise the role of the lineage mother - even though this is obviously an important effect of her tale. She also dramatises the continuing predominance of patriarchal law in an African nation-state, showing how this lives on in contradictory forms. Nabou, not beneficent, yet not entirely blameworthy, first desires revenge because female status in the patriarchal society of which she is a part depends on bearing sons. She obtains what she desires because, as an older woman, she is able to manipulate patriarchal law to her advantage.

Yet, as a type of corrective to this role, it is clear that matrilineal - and also sisterly - connections play an important part in coping with everyday and national experience (see, for example, SLL 75-76). Survival and adaptation are

key elements in Bâ: her suggestion is that the success of Africa's new national future depends on coming to terms with the past and recognising the strength of inherited social conventions. It is significant that Nabou's vision of the land as laden with time is narrowly juxtaposed with Ramatoulaye's own reflections on the national past and future: the sense of self in both generations of women remains related to national territory (SLL 21 and 24). But if the viability of the nation as geo-political entity is not in question, its gender-biases are. National unity may be important (SLL 24-25), yet women must be seen as central to that unity. Ramatoulaye lays emphasis on the family as controlling metaphor for the nation; furthermore, within this focal family, the "mother [should be] supreme"[66] (SLL 89, 87, 74).[67]

Bâ, therefore, is interested not in a wholesale scuppering of nationalist belief but in its conversion. Her efforts at nationalist reformation are in this sense more focussed or directly challenging than the conceptions of national being of the other writers examined here. In the first instance, her rewriting of male national experience is effected at both levels specified earlier: the epistolary

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66 To adapt Achebe's phrase.

67 Katherine Frank, "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa," ALT 15 (1987): 14-34, on the other hand, sees Bâ as endorsing the Western individualism represented in the novel by Aïssatou.

dialogue and domestic and familial imagery contribute on a textual level to the (temporal/territorial) evocations of women's experiences during early independence. But, in addition to this, Bâ reinterprets in a deliberately gender-specific way the well-known metaphor of the nation as family, privileging what Amadiume refers to as the matri-centric core unit of mother and child.[68] Equating existing nationalist politics with the "fruitless wranglings" and power games of men, she instead advocates, in openly utopian fashion, the communion of (presumably like-minded) women: an "association where there is neither rivalry nor schism, neither malice nor jostling for position" (SLL 74).

4. Bessie Head

The 'illegality' which marked her birth, and that quality of the illicit and the forbidden which her own being represented, strongly determined Bessie Head's life and work.[69] Her efforts were all directed to bring together what prejudice and law had forced asunder, and her writing can be interpreted as a record of her slow struggle towards self-

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[68] See, for example, Male Daughters 27.

[69] She was the child of a white woman and a black man, a union forbidden in terms of the notorious Immorality Act. After her birth, her mother was confined to a mental asylum and Bessie was given out for adoption. See Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter, "Bessie Head's A Question of Power read as a Mariner's Guide to Paranoia," RAL 20.1 (Spring 1989): 72-83; Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan, "Bessie Head: A Question of Power and Identity," ALT 15 (1987): 82-88.

reconstitution. In a manner significant for her art, Head saw wholeness in a divided society as coming only with the discovery of a community: "no one can create harmony out of cheap discord."[70] It was to escape discord that she moved to Botswana. Yet even in Botswana, her struggle for self- and communal cohesiveness was complicated in a number of ways, most immediately by the blight of her mother's mental instability (which was feared to be congenital),[71] but also by her distress at the unreasonable and unforgiving patriarchy of, as she described it, "African society."[72] As Dorothy Driver has observed, in Head "the relation between self and community is complicated by the fact that for the term 'community' we read 'patriarchal' community."[73] In addition - a fact Driver has not noted - Head sees this patriarchal community as closely identified with new African national movements. In her short stories and also in her choric

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70 Bessie Head, "An African Story," The Listener 88.2279 (1972): 736. I am indebted to Dorothy Driver's essay (see footnote 73) for this reference.

71 Bessie Head, A Question of Power (London: Heinemann, 1986) 16-17.

72 Head speaks, for example, of a "strong theme of power-worship" and a will to dominate in "African society" (QoP 38).

73 Dorothy Driver, seminar paper, "Women and Voice in Colonial Discourse: Self-Representation in Writing by Black South African Women," ICS, London, 22 May 1989: 13.

history, Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind (1982),[74] she tries to speak of her discovered community in such a way as to celebrate multivocality, to focus on women's activity, and so play down a dominant and, in her representation, domineering masculinity.

In the fictionalised autobiography of her own mental breakdown, A Question of Power (1973), Head develops what in certain respects becomes an allegory of paranoid schizophrenia: she dramatises the extent to which the guilt and self-hatred instilled by a racially-divided society split the personality.[75] Head represents her psyche as the stage on which the divisions of society are played out in a series of harrowing sexual power games in which the actors are the

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[74] Bessie Head, The Collector of Treasures (London: Heinemann, 1986), and Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind (London: Heinemann, 1986).

[75] The image of "internal drama" is Head's own (QoP 29). She speaks also of the madness of the society as reflected in the individual's "nervous tension" (QoP 19). This corresponds to the observations of Frantz Fanon, as expressed in particular in Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 1986), and encapsulated in the epigraph and title of Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions. It may be that one way of writing against the confines of patriarchy is for African women to chart their own troubled mental journeys as victims of oppression. Lily Moya's distressed and yearning letters, as collected in Shula Marks, ed., Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women (London: The Women's Press, 1987), would reflect a similar "nervous condition." In So Long a Letter, an acquaintance of Ramatoulaye's, Jacqueline, suffers a nervous breakdown caused by the "moral torment" of personal and cultural rejection (SLL 41-45).

disturbed fragments of her self. Particularly cruel is the phallic Dan figure whose megalomania in the style of a "Hitler" or "Napoleon" (QoP 14) is predominantly expressed as sexual abuse. It is a prominent indication of Head's understanding of chauvinist[76] nationalism, that Dan represents a conjuncture of dangerous sexuality and nationalist ambition (QoP 104, 127). "[E]xtreme masculinity" (QoP 105), she maintains, is an African trait which is given prominence as part of the new assertion of the African personality. Dan, seeking attention, is said vigorously to exploit and to flail his "huge towering black penis" (QoP 128).[77]

Confined to a small group of actors and continuing throughout A Question of Power, the struggle for the mastery of "Elizabeth's" personality is claustrophobic and relentless. To give some relief from this overheated and agonised mental space, Head from time to time moves her narrative out into the wide, sunlit expanses occupied by the community at Motabeng.[78]

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[76] The term is more in keeping with her own language.

[77] Head is clearly concerned about the corruptions and delusions of excessive power. Sello, a masculine figure and Elizabeth's other chief tormentor, is shown to be a magus of charismatic power. The Medusa figure, another sexual tormentor, also represents a perverted will to power. See Lauretta Ngcobo, "Apartheid South Africa: Through Women's Eyes," TWQ 10.1 (January 1988): 304-305; Margaret E. Tucker, "A Nice-Time Girl Strikes Back: An Essay on Bessie Head's A Question of Power," RAL 19.2 (Summer 1988): 170-181.

[78] In Head's view, there seems to be an implicit contrast between the imprisonment of a male domain of mind games, engaged by warring egos, and the openness of farmland

The lucid, measured narrative style of her descriptions balances the elliptical compression and obscurity of the internal drama scenes (see, for example, QoP 123). Though her commitment to the co-operative projects of the community is frequently under pressure from her mental torment, her participation in these communal tasks is represented as intensely calming and restorative:

> It wasn't any kind of physical stamina that kept her going, but a vague, instinctive pattern of normal human decencies combined with the work she did, the people she met each day and the unfolding of a project with exciting inventive possibilities (QoP 149).[79]

Carrying through the logic of this healing process, Head went on after A Question of Power to write an oral history of her community at Serowe: the inscription became an act of dedication. In building up a forum of testimonies, expressions of opinion and personal biographies, Head attempts in Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind to bring the village and its history into her art; to gather together "the shattered little bits" of her life by translating the community's "sense

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which is the women's space because 'husbanded' by them - a role embodied in the activity of Elizabeth's serene friend, Kenosi. In Serowe, Head includes several testimonies which refer to ploughing as an exclusively female activity. Women, therefore, are best acquainted with the land - open territory; men with the machinations and intrigues of the enclosed space of the kgotla (men's council).

[79] Already, when she describes interaction in the community, she incorporates the snatches of dialogue that will develop into the choric structure of Serowe (QoP 20, to quote an appropriately phatic example).

of wovenness" into her own writing (S x-xi). The cohesiveness and control of the end-product reflect the success of the venture, its power for making whole.[80] Writing, itself, which, as we saw with Gikandi, involves a process of self-making, is given form and substance through the identification with communal themes and modes of articulation. So by creatively writing herself into the community, Head begins to exorcise self-obsession and so arms herself against the fearsome (and allied) powers of racial guilt, mental instability and undisciplined masculinity. Her efforts are realised at both levels of transformative intervention outlined earlier (this too matches the cohesiveness of the project). Textually, in order to speak in others' tongues, or to allow those tongues to speak, Head has gathered together actual accounts from village members. She defers to their opinions, their perceptions; she includes marks of colloquial speech - local references, deitic markers, conversational asides, an off-the-cuff recipe for good Morule wine (S 107). There are echoes in her method of the repetitiveness evoked by Nwapa:

> the other themes of the book people of Serowe developed themselves during the year I moved in and out of their homes. A number of people would repeat the same story...and I learned to hold on

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[80] Significantly, one of the themes she sets out to develop in her account is, as she herself points out, that of the people's "intimate knowledge of construction" (QoP xv) - their ability to make walls and pots, to create.

> to these stories as they vividly evoke the ancient African way of life (S xv).[81]

The brevity of individual chapters, too, reflects people's speaking style: "past history....was often bits of what they could recollect, and it often came out in short statements rather than coherent stories" (S 66).

At the same time as she (re)creates this vocality, however, Head, simply by writing in an oral tradition, makes a crucial and very likely unprecedented intervention as a African woman oral historian. She inserts herself into, and so also displaces, a male tradition of historical narrative as manifested both orally and in text. Head remarks that when the "old men" narrators each pick up their "little piece of the gigantic puzzle" of the lost past, they set themselves in opposition to the accounts of "white historians who trod rough-shod over their history dismissing it as 'petty tribal wars'" (S 66-67 and also 95). Though she represents her own attempt at historical narration as collaborative rather than as antagonistic, she is nonetheless taking over the role of communal narrator from these old men. She appropriates not

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[81] While acknowledging the transformative power of this dialogic form, one must all the while remain heedful, as Carolyn Cooper has warned, of the editorial presence 'managing' such apparently collaborative texts. See Carolyn Cooper, "Writing Oral History: SISTREN Theatre Collective's Lionheart Gal," Kunapipi 11.1 (1989): 49-57. Head's more openly 'interventionist' project can be compared with the text Cooper discusses: Honor Ford Smith, ed., Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women (London: The Women's Press, 1986).

only a male discourse (that of written history), but also a typically male discursiveness, the "tangled story...of clan disputes and abrupt migrations" (S 66) which men have mastered for generations, and subverts a powerful patriarchal role - involving normative narration and the canonisation of heroes. One of the ways of resolving problems of identification in a (nationalistic) patriarchal community, Head could thus be suggesting, is to disregard male narrative authority. With respect to written history also, this intervention is decisive: by deploying a polyphonic form, she attempts to avoid the single perspective on events that has characterised official histories of national (or, in this case, proto-national) formations.[82]

Of the writers represented in this chapter, Bessie Head's attempt through her writing to resist patriarchy - including specifically that patriarchy expressed in nationalism - is probably the most integrated (because engaged at several levels), and also the most self-conscious (because the resistance works as personal reconstruction). In an implicit recognition that personal trauma can be a symptom of

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[82] Also in her subject matter, Head in Serowe tries for heterogeneous effects and gender parity, balancing reports on local affairs of government where men dominate with accounts garnered from women of their activities - pot-making (43), hut-building (49) - and their problems of coping with polygamy and family break-down (58 ff). Her account of women's open spaces also contrasts with nationalist concepts of bounded territory.

continuing political dispossession, her writing is developed as the healing required where patriarchy is the 'catch-all' sickness of a fragmented society. In her description of Botswanan society, the gender injustices instated in the times of the "forefathers," which were first exacerbated by colonialism, are now destructively bolstered by the illusory boom of independence economics and a chauvinistic nationalism.[83] Head's claims about African patriarchy can seem histrionic and prejudiced, and must at times be heavily qualified by her own experiences of social ostracism as a half-caste - in particular by the sexual paranoia occasioned by the conjunction of racial and sexual guilt in her past. Where in the figure of Dan, she represents, as she sees it, the perilous identification of cultural aggression with the resurgence of repressed male sexuality, her own "overpowering horror of men" (QoP 139) leads her to make essentialist and racist allegations: "The social defects of Africa are, first, the African man's loose, carefree sexuality" (QoP 137). Yet, at the same time, her observation (most pointedly in QoP) that nationalism has to do with ego-assertion, and, where society

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[83] This reading combines, in particular, Head's potted history of patriarchy in the short story, "The Collector of Treasures," CoT 91-92, with the references to theories of race purity and national corruption in A Question of Power (see, for example, 63 and 133), and also her anxieties about witchcraft as a dangerous embodiment of racial nationalism (see QoP 21; "Witchcraft" and "Looking for a Rain God," CoT 47-60). Head's rejection of African patriarchy at times closely resembles Bâ's, in particular when she advocates monogamy as a solution to social ills (CoT 86).

has been disrupted, can lead to violence and compensatory exploitation, has the weight of her own experience to bear it out.[84] The tormented tend in their turn to become tormentors.

It is as a means of withstanding these destructive forces that Head's emphasis on human connectedness becomes so important. As she suggests in the vision that ends A Question of Power (which she reconfirms in the more factual descriptions in Serowe), what is needed is "loving," "belonging," co-operation and mutual reliance (QoP 201-206; S x-xi). To a large extent these positive qualities reside with those who have not tormented and who have helped each other in their distress - the women in the community. Head's vision of social wholeness remains highly constructed: it is carefully orchestrated in its selection of voices; the smooth, "flat continuity" (S xi) of quotidian life is made more smooth by the linearity of text. Yet the textual reconstitution of a community also entails an important reimaging of women's roles and social participation - their emblematisation, as with Kenosi in A Question of Power, as simultaneously "goddesses and housekeepers [my emphasis]" (QoP 201). Via the

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[84] Her second novel, Maru (London: Heinemann, 1987; first published 1971), based on her own experiences of ostracism, is concerned with racial prejudice in Botswanan society. Susan Gardner, "Bessie Head: Production Under Drought Conditions," Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology, ed. Cherry Clayton (Marshalltown: Heinemann, 1989) 229-230, has commented that Head refused "any nationalist or pan-African pressures on her work."

representation of the quiet, creative Kenosi, Head's characterisation of women graduates from the allegorical in A Question of Power to the local and specific in Serowe and The Collector of Treasures. For reason of that specificity and realism, Head must concede that women mostly "just go on having babies" (QoP xi). But at the same time, by dramatising themes of social disruption, patriarchal disregard and women's own protective solidarity, she ascribes to the mundane drudgery of being female in her adopted society a centrality and specialness.

Dorothy Driver has proposed that Head's "solution" to the oppressive patriarchy of her adopted community lies as much in a "feminization" of the father figure as in the individual reconnection with the community.[85] In "The Collector of Treasures," the "ideal husband" figure, Paul Thebolo, devotes himself to family life, and is said to be "a poem of tenderness" (CoT 93). However, it is still important to point out that, though this sentimental reformulation of maleness was crucial for Head,[86] it stands alongside an unabated interest in the lives of women: their strength, friendships, and capacity for caring and endurance make up the substance of her stories. From the point of view of sociological change, this focus on women is also more

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[85] Driver 14.

[86] Its homophobia should not go unheeded.

connected with the actualities of women's lives than the conversion of male roles. As Head suggests, migrant labour and male urban migration literally "feminised" Botswanan communities while brutalising the men - who then abused the women (CoT 105-106). The strengthening, rallying forces represented by women in The Collector of Treasures stories (and also in A Question of Power) counterbalance the evils of a dehumanised patriarchy - and also creatively fill the spaces where patriarchy is absent.

Life (pronounced as two syllables), in the story of the same name (CoT 37-46), is a prostitute who returns home from Johannesburg, brings disruption to her village, and is then killed for her pleasures by the husband she has married, one who "takes his dominance and success for granted" (CoT 41). The story dramatises the commonplaces of the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the uncompromising vengefulness of insulted patriarchy. Yet contained within the single-track story is also the portrait of a fierce and wayward female exuberance. Though the narrator clearly disapproves of Life's undisciplined sexuality, and though Life and her husband at the end make up a conventional figure of unresolvable conflict between "two worlds" (CoT 46), equally important in the tropography of the story is the image of the lusty resistance of Life and of the beer-brewing women who surround her, who have found ways not only of surviving but of enjoying

themselves in defiance of patriarchal law. Because Life remains to some extent oppressed by her experiences in the city, it is to her women friends in particular that these comments apply: they are the ones who have life. Their independence and irrepressible vitality contrast profoundly with the image of the "little girls" of the village, described in another story as "[adoring]" the tasks assigned them, "household chores and drawing water" (CoT 69). Life's friends may remain formally subject to "the respectable order of village life" (CoT 39), yet they work hard at the art of getting by equitably. They congregate around Life, "their queen" (CoT 43), celebrate with her when times are carefree, work with her when her husband enforces his patriarchal rules. Most important of all, however, in view of Head's own practice is that, like Nwapa's community of women, the women of the village are said to have "developed a language all their own" (CoT 39, 40). They loudly announce their independence, and their defiance is reinforced by performative claims: "We are women and must do something" (CoT 43).

Women's solidarity and defiance is given more pointed expression in the eponymous "The Collector of Treasures" (CoT 87-103), a story which encapsulates a number of Head's concerns. It is here that she makes her bid for a new social responsibility on the part of men. Significantly, in view also of Driver's two "solutions," the story operates at two

levels: there is the evocation of the New Man Paul Thebolo, peaceable, considerate, and charitable, but the catalyst of the story is Dikeledi, his neighbour and his wife's intimate friend. Dikeledi, we learn at the start, has murdered her husband after years of abuse and unhappiness by "cutting off his special parts with a knife" (CoT 89). The story opens with her arrival in gaol, then moves back in time, to her village, to situate her crime. The two locations, and also the two levels of the story, are reconciled by the presence of Dikeledi and by the motif of sharing and friendship which she represents. In gaol, Dikeledi and her fellow-inmate Kebonye form "one of those deep, affectionate, sharing-everything kind of friendships that only women know how to have" (CoT 94). Dikeledi has had a similar sort of friend in Kenalepe, Paul's wife. As also in "Life," these friendships are a means of survival, a bond against the world of men.

However idealised this formulation of female relationship may be, Head here witnesses to the same creative or restorative powers of women's community that Bâ built into the dialogic framework of her novel, that Nwapa observed in the village compound, and that Emecheta located in matrilineal ties. In almost every case, too, this community is set up as an alternative or counterbalance to a male sphere, community or fraternity - realised most recently, as most of these writers recognise, in the form of the nation. As demonstrated

by Head in Serowe, but also by Nwapa's choric techniques and Bâ's epistolary writing and matri-centric communal ideal, the attempt to embody this community or communality in story, gives these women writers both a subject and what might be called mode of narrative colloquy, a way of writing aslant the normative tradition that is distinctive, regenerative, and enabling. Polyphony in their hands becomes not only a way of celebrating plurality, or a type of rhetoric, but a political statement. In part reflexively commenting on her own style, Head is also evoking something of the practice - or of the narrative themes - of the writers discussed above when, in the last tale of her collection, she describes a woman relating bits of village news to her husband:

> She had the capacity to live with the conflicts of life in a way he had not. Like all women, she was involved in village gossip and disputes....but the richness of her communication lay in her gift to sift and sort out all the calamities of everyday life with the unerring heart of a good story-teller (CoT 108-109).

For these women, dramatising the muddle of life in speech is a way of making it bearable.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Recreative Partiality and New Susceptibility": A Second Phase of African National Writing

> In this bleak context, it would seem to me, what is required at a certain level - if a new dialogue is to begin to emerge - is a penetration of partial images, not a submission to the traditional reinforcement of partiality into total or absolute institution; partiality may then begin to declare itself for what it is and to acquire a re-creative susceptibility to otherness in a new and varied evolution of community within a fabric of images in fiction and drama; it may begin to evolve inner links or correspondences with stranger cultures (that in their turn confess to their recreative partiality and new susceptibility), so that all in all a movement occurs towards a goal of profound self-awareness, a goal that remains ceaselessly unfinished or drawn towards futurity in an intricate play of partial image upon partial image open to mutual re-visualisations, intricate exploration backwards and forwards within a world that alters to re-educate itself into flexible limits in the living we take for granted as exploiters and exploited, in the dead whose tongues of fire we need to cultivate into reflexes of self-judgement.[1]
>
> That we are surrounded by deep mysteries is known to all but the incurably ignorant. But even they must concede the fact, indeed the inevitability, of the judiciously spaced, but nonetheless certain, interruptions in the flow of their high art to interject the word of their sponsor, the divinity that controls remotely but diligently the transactions of the market-place that is their world.[2]

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[1] Wilson Harris, "The Complexity of Freedom," Explorations 116.

[2] Chinua Achebe, Anthills of the Savannah (London: Heinemann, 1987) 102.

Judging from the contributions discussed in the last chapter, African women writers in the recent past have begun to raise their voices at the door of the nationalist literary sanctum: they are beginning to disavow official national signifiers, to demand different terms of identity or, as Homi Bhabha has expressed it in another context, to draw on their marginal, unlawful or "inappropriate" experience to produce displacements of national value.[3] But, given that a grievance earlier levelled against nationalism was in part directed at its gender-specifics, one may register some discomfort if writing against nationalism also looks to be a specifically gendered activity. Because women were and are marginalised by nationalism - the ground or objects of its discourse, not its main spokespersons - their critical position was understandable. Yet it is still worth asking whether a transformative or 'liberationist'[4] narrative, which would challenge the unanimistic and the patriarchal in nationalism and find virtue in multiplicity, in all cases requires 'a

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[3] Homi Bhabha, Signs Taken for Wonders," "Race," Writing and Difference 163-184, especially 180-182.

[4] This term, adapted from Edward W. Said, Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature 15-18, describes the "second moment" of release from the struggle against colonialism (though Said's interpretation maintains a more nationalist slant than that intended here). It is this phase which would theoretically follow after the period of "nativism," or of essentialist, reductive nationalism. The idea is based on what Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 163-164, urges as the "step that must be taken from national consciousness to political consciousness."

woman's eye', or an apportioning, as was compound space in Nwapa's novels, into self-enclosed and self-enclosing gendered areas?

When correlated with the gender of the writers, the textual evidence cited thus far might suggest that an unfair case has been made against the work of male, and in most cases nationalist, writers. Whereas certain of the novels by women writers appeared in the late Seventies and Eighties, examples of male nationalist writing were drawn mainly from earlier decades. This weighting was to a great extent expedient: few women were writing during the independence era - hence the choice of Nwapa as representing a unique and crucial contribution. More to the point, the Fifties and early Sixties constituted the age of high nationalism; it was then that the confident work of nationalist sons, and the overtopping symbols of a newly-achieved and self-conscious territorial pride, dominated. Yet in the Seventies and certainly in the Eighties, under pressure of political and cultural changes, attitudes to and representations of the nation have undergone significant transformations. Earlier feelings of pride and confidence in national cohesiveness have been fractured by new uncertainties and questionings. Given also the continuing preponderance of male over female writers in Africa, it might be expected that at least some male

writers will have begun to translate the new dilemmas of identity and national belief into their work.

From the time of Biafra, and continuing through conflicts in such areas as Zaire, Uganda, Western Sahara, and the Sudan, African nationalism as rallying mass-movement or as state ideology has increasingly come into crisis, in some cases appearing in guises either farcical or tragic. Trusty national signifiers have begun to slip. Across the continent, what national integrity and self-esteem was fostered in the Fifties and Sixties has been called into question by a new history of debt-burdens, massive corruption, foreign intervention, and, as Soyinka might say, the play of local tyrannical "giants" or feudal lords. Where national leaders have repressed and looted in the name of the nation, nationalism as official ideology has forfeited its associations with the honour and self-determination of peoples. Intensifying the grim ironies of leadership or sectional wars, economic developments, too, have proved divisive of national unity. Such failures of what is termed the national bourgeoisie - an alienated and status-seeking group - have been elaborately described by Fanon.[5] In addition, with Nkrumah's political and then actual demise, Pan-Africanism, the supra-nationalism which was earlier seen as overarching and completing state-nationalisms, fell out of

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[5] Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 119-165.

favour for a time. Inevitably, as a result of these crises, and especially where artistic activity is restricted in the name of national security, the attitude of writers to African nationalist experience has become more complex, sceptical, and agonistic than in the agitated decades around the time of national independence. Soyinka points out: "few independent African countries today have not experienced the truncation of their artistic and intellectual potential in the process of nation-building."[6] This change in writers' attitudes was first registered in what might be called the novel of disenchantment of the late Sixties and the Seventies, of which Achebe's A Man of the People (1966), Ayi Kwei Armah's The Beautyful Ones are not yet Born (1968), and Ngugi's Petals of Blood (1977) were representative.

Yet, though the literary elite's disenchantment with nation-building may contribute to what could potentially be a discursive displacement in the African novel, displacement itself - if defined as a shift in perspective, style, and representation - is a more composite experience. Disillusion, in other words, is by no means the sole determining agent of change, nor, as a predominantly elite response, does it necessarily signify the complete emptying or invalidation of nationalist ideology. For one, writers, and, even more, the people or nations who are the subjects of their fiction,

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[6] Wole Soyinka, "Twice Bitten" 112.

continue to live within or belong to one or other national reality, even if this is seen as bogus or corrupt. Where other options are unavailable or threatening, national conditions are endured. As Soyinka suggests in "Twice Bitten," dissatisfaction therefore tends to be with specific Sixties and Seventies variants of the ideology and not necessarily with the fact of national self-determination. The monologic tendencies of nationalism, of which its male domination is one expression, may have advanced the fortunes of comprador elites (and vice versa), but this does not signify that certain nationalist creeds - the affirmation of cultural unity, the redemption of the past - will have fallen out of favour.

Of the other catalysts, therefore, which have acted to effect shifts in African writing, an important, even if obvious, factor must be the actual geographical displacement of writers, the kind of partially unintentioned national truancy which has become a condition of being for Third World writers elsewhere in the world too. The repressions and depredations outlined above -in particular, the persecution of artists by autocratic regimes in their home countries - have led to the formation of an international or cosmopolitan elite of post-colonial writers in exile (forced or voluntary).[7]

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[7] Nuruddin Farah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and South African writers in exile are probably the most prominent African members of this group. As writers like Ben Okri and Buchi

This situation has had certain important implications for the fiction which these writers produce. For where the periphery confronts the old imperial centre, literally, on its own ground, and has also to work with the linguistic and economic constraints which affect novelistic consumption in its home territories, it is largely a metropolitan audience to which it addresses itself and metropolitan art forms which it adopts.[8] Former colonials or subalterns have come to view themselves and their terrain, as it were, through the windows of highly-wrought European palaces of narrative and modernist art.

The effects of such inverted ironic perspectives and reverse colonial pilgrimages, in which alienated Others find themselves in the old sites of colonial culture, are manifested in the preoccupations and forms of post-colonial fiction. One of the most prominent of these must be its self-reflexivity: driven by political necessity to confront the conditions of its own being, it is aware of its doubleness of

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Emecheta demonstrate, however, where a cultural or political climate is perceived to be uncongenial to writing, displacement from a home country may be chosen, not forced. Too, the exiled literary elite develops its own logic of existence. For accounts of split writing allegiance, see: Caryl Phillips, "Living and Writing in the Caribbean: An Experiment," Kunapipi xi.2 (1989): 45-50; Nuruddin Farah, "Haunted Beauty of the New Uganda," Weekend Guardian (21-22 October 1989): 5. It may be that the exiled condition of post-colonial writers has encouraged their interest in early twentieth-century modernist art forms.

[8] On the material paradoxes which beset "new novel," see Timothy Brennan, "The national longing for form," Nation and Narration 56.

perspective and of the artifice of its self-fashioning. But, rising out of or co-existing with this self-awareness, as important as defining features are, first, the syncretism and cultural 'deformations' which are the legacy of this fiction - it being influenced, as was already seen with Soyinka, both by indigenous experience and by modernist conventions; and, second, standing alongside this, its in part unconfessed symbiotic and symbolic encounter with post-colonial theory, of which an important feature is a new (though perhaps only partially-awakened) attention to gender issues.[9]

Post-colonial fiction has the potential to enact what Wilson Harris calls a mutual "penetration of partial images" - a tolerant hybridity. This was so in the writing of independence; yet it is perhaps even more self-consciously and energetically the case now. The experience of a fractured history has acted gradually to fissure and undermine the formerly implacable duality of oppressed and oppressor, neo-colonist and colonised. Purisms are eroded: cultural crossings, the noisy congruence of disjunctive aesthetic forces, split and multiply identities and narrative languages, allowing for a Bakhtinian "interanimation" of stances and

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[9] On the nature of this encounter, as well as the difficulties of appropriation associated with it, see Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin, eds., Kunapipi: On Post-Colonial Criticism xi.1 (1989), in particular, Slemon and Tiffin, "Introduction" ix-xxiii; Diana Brydon, "Commonwealth or Common Poverty?" 1-16; and Biodun Jeyifo, "On Eurocentric Critical Theory" 107-118.

styles, the celebration, for example, of indigenous motifs and legends within fictional forms in part taken over from European art. The new interest in identity as plural rather than binary has also brought with it an openness to different perspectives on experience, to previously inarticulate modes of being. In a metropolitan cultural milieu preoccupied by post-modernist decentrings, post-colonial fiction effects its own intensely particular, lived displacements. As Jean Franco has said of Latin American writing, in a world where national "signifiers are prized loose from any signified,"[10] or where national truths come to be perceived as myths or jokes, the new cynical and syncretic writing brings, in Achebe's terms, the "interjection" of new "sponsors": an irreverence before the old doctrines of salvation; the advent of local, and more humble, indigenous divinities and beliefs. Fiction gives intimations of what Soyinka has described as a "second stage, the positive, creative phase of liberation," not liberation from, but self-liberation, "internal reconstruction"[11] - or, as will be seen in Farah, the desire to expand beyond nationalist limitations of identity and milieu.

The dislocations practiced by post-colonial fiction, coupled with its self-awareness, help to resist what is in

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10 Franco, "The Nation as Imagined Community," The New Historicism 205.

11 Soyinka, "Language as Boundary," ADO 143.

part a danger of its temporal conjunction with critical theory - its being appropriated simply as metaphor or exemplifying tool.[12] In fact, to dismiss to a certain extent the fear of "disempowering" by criticism, one might argue that its concrete experience of "decentering" and heterogeneity has made of post-colonial fiction a discourse paradigmatic of new cultural developments. The self-aware, hybrid text creates what are potentially new codes of meaning: metaphor carries embedded in it fresh ideas of self and being, story turns into eschatology. As will be most clearly seen in the discussion of Farah, multi-levelled narrative becomes a way of realising new, displaced - because no longer quite national - modes of being. In Okri, hallucinogenic, disjunctive texts offer mappings of the otherworldly spaces of the post-colonial city, Fanon's "phantasmic plane" of national being.[13] Or, again, as Dangarembga will demonstrate, the private becomes central and text is used to spin legends of self- and not nationhood: in self-reflexive fashion, fiction demonstrates how human beings narrate themselves into meaning. Where the nation no longer offers completely convincing discourses of legitimation,

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[12] Slemon and Tiffin xvi speak also of the dangers of theory "[proceeding] in its decentering work completely without reference to the oppositional, subversive cultural activity of colonised and post-colonial peoples."

[13] Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 43.

literature, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, becomes "a 'non-expository' theory of practice."[14]

It should again be emphasised that, certainly in the case of African writing, the new developments in post-colonial fiction do not necessarily lead to the erasure of cultural particularity or national concerns. As will be seen, writers tend to concentrate on the dilemmas and divisions which beset a particular nation or cultural milieu. They may disgard certain of the "mummified fragments" of national myth, yet this does not imply that they discard the stories of that region, its "hidden life, teeming and perpetually in motion."[15] To show how this is true and to begin to substantiate the above exposition, this chapter will analyse in some depth inaugural or proto-forms of what might be termed the African revisionary novel - or novel of re-imagination[16] - by two of Africa's older writers: Chinua Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah (1987) and Nuruddin Farah's Maps (1986). Attention will be directed at the common defining characteristics of the 'new writing': the loss of faith in received authority and orthodox creed, including ideologies of

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[14] Gayatri Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory," In Other Worlds 85. Jeyifo 109 has described post-colonial texts as "paradigmatic deconstructions." See also Slemon and Tiffin xvii.

[15] Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 180-181.

[16] Building on Benedict Anderson's idea of imagining communities.

liberation; a shift from the national and public into the personal and subjective; a focus on women as heralds of new states of being; and an interest in what might be termed 'aesthetic redemption', the transfiguration of a 'fallen' polity through narrative, symbol and indigenous myth. It should not be expected, of course, that each text show all of these features: Achebe, for example, is more conventional in style and nationalist in orientation than Farah. In course of the analysis, as a way of developing the preoccupations of earlier chapters, reinterpretations of national experience, in particular, will be scrutinised, and, to maintain the gender focus, the effects of this reworking on the representation of women investigated. Do 'transfigurations' also transmute or re-figure the woman as national icon? As part of a 'second moment' of social consciousness, might women not come into prominence as autonomous narrative subjects?

In his paper on Nuruddin Farah's Maps, Simon Gikandi sees the process of redefining nationalism as being well underway in the work of certain African writers. Interest in national questions has increasingly been marked by significant new curiosities - perhaps, one might add, by new uncertainties or evasions. Gikandi claims that writers are becoming more aware of national ideas as "discursive systems," rather than as truths. Observing, along with Achebe, that "it is no

longer enough to cast African culture as one long struggle with colonialism," he goes on to explain

> My thesis here is that a new African literature is emerging in which notions of betrayal and the failure of nationalism are seen as inadequate strategies for representing and explaining a postcolonial situation which is proving to be much more confusing than earlier theories of neocolonialism entail.

Nationalist thinking has reached an impasse of which Ngugi's hero Matigari, in Gikandi's view, is the emblem: he is "bewildered by the postcolonial world precisely because his mode of knowledge is still entrapped in the romance of the nation and of national independence." Matigari's (or Ngugi's?) 'nationalist' problem is that he "still believes that new modes of resistance must...be directed at the European colonizer who is still the source of power for the regime."[17]

Gikandi's thesis serves as a useful introductory application of revisionary ideas to an African literary context. As a way of situating and developing the above discussion of paradigmatic narrative, however, one of his key terms merits elaboration. What he speaks of as writers' "close attention to discursive systems," might be referred to, less restrictively, as an increasing awareness of <u>fictionality</u>. The change of emphasis in this case pivots

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[17] Gikandi, "The Politics and Poetics of National Formation" 3, 4.

around the concept of inventedness or of the imaginary in nationalism. As part of the new awareness of textuality and self-fashioning, where nationalism has come to reveal its contradictions and points of tension, writers - long associated with nationalism in Africa - will more readily become aware of national reality as a thickly textured mat of historical narratives, all of them to some extent untrue, some of them flagrant lies, yet most of them, to one group or other, necessary fantasies. The encounter between theory and fictional practice mentioned earlier is here clearly enacted. A perception that has become the thesis à clef of post-modern theory, came to African writers as part of historical experience: not merely metropolitan encounters, but also political travesties, impossible claims of unity, ideals that did not sort with memories of past polities or present economics - these demonstrated the fictions of which 'reality' is composed. In consequence, narrative and writing, both as discourse and as trope, have, if anything, become more important to writers of the second phase, especially as means of redefining or recomposing a body politic. As Peter Abrahams said long ago in Tell Freedom (1954), it is the story - and the imaginative power and vision it signifies - which becomes the single most dependable and intriguing reality.[18]

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[18] Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom (London: Faber, 1988) 66.

To fill in the contours of the new African novel of re-imagination, the analysis of Achebe and Farah in this chapter will be followed in the next by a reading, as a type of coda to the thesis, of fiction from a younger generation of writers: Ben Okri, in contrast to him a fellow-Nigerian, Festus Iyayi, and the new Zimbabwean woman writer, Tsitsi Dangarembga - with reference also to the writing of the Ghanaian B. Kojo Laing and the Zimbabwean Dambudzo Marechera. The intention will be not simply to find illustrative instances of the new writing and to outline its vision, but also to demonstrate how it might be that such writing re-imagines reality - that is, becomes paradigmatic. The literature comes along with the theory embedded in it - the theory as story, and in the form of story. Or as Ashcroft et al. put it in their study of post-colonial writing:

> the analysis and exegesis of a specific text may be one of the most crucial ways of determining the major theoretical and critical issues at stake. Such analyses are not directed towards totalizing 'interpretations' but towards symptomatic readings which reveal the discursive formations and ideological forces which traverse the text. As a result, readings of individual texts may enable us to isolate and identify significant theoretical shifts in the development of post-colonial writing.[19]

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[19] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989) 83.

1. Chinua Achebe

From the outset it should be stated that Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah[20] does not precisely fit the model of the new African novel of re-imagination: it does not directly criticise, nor indeed address, the concept of the nation-state; it is not the narrative of an exile; thematically, it is a committedly Nigerian and not a cosmopolitan tale. These features may be explained with reference to the specific political sympathies of the author, but should also be placed in the broader context of Nigeria's post-independence history, its fate as "a regionalised state" divided by "tribal" affiliations.[21] Having witnessed the human and psychological costs exacted by Biafra, Achebe has tied his loyalties firmly to the concept of a united Nigeria. The nation for him has become a very present reality: throughout his pamphlet, The Trouble with Nigeria (1983),[22] for example, he repeatedly appeals to Nigeria as national entity and advocates (at least theoretically) patriotism with an explicit national focus (TN 16, 19). He also expresses regret at the havoc "tribe" has

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20 Hereafter Anthills.

21 Though he does not mention specific religious differences, Sam C. Nolutshungu, "Fragments of a Democracy: Reflections on class and politics in Nigeria," TWQ 12.1 (January 1990): 86-115, discusses ethnic and regional divisions and the failure of democracy and elite party politics in Nigeria, and so offers valuable comment on Achebe's political ideology.

22 Chinua Achebe, The Trouble with Nigeria (London: Heinemann, 1987).

caused in Nigeria's history, and rejects "the abortion of a pan-Nigerian vision" that Biafra represented, "the death of a dream-Nigeria in which a citizen could live and work in a place of his choice anywhere" (TN 5).[23] In Anthills, too, Achebe takes the existence of the nation for granted; Kangan of the novel is styled as a type of fictive Nigeria in which the suitability of the nation-state for a future politics is endorsed.

In investigating the African novel of re-imagination as an emerging, plastic form, however, one should be careful not to confine the terms of analysis to single political issues. Direct criticism of the nation need by no means be the defining condition of the new novel; the body politic may be interrogated through means other than a plain abrogation of nationalism. As has been suggested, the revisionary novel is characterised by its open-endedness, its awareness of textuality and the power of story, its interest in possibilities for re-formation brought by outsiders and found in the unknown - that is, in many cases, in the mystical, the

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[23] It is significant that Achebe's "dream" epithet (twice repeated) picks up that idealistic strain of nationalist assertion which was heard also in Emecheta's description of Debbie Ogedemgbe as national "dream-woman." Yet Achebe is to some extent aware of the history of the nation as invention: Nigeria in pre-independence days, he notes, was seen as "a mere geographical expression" (TN 5). Citing the 1960 national anthem, Achebe also comments on the ironic "brotherhood" of nationhood (TN 6), though only insofar as that brotherhood signified fellowship.

fabulistic, and in women. The problems which inhere to this implied equation of 'othernesses' will be considered. For the moment, however, Anthills anticipates a new African writing in several important respects: one, though it avoids nationalist issues, the novel seeks to envision a revised politics for Africa; two, myth and story serve as prominent media of that revisioning; and three, woman is its chief subject and its guiding force.

Nearly twenty-one years in the coming, it was to be expected that, when compared to his last novel of the Sixties, A Man of the People (1966), Anthills would show a marked elaboration in Achebe's novelistic interests.[24] The novel, as Ben Okri remarks, is "his most complex and his wisest book to date."[25] Dealing with the cynical calculations and calcifications of Africa's latter-day power-elite, and the bankruptcy of Sixties and Seventies nepotistic politics, Anthills is in a sense a sequel to A Man of the People (1966), a novel which explored themes of political corruption and military takeover on the eve of Biafra. But Achebe's view of that elite and its politics in the wider African context has become more uncompromising and - at least theoretically - more

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24 Achebe attributes his (novel) writer's block of the Seventies and Eighties to his state of mind after Biafra - "one of the most horrendous wars in modern history." See Charles Trueheart, "Nigerian Novelist Finds his Voice Again," The International Herald Tribune (6-7 February 1988): 20.

25 Ben Okri, The Observer (20 September 1987).

attuned to gender and populist issues. Unlike in the earlier novel, the elite can no longer be expected merely to engage in dramatic but gratuitous actions in defence of its political honour. Rather, it must decisively take a lead, and turn outwards to the nation in doing so. Achebe signals this change in attitude by admitting to his narrative representative members of 'the people' - taxi-drivers, a shop assistant, a market woman, the urban poor.

In creating a populist inclusiveness, Achebe may to some extent be suspected of deliberate design.[26] This impression is reinforced by the somewhat determined development of the novel's two main heroes: Ikem Osodi, the poet-journalist, comes to realise the importance of establishing "vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed...the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (141), and Chris Oriko, carrying Ikem's light, forges contacts outside his elite group. The charge of deliberateness, however, should not disparage what is Achebe's obvious commitment to envisaging a future for his depressed nation and continent. Expressing at once mature disillusionment and heavily-

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26 Martin Turner, review, "The story is our escort," Wasafiri 9 (Winter 88/89): 31-32, has commented that Anthills shows signs of a "flirtation with bien passant ideology." Odia Ofeimun, The Guardian, Lagos (20 November 1987), concurs, observing that Achebe has been learning from new trends in literature, and to some extent still shows himself to be a neophyte, the contemporary themes having been rather roughly assimilated into the plot.

qualified fresh hope, his tentative new vision - or attempt at a vision - is communicated both structurally and stylistically. For example, several characters dominate centre stage and pidgin is taken more seriously as a lingua franca than in previous novels - it is the first language of Ikem's girl-friend, Elewa (though it may for that reason also mark her as outsider). Most significant perhaps is the emblematic placing of central characters: where the novel opens with paranoid manoeuvres within a male elite determined to keep hold of power,[27] it ends with a celebratory naming ritual involving three key female figures: Beatrice, Chris's old girlfriend, and a new priestess of the goddess, Idemili, Elewa, and Elewa's child by Ikem, called Amaechina, "May-the-path-never-close" (222). Headed by the powerful Idemili 'taliswoman', and together with its affiliates from various classes, urban and rural,[28] this sisterhood signifies a potential new alliance of power, the beginning perhaps of a new era for Africa. The question to ask, however, is whether the new alliance remains in the main emblematic, a public enshrining of a canonised and perhaps stereotyped womanly

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27 Ofeimun, Lagos Guardian, suggests that the troika signifies similar triumvirates in Nigeria's history - that, for example, of Awolowo, Azikiwe, and Ahmadu Bello/Abubakar Balewa.

28 The potential new alliance, including a taxi-driver and an army captain, is significantly inclusive of important classes. Weighed against this is the fact that Chris is later killed by one of 'the people'.

power set up as a last resort in the face of a depraved political situation?

Of the "little clique" that found itself in a leadership position at independence, Achebe has noted that it "was not big enough...it had no perception of incorporating others."[29] In Anthills he has tried for incorporation - that is, he has attempted to stage a type of Gramscian top-down or "passive revolution," one that operates through the appropriation of popular elements by an elite.[30] He has shifted authority out and away from the group that inherited state power in the Sixties, those first "interpreters" of African nationalism, and, in so doing, has called into question certain of the more inappropriate or destructive political conceptions that subtended the ruling ethos - the assumption of exclusiveness of the leadership, for example, and its unambiguous maleness. The challenge of the investigation thus depends heavily on his portrayal of the new leaders and, in particular, on the viability of the class and gender constitution of the reformed ruling group.

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[29] Anna Rutherford, "Interview with Achebe," Kunapipi ix.2 (1987): 3.

[30] See Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought 29-30, 45-49, for an adaptation of the Gramscian concept of passive revolution to colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Light is shed on the political conception behind Anthills in The Trouble with Nigeria, the pamphlet which Achebe wrote as an injunction to Nigeria just before the 1983 election scandal. This debacle, in which Shagari was deposed, led to the military rule first of Buhari and then of the present ruler, Babangida. "The trouble with Nigeria," as Achebe cites the popular expression in that text, is, quite bluntly, the "indiscipline" of its leaders (TN 1). The term "indiscipline," which became current during Shagari's term of office, refers to the state of corruption, near "lawlessness," and gross abuse of public responsibility to which Nigeria was reduced by two decades of independent government (TN 27). It points most specifically to the unexplained mass leakage of the late Seventies oil millions into foreign bank accounts (TN 2-3).[31] Though the malaise is social, its root cause and primary cure are to be found not in society at large, but in the nation's leadership. Leaders combine and so compound their lawlessness with influence and power:

> [They] are, in the language of psychologists, role models. People look up to them and copy their actions....Therefore if a leader lacks discipline the effect is apt to spread automatically down to his followers (TN 31).

The theory of strong and responsible leadership exercises Achebe throughout the pamphlet. Africa's national

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[31] See Chinua Achebe, "What has literature got to do with it?" Hopes and Impediments 107.

leaders have become its curse - but, he believes, they might be its salvation. Noteworthy in this diagnosis is his focus on character and role models in favour of class or neo-colonial factors. His intention in The Trouble is admittedly to castigate and to exhort; in considering Nigeria's problems, he is not directly concerned with economic causes and effects. Yet, addressing Nigeria's elite as himself a self-conscious member of that group (for example, TN 22 and 53), Achebe is also entirely unambivalent in his view of leadership as the chief pivot of political and also of economic transformation. Though he believes that the advent of a new leader should be followed by "a radical programme of social and economic re-organization or at least a well-conceived and consistent agenda of reform" (TN 1), he sees the first step in any process of change as being new rulership, in effect, the intervention of personality.[32]

If in The Trouble with Nigeria Achebe castigates a corrupt African elite, in Anthills he sets about deposing one. In the process, developing some of the concepts he introduces in the pamphlet, he begins to suggest what sort of leadership it is that might come in its place. Chris Oriko dies with the phrase "the last green [bottle]" on his lips (216, 231) - it is a cryptic reference to his own description of the

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[32] For a comparable view of the role played by leadership structures rather than class in defining the political make-up of Nigeria, see Nolutshungu 86-115.

increasingly more inward-looking and alienated rulers of the nation, Kangan. In her revelatory conversation with Ikem, Beatrice comments that, from the point of view of the three men trained for power at "Lord Lugard College,"[33] "[t]he story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you" (66). During what will be the last days of his life, Chris comes to the same realisation:

> We? Who are we? The trinity who thought they owned Kangan as BB once unkindly said? Three green bottles. One has accidently fallen; one is tilting. Going, going, bang! Then we becomes I, becomes imperial We (191).

In part a joke about Sam being left alone in power, the "imperial We" reference is also Chris's final comment on the obsession with power that, in different ways, motivated each member of the trinity.[34] Ironically, however, after the demise of the troika, a highly exclusive elite "we" will still remain in place. The group that coheres around Beatrice is to be the catalyst of the future - as Achebe has remarked: "the ultimate responsibility for getting us out of this bad patch is with the small group of people who, in one way or another, find themselves in positions of leadership."[35] Within this

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[33] That is, Sam, the present military Chief of State, Chris, his Commissioner for Information, and Ikem himself, the Editor of the National Gazette.

[34] Neal Ascherson, review of Anthills, "Betrayal," NYR (3 March 1988): 4, comments: "The three murders, senseless as they are, represent the departure of a generation that compromised its own enlightenment for the sake of power - even the power of bold opposition enjoyed by Ikem Osodi."

[35] Rutherford 2

small group, the tendencies to nepotism and corruption which have compromised elite rulers in the past will presumably be mitigated by the advent of woman's salubrious force. This does not, however, take away from the fact that the group retains its exclusive elite structure. Moreover, if woman is to be included because she is uncorrupted by power, once party to power, how is she to uphold that force for good? For these sorts of reasons, it would not be difficult to dismiss Achebe's political hope in Anthills as revisionist, liberal-humanist, and excessively idealist.[36] Yet, remembering his disillusionment with the master plans of political revolution, might his attitude not equally be interpreted as cynically pragmatist - a self-conscious making do, and making over, with the resources available, coupled with a kind of rogue idealism grounded in indigenous spirituality?

The poet-hero, Ikem, with whom Achebe can be closely identified, elaborates this political vision - or "new radicalism" (158) - in the incendiary speech to the University which is the immediate cause of his arrest and murder.[37] One of Ikem's main intentions in this speech is to distance

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[36] Though he does not comment specifically on Anthills, Chidi Amuta, The Theory of African Literature 64, 122, 128, refers to Achebe as a bourgeois "liberal reformist."

[37] For a discussion of Achebe's endorsement of Ikem's views, see David Maughan-Brown, paper, "Anthills of the Savannah's solution to The Trouble with Nigeria," ACLALS Conference, University of Kent, Canterbury, 29 August 1989: 4-5.

himself from revolutionary theories, in this way not merely anticipating the charge of elitist reformist, but also dismissing it as unproductive and obsolete. Though he is to some extent wilfully obtuse (154-155), Ikem is unambiguous in his rejection of text-book revolutionary orthodoxies both as presumptuously alien (158), and as being too theoretical within specific African or Kanganian contexts.[38] The abstractions of such theories have permitted every sort of misinterpretation and licence on the part of their proponents. Yet, as he has already enjoined Beatrice, "[n]one of this is a valid excuse for political inactivity or apathy....the knowledge of it [is] the only protective inoculation we can have against false hopes" (100). His political ideal, as was Achebe's in The Trouble with Nigeria, is to "re-form [society] around...its core of reality" (100), that is, to develop its inner strengths, not to impose theories upon it. In typically metaphysical terms, he wishes "to connect his essence with earth and earth's people" (140-141), yet at the same time remains aware of the classic dilemma of radical intellectuals, namely that the knowledge and experience which constitute their power, also isolate them. In deeply ironic fashion, his

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[38] To illustrate his point, Ikem runs through a list of conventional revolutionary groupings, none of which is found to be 'present' in the hall. He is being perversely cynical, yet he speaks with the history of Africa's failed 'democratic' revolutions behind him. Liberatory ideologies, in Ikem's view, have had no regard for the particularities and the subtle, micro-momentary movements of specific national histories (99-100), and have thus become themselves oppressive (159).

belief in indigenous sources of healing tags Ikem's status as outsider, one who appreciates rituals as an observer, but does not live them. Similarly, Beatrice, although a bearer of redemptive vision, cannot be called a representative member of the earth's core: she is a special icon, not a people's goddess. As in the pamphlet, therefore, the problem of establishing an adequate and effective relationship between the elite and the people remains. Anthills does not entertain the possibility of Gramscian-type "organic intellectuals" emerging from the populace to forge alliances with the elite.

The point of resolution to which Ikem's meditations lead is again captured in Achebe's idea of incorporation, or broadening from the top - as opposed to, say, democratisation or widening from the base: "You have to broaden out so that when you are talking you are talking for the people, you are not only talking for a section or a group interest."[39] Given the need for an elite and therefore for hierarchy, the main possibility of reconciliation lies in building and extending person-to-person connections across class, gender and state hierarchies. The intention is to maintain an elite leadership within a national framework, but to change its style: to develop responsibility, a new gendered image of power, not a little scepticism and a broader support base - in general to "widen the scope" (158). The leaders approach the "owners" of

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[39] Rutherford 3.

the country in order to take into their bosom certain of their number. So Beatrice, inspirer and new seer, becomes the informing centre of a reformed select group drawn from various social sectors. According to the leit-motif of the novel, in the anthill that survives after the fires of the harmattan, Beatrice is the queen, keeping the colony together. As with Yeats's interlocking gyres, though things threaten to fall apart, though old vortices implode and collapse, centres - stable "cores of reality" (leaders, elites, women as dispensers of succour) - are needed if there is to be movement and change.

Yet an important question which remains unanswered. How is the broadened, non-sectional elite is to maintain its structural integrity, as well as its identity as elite, following the broadening process? It seems unlikely that this process is always to be as conveniently ad hoc as is the formation of the group around Beatrice. How to avoid the appearance of tokenism? Where are the likely candidates - women, 'people' - to be found? How might an exclusive Idemili cult be adopted by the mass? At this point, where questions of political definition and structuration arise, Achebe, as it were, purposively intervenes in his narrative, transposing such difficulties into the medium of the imaginary rather than trying for some sort of practical resolution. Just as story transmits the visions of the past into the future, so

Anthills, the African story as novel, carries its own vision of the future in appropriately figural terms. Achebe's transposition is in a number of ways, quite clearly, an avoidance technique, literally, a displacement of the problem. In terms of the revolutionary or Marxist theory - the "orthodoxies of deliverance" (99) - Ikem derides, the cop-out is patently obvious: existing economic and political structures remain firmly entrenched; a soft-core middle-class moralism is reinforced. In addition, from a gender perspective, by presenting the sisterhood's investiture as in the main symbolic, the danger is again that woman's conventional position as inspirational symbol - the mentor who is never a full political actor - is entrenched.

Yet Achebe has prepared for his caveat by eulogising the power and importance of story-telling in the novel - in particular through the rhetoric of the old man from Abazon (122-128), in the hymns and the poetic role of Ikem, and in the apotheosis of Beatrice. For the present, the nation is to be redeemed metaphorically - or perhaps metaphysically - only: that is, by London-educated civil servants turning into Igbo priestesses, by syncretic ritual and emblematic cross-class and -ethnic alliances. Achebe's general idea seems to be that, in the African context, where much theory has already been uselessly imposed, political postulates, such as those set out in The Trouble, do not of themselves offer hope of

regeneration. Not by way of clichés from other histories and struggles, but in the figures of gods and rituals drawn from its own local cultures, can the nation (whether Kangan or Nigeria) interpret present confusion and conceive of a new future - or as Beatrice puts it, "[hack] away in the archetypal jungle and [subvert] the very sounds and legends of daybreak to make straight the way" (109).[40] This is related to Ikem's idea - which in turn bears resemblance with the thought of Bessie Head - that humanity be re-formed around what lies within it; that, where "times" will always "come round again out of story-land" (33), one should draw on history as it is and has been lived.

Because the metaphoric and rather allusive images of a future dispensation give primary colour to the hope of Anthills -and to Achebe's own hope for the African nation - the techniques employed in evoking his vision, and, in particular, the relation between ideas of narrative transcendence and symbols of women, should be defined more clearly. Significant emblematic elements appear in Ikem's two dense prose poems (30-33 and 102-105): here masculine images of power and agency are juxtaposed with the feminine associations of peace and reconciliation, reflecting a dichotomous symbology reminiscent of the nationalist writers

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[40] On interpreting the past "creatively," see also Rutherford 4.

discussed earlier. Yet the final scene at Beatrice's flat, in dramatising and unifying Achebe's symbolic meanings, demands the focus of attention. Beatrice, for one, as prefigurement of a gynocentric spiritual way, harbinger of a new politics, stands as a kind of a representative centrepiece for the novel of re-imagination. But other important symbols are also brought to the shrine that is variously Beatrice's flat, site of her celebrants' meeting, or the last chapter that she dominates as goddess emblem. Especially significant as endorsements of the new vision of woman are the pledge to Kangan and the future (we see that the national entity is not in question), and the explication in appropriately elegiac terms of Chris's final pronouncement on Africa's redundant leadership.

First, however, some comment on the techniques of symbolisation in the novel. Though it may at first seem paradoxical, the author's understated, not to say prosaic approach in Anthills is well-suited to his 'mystic' purposes. An illustrative comparison which comes to mind is that of Eliot's The Waste Land. The relatively thin plot of Anthills, the laconic comments and diffused consciousness of characters,[41] the embedded symbols of sun power and of

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[41] At times indeed, as his pronouns suggest, Achebe loses control of narrative perspective in representing consciousness. See the portrayal of Beatrice's consciousness on 180 and 183.

Beatrice's goddess status, suggest that explanation for such symbols must be sought at wider and encircling arcs of, possibly mythic, meaning. Then, too, important developments are reflected in unemphatic comments or single, apparently unimportant events, and add to the sense of mystery. From the simple initial act of having pointed Ikem in the direction of his vision of woman (96), through being flippantly called a prophetess by Chris, we find Beatrice metamorphosed through sorrow (her suffering is stated not dramatised) into a priestess of Idemili, "the unknown god [my emphasis]" (224) - and also a leader of the naming ceremony (replacing the traditional position of father or male family head (222)). Whether the cross-reference is intentional or not, Achebe rather appropriately draws on the same redemptive Igbo tradition of female devotion and worship as did Nwapa in Efuru.[42] With her moral authority, goddess-like carriage and capacity for mediation and inspiration, Beatrice has recognisably become a daughter of the Idemili described in the myth told by Ikem:

> In the beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of

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[42] Idemili is the equivalent of the Woman of the Lake. See also Amadiume, Male Daughters 99-105. It is significant, however, that Achebe continues to draw on specifically Igbo symbols in a novel that takes Kanganian (Nigerian?) national unity as a political given.

> authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty [my emphasis] (102).[43]

Yet the incarnation of Idemili is not only a redemption of the present political situation, or of the neglect of the goddess in the past.[44] Beatrice's spiritual power as a blessed woman, a Dantean avatar perhaps - attended by Elewa, child of the people and bearer of the seed of a poet, and a new child, a girl with a male name - also signifies the coming of a new order, thus fulfilling Ikem's final vision of Woman as adopting a new and yet-to-be-imagined role (98).

The potential of Woman as celebrated at the end of Anthills represents a significant advance in the African novel, being most distinguished perhaps by Achebe's refusal to dictate how that potential will be fulfilled (98).[45] Woman is indeed the prefiguring subject of a new social and political vision. Yet at the same time, despite the efforts at 'rescheduling' power, it still cannot be denied that the way in which Achebe privileges Woman continues to bear familiar

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[43] Certain parallels may be drawn between Ikem's myth and events in the novel (on his way to Beatrice's for the last visit, for example, Ikem runs into a storm, the "pillar of water" symbol of Idemili). See Fiona Sparrow, review, "Chinua Achebe, Anthills of the Savannah," WLWE 28.1 (Spring 1988): 58-63.

[44] Ikem's observation, that myth has been used to marginalise women, is echoed by Achebe. See Rutherford 4, and "Achebe on editing," WLWE 27.1 (Spring 1987): 1-5, especially 2.

[45] Rutherford 4.

markings for gender, and that this may compromise his re-imaged hope. Symptomatic of his difficulties is Elewa's transmogrification through the implantation of Ikem's seed (184). As part of the same symbolic logic, Amaechina's name - May-the-path-never-close - is translated as the "Shining Path of Ikem" (222). The implicit idea of inheritance along a male line - of masculine influence as life-giving, and of man as passing the rod of leadership on to woman - can of course be justified in terms of Achebe's belief in continuity: "The remnant-shall-return" (222). Yet it equally signifies that maleness remains potently generative: as Beatrice discovers the day she dances with His Excellency, "the royal python" still stirs "[gigantically]" in the "shrubbery" of Idemili's shrine (81)! Gender-specific spheres of influence remain in force. In their time-honoured way, women in Anthills, especially the heroine who lacks "book," wield power chiefly through sex and their bodies, whereas man continues to control the word (Ikem's poetry) and also, we presume, the rule of the word that is politics. As in earlier nationalist writing, the artist, the one who defines first the vision of the future and transmits the myths of the people, is male.[46] Towards the end of the novel, it is true, a woman does decisively obtain

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[46] Ifi Amadiume, "Class and Gender in Anthills of the Savannah," PAL-Platform 1.1 (March 1989): 9, has also suggestively pointed out that, while the Almighty in Ikem's myth is male, she knows of "no translation from Igbo which would render God a he and a man." In addition, Amadiume believes, Idemili in the Igbo pantheon is usually not given a father.

control of vatic power. Yet one must still ask to what extent Beatrice's induction into the cult of Idemili is in part a development of another stereotype, the inverse of the image of woman as unclean, or as body? As with earlier evocations of Mothers of Africa, Woman is represented as mystical, in touch with the unknown, as mentor or genius of the nation. Is it therefore still the case that the 'woman solution' is to be effected primarily on symbolic ground?

As problematic as cross-gender filiation, are relationships within 'the sex'. In this case, differences of class complicate gender status. Again Beatrice plays the central role while Elewa - or perhaps Ikem - is the main catalyst of the situation. The conflict arises during the time of crisis after Ikem's death when Agatha, Beatrice's maid, will not serve Elewa because she is of her own class. Beatrice then treats Agatha roughly, pushing her aside to do the job herself. At this point Achebe equips his chief heroine with a fair amount of defensive rationalisation: she is concerned to repeat that Elewa's "emergent consciousness" has acted with transfiguring power, singling her out from the mass represented by Agatha. It is this special "almost godlike" touch which, in addition to being "Ikem's girl," Beatrice concludes, has "[transformed] a half-literate...girl into an object of veneration" (184), and someone she is able

to befriend.[47] Beatrice makes quite clear that the "complaining millions of men/ Who darken in labour and pain," are to be saved, not by their own efforts, but by those with inner light. It is not specified however how the elite of enlightened humans - even if female - are to interact with those in the masses, like Agatha, who do not have a capacity for "luminosity" (unless this is sympathetically transfused), or, given that class barriers remain in place, do not come into contact with those who have light. We are confronted with a familiar problem: how does one begin to conceptualise and to constitute the enlarged caucus of the new elite?

These difficulties are serious, especially as Achebe would want his novel to give hints and guesses of a new and 'regendered' order. Yet, even if with the ironic effect of accentuating the symbolic status of the New Woman, Achebe to some extent covers himself by his insistence on the primacy of story and metaphor, and on the importance of woman's place in myth. Therefore, to criticise him for inconsistencies or moments of oversight is in effect not to give sufficient regard, as he so emphatically does, to the redemptive art of narration and composition, and the metaphysics of that art. "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?" asks

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47 Remembering the title and also the dichotomous characterisation of the girl/militiawoman, Gladys, in Achebe's short story, "Girls at War," this progression from "girl" into sanctified object is revealing. Achebe, Girls at War 103-123.

Beatrice. The answer is there in the eyes of her guests: they recognise in her act of articulation "the return of utterance to the sceptical priest struck dumb for a season by the Almighty for presuming to set limits to his competence [my emphasis]" (220). "Truth is beauty," Beatrice explains at the very end of the novel - it is the truth that lies in the last image of Chris withstanding his assailants like "Kunene's Emperor Shaka" (233);[48] and the truth contained in the prominent image of the anthills holding their own truth of the past. Implanted in the "truth [is] beauty" postulate is an inevitable suggestion of abstraction from real, material life: it is in keeping with this that Beatrice's new vocation, if we are to believe Nwapa, demands retreat from the everyday. Yet Beatrice's assertion is also a practical adaptation of the doctrine of aesthetic appreciation to a context, where, as Soyinka also held, myth and ritual continue to thrive as living presences, as beauties of ceremony to be redeemed for their truth, their lived reality, as much as for their patterned form.

Especially where, as in the cheapened quotidian reality of a Third World dictatorship, neither is found in great abundance, Achebe appears to want to hold the two ideals,

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[48] Significantly, the allusion is not to the earlier, more (missionary) Christian and less nationalistic Shaka of Thomas Mofolo.

truth and beauty, in balance, the one intimating or anticipating the other:

> Man's best artifice to snare and hold the grandeur of divinity always crumbles in his hands. And the more ardently he strives the more paltry and incongruous the result. So it were better he did not try at all; far better to ritualize that incongruity and by invoking the mystery of metaphor to hint at the most unattainable glory by its very opposite, the most mundane starkness - a mere stream, a tree, a stone, a mound of earth, a little clay bowl containing fingers of chalk (103).

So, just as a relatively ordinary woman may become, through her spiritual understanding, an example or "shining path" to her companions, in the same way an ordinary stick in the sand is transformed through ritual into a pillar of Idemili, the connection with "earth and earth's people." The real functions as index to the beautiful. In this way, too, a random collection of individuals can come to represent the ritual passage into the future of another Kangan. In 'serious' politics, symbols and supernatural signs such as these might seem superficial or insignificant, yet need not be, especially where other options are unsteady or have failed. More than this, symbols stand for points of intersection with, as Achebe would have it, the very present divine: as introjections of spirit, "transactions" between the marketplace and the gods. In a way, by urging such transactions, Achebe recalls Yeats's faith in the regenerative powers of ritual, his emphasis on the value of custom and ceremony, and on the importance of the quotidian symbolic.

Yet Firinne Ni Chréachain, a Marxist critic, has also conceded:

> The neocolonial world...is a place of the greatest insecurity. It is wracked by external dependency and internal contradictions. Today, you have a job, tomorrow...you have lost it. Today you are minister, tomorrow you have fallen from your tower. In such a world, the supernatural can still have a field day.[49]

Alongside such concessions, however, we must also remember that Achebe's vision, as reflected in the main through Ikem, is not all metaphysical. There are two main points to be made here: one has to do with Achebe's gendered political understanding, and so, by implication, with nationalist representation, while the second is a more general assessment of the political vision of Anthills. First, then, though taking into account the reservations registered above, it should be acknowledged that the recognition Achebe grants to women can be seen as an adaptation on a national scale of the gender separation which was a source of local strength in Nwapa and also in Head. His message seems to be that, with the resounding failure of male leaders, women must now forge a national politics through exercising the humanity and compassion which, in his view, they seem to possess.[50] Where nationalism, in Africa as elsewhere, has been characterised by

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[49] Firinne ni Chréachain, paper, "The Beggars' Strike: A Lumpen Revolution," ASCALF Conference, Institut Francais, London, 24 November 1989: 15.

[50] See Rutherford 4.

chauvinism, aggression, and recourse to militarism, his suggestion represents at the least a pertinent, though belated, intervention. In addition, despite his silence on the subject, one might also ask whether the changes he envisages could not have a knock-on or catalytic effect on existing conceptions of the nation also? If nationalism is dependent on a patriarchal state and a gendered symbolic system, and if, at the same time, social reconstitution is to take the form of a gendered power reversal, might the shifts in spiritual and temporal power not subject nationalism as understood and practiced to strong pressure to change?

On the other hand, however, because Beatrice et al inherit the elite power system, the mechanisms of state, and the ideology that go under the name of Kangan or Kanganism, the new Kangan may look like little more than the old nation with a change of resolve and heart at the top. That Achebe has in Anthills transposed Igbo signifiers into the explicitly non-ethnic language of Kanganian national identity, confirms his loyalty to the idea of the nation-state. Unlike in his other novels, the references to or symbols of Igbo-ness (the figure of Idemili, Ikem's legends, the naming ritual, the speech patterns of Abazon) are used, not to demarcate a particular community, but as signifiers of a broader Kanganian

identity.[51] One might go so far as to argue that Achebe has worked to make of Kangan the united Nigeria of a new tomorrow. However, given that the nation stands to the state as does culture to administrative unit, does the promotion of the regenerating sorority, representing the renewed spirit of the nation, not maintain the boundaries and interests of a 'woman's sphere', rather than extending its scope? The situation is other than that represented by Nwapa or Head, where women, consistently marginalised, evolved out of their otherness strategies of defence and self-affirmation. For Achebe, in contrast, the gendered differentiation of political modes is represented as an assertion of womanly specialness and so carries with it the danger of a continued objectification of women. As suggested, the resemblance between the Woman symbol of a new dispensation and the icons of conventional nationalism, persists. Unlike the emblems of Igbo life, which are translated into a national symbolic language, the gendered symbology of the new state, although qualitatively modified, does not substantively change.

Weighing against this, however, if Beatrice is considered to represent a reformed national way, it is significant that she stands in juxtaposition to an equally important symbol of new identity and belonging. As epigraph

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[51] In some cases, too, as for example with the speech of the Old Man, the obvious pointers to Igbo identity are erased or downplayed. I am indebted to Odia Ofeimun for these insights.

to Chapter Ten and, in effect, to Ikem's political thought and action, Achebe cites the poem, "Africa," by the late Negritude writer, David Diop (134 and see Ikem's comment 139). Africa in the poem is invoked in the form of two symbols: one of oppression, and a second, which Ikem endorses, of a slow-growing patient tree, bearing the bitter fruit of liberty. The tree signifies the painstaking but dogged acquisition of a political culture - presumably, too, of ways of exercising political and social 'discipline' - at the same time as it gestures at a pre-1957 type of romantic Pan-Africanism.

In his essay "The Writer and His [sic] Community," Achebe quotes the same image to suggest the slow but inevitable growth of a relationship in Nigeria between artist and community.[52] He speaks of the relationship developing despite problems of identity, suggesting not only that national feeling should be integrated into a wider, indigenous cultural system, but also that the sense of belonging might be productively opened up into a broader pan-nationalism. So, too, Farah will invest meaning in an expanded, more generous version of African nationalism. In addition, both writers associate the image of a strong, transcendent female figure with the move (more pronounced and explicit in Farah) beyond national consciousness. The symbolic linkage could be

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[52] Chinua Achebe, "The Writer and His Community," Hopes and Impediments 41.

interpreted in two ways: it might either represent a significant new development - a recognition of the need to transform ossified national and also patriarchal forms, whether in myth or in state structures. Yet it might also signify an attempt to get beyond the colonial nation-state only, in which case the African woman emblem would be confirmed in the continental proportions she already possesses in more conventional Pan-African iconography.

Regarding the second point, that of the political vision of Anthills, Achebe has clearly sought to change the lights and emphases in that post-colonial web of historical consequence in which Africa has been so inextricably caught. Ikem's assessments are in the main too brief or too cursory to suggest the rudiments of a new politics. Yet they do represent at least the first lightenings of a new understanding. One of the reasons why the masterplans evolved for African nations at the time of independence, plans variously socialist, communalist, Africanist, or nationalist - or any combination of these - failed ideologically as well as economically, was because they paid no regard to local particularities, or to the specifics and idiosyncracies of regional historical development. We thus find recent African history littered with the broken shells of impossible populist visions. The problem was, and is, that the everyday process of getting on, which also in this case means getting by, as

well as the seemingly grander "progress in freedom," probably has little to do with millennarian all-encompassing theory (99). It is rather a matter of making do, of ad hoc, unsystematic movement, the gradual acquisition of understanding - what might be called stochastic development or, drawing on Ikem's words, "piecemeal, slow and undramatic" progress (99).[53] This may not suggest much of a salvation for Africa, but, Achebe seems to be suggesting, where megalomaniac dreams have failed, the intention is not the grand illusion: modest hopes and passive transformations "escorted" by symbols and stories might work instead.

2. Nuruddin Farah

Nuruddin Farah's novel, Maps,[54] stands as a fitting companion piece to Anthills of the Savannah, especially in view of the openings it offers for the reconceptualisation of African reality. Though Farah's novel relies less on motifs from oral tradition and more on dream and memory, in Maps, as in Anthills, what has been referred to as the visionary or as revisioning provides a primary morphology for reimagining the political future, with story as its medium. In both novels,

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[53] For an endorsement of the concept of stochastic development as applied to politics, see Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Europe, Europe: Forays into a Continent, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Hutchinson, 1989), especially 36-86, 283-323.

[54] Nuruddin Farah, Maps (London: Picador, 1986).

too, the symbol of woman forms the central ground or stuff of vision, though in Maps the chief woman character is more physically or maternally present, much more flesh and fluid.[55] In comparison with Anthills, Maps would also appear to be intentionally subversive of national meanings, as these pertain both to discourse and writing, and to notions of territory and possession. The Somali nation - its self-definitions, its constructions of race and history - are for Farah a site of tension and contest: his intention is to tell his own tale, the "true history," of that nation.[56] "Stories," he has asserted, giving an insight into his own political allegiances, "are never told simply about the characters alone, but about a whole nation, which is the more important story."[57]

Through a conflation of images of body, land, and identity, Farah dissects some of the sacred concepts of nationalism by literalising that ideology's dearest tropes. The tenet or 'truth' of nationalism, that the nation confers unique and cohesive identity, is the particular myth Farah chooses to demystify. What he exposes - quite other than its

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55 Farah has long demonstrated a close identification with women characters. See his early novel, From a Crooked Rib (London: Heinemann, 1982; first published, 1970).

56 Nuruddin Farah, "Why I write?" TWQ 10.4 (October 1988): 1599, but see also 1596-1597.

57 Nuruddin Farah, "A combining of gifts" 186.

cohesiveness - are the coercive forces that operate in national movements and ideologies. From the start of the novel, the ambivalences of the young hero Askar's relationship to his native Somalia are laid open as he forms an intimate, and thus more immediate bond with his foster mother, the Ethiopian (Oromo) woman, Misra. Implicated in this conundrum of affiliation are questions of the hero's identification with the forbidden female body, as with the disputed land, and also of their mutual identification in his mind. The embodiment of national territory as woman is dramatised and so objectified; or, in other words, a 'natural' trope is literalised and so defamiliarised or made strange.

Askar spends the years of his late childhood and adolescence charting an identity away from Misra and what she represents in his life; yet her re-emergence as a person and a signifying presence at the end of the novel undercuts the sure possibility of his achievement of independent stature - which means, in the main, his realisation of a homogeneous Somali identity. However, to effect this inversion, Farah must to an extent reconfirm Askar's bond with Misra and so remythologise the woman-body-land equation he earlier exposed. This bond, with its promise of wholeness, becomes, it seems, the more real or physical truth, felt in the belly and the blood, than Somaliness. As Maps does undeniably perform prominent and important iconoclastic tricks with the revered trope of the

motherland, this kind of charge may at this stage seem premature and also ungenerous. It is made, however, by way of projecting the course of the analysis. Suffice to say for the present that where an originary land (Somalia) is divided or alienated, a foreign body (and earth), signifying home and known ground of being, may be both the more dear and desired, and the more repressed (the mother once again as sign of absence and deferred desire). Yet in the spaces of lack and denial thus opened up, alternative - though still comparable - means of envisioning belonging may be created. Where divisions of place and self cut across Askar's existence, not so much fracturing as generating his story, his narrative grows into a tale of reconstitution. Story becomes a way of ordering and recreating individual and communal meanings. By the end, its symbols come to offer feelings of hope and inspiration comparable to those produced by national bondedness within a defined national territory. Reciprocally, however, Askar's fractiousness also grants him the perspective to come to terms with conflicting concepts of the self.

Maps is a tale of disputed and also divided identity: the hero is an orphan boy born in the Kallafo area of the Ogaden, whose father was a dissident Somali nationalist, whose foster mother is a woman of Ethiopian origin, and who spends his adolescence in Mogadiscio, deciding whether and in what way to dedicate his life to the Western Somali Liberation

cause (55). The narrative, punctuated by Askar's own queries and pleas for clarification, unfolds as an answer to the question asked of Askar by the Somali police at the end of the novel: "What is your name?": "And that was how it began - the story of (Misra/Misrat/Masarat and) Askar" (246). Because Askar has spent the days of his life in self-invention and interpretation, the novel can thus be read as a narrative response to that life-narrative, another fictive supplement or reinterpretation - in Uncle Hilaal's words, "an answer to the fictive riddle [national identity] asking a factual puzzle [on which side does Askar belong?]" (65). As in the dream in which he finds himself wandering in a landscape full of people "tattooed with their identities," Askar learns to speak his own declarative "I am" (42-43). The narrative result is a doubling or objectification of self manifested in his use of the second-person pronoun, especially at the beginning and end of the novel, as well as in the dual time-frame of the narrative, its movement between a past life with Misra and the contemporary world of Mogadiscio (138).[58] The narrative of narrative, and about narrative, demonstrates that a sense of being is never sure or fixed, even when nationalist myth would

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[58] The self-displacement which is the result of self-division is encapsulated in Askar's initial statement "you are not yourself" (4) - probably his surest realisation. On other occasions, when he is older, Askar is referred to in the third person. He has by this stage learned to think of himself not only as subject of an object body, but in relation to others. This perception correlates with Hilaal's cryptic question, "Askar, where is the third? Where's the other?" (138).

presume to capture, fix and tag it. Askar's identity - if that unitary term is at all appropriate - is based rather in metaphor and mystery: the memory events of others constitute his present consciousness (4, 6); throughout his life dreams elucidate and complete his waking experiences; dispersed single emblems of the past focus his being - the snake bearing the mask of his father (44), the images of his beginnings in water, fluidity, femaleness (33-35). This metaphoric identity is so real to Askar that he conceives of himself to some extent as mythic child (21), perhaps an embodiment of full Somali identity, the divisions of whose soul would thus symbolise the disputed ground of the Somali Western Front.[59] Indeed, Askar was a creature unattended and orphaned at birth, and then remothered, remade - like a new nation - out of a dark natal room signifying negation and suffering.

Throughout the novel, therefore, if it is true that Askar represents - an at times forbidden or covert (Ogaden)[60] - Somaliness, then the blurring of his maternal connections, and the debates surrounding his upbringing and, consequently,

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[59] Hilaal, always a source of illumination, especially when it comes to national matters, points out that the Somali people are a "nation with a split personality" (120). Askar will feel the loss of the Ogaden after the 1977-78 war as resembling the weakness following forced parturition (157).

[60] Askar is a 'forbidden' child, being not only the son of a nationalist dissident, but illegitimate also. His birth is not advertised and his name, which means struggle (another pointer to his emblematic identity), is at first covertly spoken.

his identity demonstrate the fictionality of nationalist selfhood. The contradictions that will beset Askar's sense of self are presaged at the very start of his existence when he is rescued from his dead mother's bloody embrace by a woman who will become more mother than mother to him - from her he will also obtain his first sense of body and conviction of being. Orphaned in the first few moments of his life, Askar develops a strong sense of autogenesis: "I was my own creation" is his precocious boast (23 and 32). Yet Misra believes that "she was the one who made him who he was" because "she brought him up" (107-108). Reflecting equally valid and non-exclusive aspects of Askar's life, these statements are only apparently contradictory. They do also dramatise, however, the conflict that exists in nationalist myth between the appeal to origins and convictions of self-determination, generation from within.

A similar reciprocity between Askar and Misra is manifested in their mutual feelings of bondedness. Without Misra, the young Askar lacks all sense of subjecthood. Misra's "motherliness" "[reabsorbs]" his lostness as orphan (5): she fills him with her "abundant self" (6); "it was <u>in</u> her touch that I began to exist" (39 and also 11). Misra similarly feels that Askar has taken over her life (8). If he smells of her sweat, she is redolent of his urine. When small, he is her third breast or leg; his sleeping position

between her legs is that of the newly born (24); his stare stimulates a nameless guilt in her, encouraging a self-emptying which becomes self-defining, a "selfless desire to give and give and give and therefore be, exist only in the giving" (39). With Misra, Askar enjoys an artificially prolonged but also partially abnormal 'mirror stage'. For the considerable time that she is his space and defines his world, he is nevertheless half-aware of himself both as self-creation and as creation of others' myths and memories (39): he is at once unconscious and hyperconscious. If we read into this relationship of Misra and Askar an allegory upon nationalist allegory - or a self-conscious reification of nationalist myth - their close identification can be interpreted as Farah's comment on the difficulty of establishing discrete, unitary identities, essences of being: the sense of self is relative, constantly referring beyond the self.[61] A further prominent and significant gloss on nationalist myth is located in the gender of the two allegorical actors. As the epigraph to the Introduction suggested, Farah is aware of the genderedness of such myth: it is no accident that Askar is a boy-child and Misra an extremely physical, tactile mother-presence.

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[61] For this reason, too, gender identities in the novel are ambivalent and fluid: Askar 'menstruates'; Uncle Hilaal and his wife, Salaado, have swopped conventional domestic gender roles and have both been sexually 'neutered'.

It is to realise his manhood, and in particular, to come into his own as a male nationalist, that Askar, as he grows up, begins to put distance between himself and Misra. Here Farah, again knowingly, deploys a set of identity stereotypes clearly opposed to the first: Askar's new foci of being emphasise intellection over the body, writing over speech, the separation and autonomy of the subject self over fusion with another. Askar develops into the familiar prototype of nationalist selfhood - the inspired and committed son of the nation. It is here that narrative and inscription, uniting the various constituents of identity, become the primary sites of self-realisation and of nationhood. As Uncle Hilaal and Farah himself point out, script, especially when imposed by a dominant or imperial force, signifies power; writing becomes an act of possession and control, whether of oneself, or one's thoughts, or the culture of an oral people (169-172).[62] By the same pattern of implications, writing is conventionally a male medium - especially in the Kallafo Islamic community. Therefore, though it is Misra who helps him with his alphabet, and though Salaado will later give him maps, to realise his Somali manhood, Askar must learn the Word, and compose a self-interpreting text - which in effect becomes the novel. The tactile "cosmos" that was Misra's body is displaced by more

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62 "So," Askar instructs himself, "read, read in the name of 'civilization'....And write, write down your history in the name of the same 'civilization'. 'This is a pen.' 'This is a nib.' 'That is a book.' Power!" (172). See also 84, 200-202, and "Why I write?" 1591-1592.

abstract concepts of space and time, "written metaphysics" (172) - first those of spiritual life, as defined by the Holy Word, and later those of the nation, depicted in the maps and histories which define community and identity.

Farah has Askar physically enact the various meanings of the Word in the process of his growing up. When his lessons in the written Word are beaten into him by his male teacher, the pain of new wisdom, which is intended to chastise his spirit, rather objectifies his body, which was his connection with Misra (84-86). The experience of pain, suggesting spirituality and resulting in isolation, is repeated, though with greater severity, during Askar's circumcision, which follows soon after his learning the Word: as the knife is honed, he is instructed to read Koranic verses (88-92). Even before his circumcision, Askar begins to use the Word as an instrument of separation, and as a surrogate comforter and companion, an extension of his body: he scores words into his flesh, ink mingling with blood; he drinks the writings he washes off his slate; in a significant scene, the slate which he habitually holds between his legs, prevents Misra from embracing him - Word or medium of the Word, comparable to an erect penis, becomes a means of self-assertion. With this image, Farah blatantly tags the role of nationalist as male narrator of his people's legends, aggressive and single-minded. Through learning pain and the power of written

language, therefore, Askar enters "a different 'self', one that had no room and no space for Misra" (92).

At the moment of Askar's induction into adulthood and autonomous selfhood, two significant things happen: he discovers maps, that is, geo-political space, which is the matter of nations, and the Ogaden War breaks out, that is, the Somali nation attempts to claim its own, seeking union with its true "Mother" (97). In these ways, Askar's growth is the more strongly identified with Somaliness - with a nation attempting to realise itself by overcoming division. In the place of "his mother-figure, Misra," we are explicitly told, Askar finds a greater joy, "Somalia, his mother country....a common mother" (96). To the metonymic chain of significations -- written word-narrative-autonomy-identity-maleness -- around which Askar's story is constructed, the final, defining concept, that of the nation, and its embedded emblem, the Mother, is added.[63] Perceptively, Misra has already predicted: "One day...you [Askar] will identify yourself with your people and identify me out of your community" (95).[64] Earlier, too, in a symbolic dream, Askar saw himself moving

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[63] Another symbol of Somaliness is the camel, also called "the Mother of Men" (98).

[64] Indeed, as Askar becomes more self-consciously Somali, Misra is the more openly identified as Ethiopian (94, 98). See also Askar's self-initiation into a warlike purity (107-110). As Hilaal will explain, Misra is not only Ethiopian but 'Woman', traditionally, from a male point of view, a source of pollution and treachery (178).

away from a woman who he understood to be Misra, but also "Ummat" (original community), and then encountering the figure of his nationalist father, who, not inappropriately, instructed him in the ideology of sacrificial self- and place-making (or nation-building), according to the proverb: "An eagle builds a nest with its own claws" (42-46).

As he grows up, Askar, the nationalist son, in order to find his rightful national ground, explores the constructed, inscribed spaces that are maps. He marks down Somali gains and victories, actions he significantly calls the "getting together" of the "Mother" and "the Ogaden/child separated from her" (97). On his skin he draws the (to him) true map of the Somali-speaking territories - Somaliness, like the Word, becomes part of his body (97-98). With maps he seeks to "identify" himself, that is, see himself in "context - a young boy from the Ogaden, one whose world was in turmoil" (145). Maps, to Askar, resemble illuminated manuscripts, inscribed with history and politics; they trace the choreography of war and occupation, serve as the charts of the occupiers, or, as Askar again tellingly calls them, the "daters" who use "their map-reading facilities, their writing capabilities" "to conquer, to subjugate" (158-160). What this also means, however, is that maps are territories of self-definition, not only symbols of national possession and authority, but also idealistic projections, like national myths and historical

fictions. In Mogadiscio, after the war and the loss of the Ogaden, Askar again redraws the map of Somalia to include that area. In response to Hilaal's question, he points out, speaking with "the confidence of one who's regained possession of a mislaid identity," that this map reflects at once the Somalis' right to the Ogaden and his "dreamt" or "invented" reality - the one is equivalent to the other (216-217).

By manipulating the imagery of the body, the written word and maps, Farah enacts in Maps the dependence of national belief and feeling on - as it was also expressed in the previous chapter - specific conceptions of territoriality and textuality. The constructedness - and also the fictiveness - of national identity is exposed. Hilaal, Askar's wise new mother-figure, his Misra replacement (146, 149), is a canny exponent of this and other fictions: in the manner of a Conrad, whose words grace Part Two as epigraph, Hilaal points out that all truth, including that shown on maps, is subjective (218); at the time that Misra's alleged betrayal is made known, he also warns Askar against "the acquired prejudices of colonial and neocolonial peoples," and, as part of this, against pseudo-fraternal bonds, such as those which arise amongst committed nationalists (179-181). Yet, perhaps paradoxically, the same apparently reliable witness, Hilaal, interprets for Askar the "specificity" of Somaliness, defined by language and culture, contrasting this with the generic,

inclusive nationalism of Africa's invented nations (147-149).[65] Equally paradoxical, therefore, because parallel to Hilaal's observation, is Farah's own admission in an interview that Somali expansionist claims hold a certain validity for him, even though their clannish politics are to be condemned. He also observes that the Somali nation can be viewed as a family, one to which he has over the years developed feelings of loyalty and belonging.[66] Is one to understand from this that national beliefs, are, as Stein in Lord Jim might have said, necessary fictions? Or that the reality of doubt co-exists with the nationalist fantasy of identity and being, both being valid? When Askar leaves the Ogaden and sets out for Mogadiscio, Misra, as parting advice, instructs him not to believe that mirages reflect the eternal state of things (114). She herself, his primary reality, will come to seem to him a mere illusion of wholeness.

These tensions of seeming and being, fantasy and reality, are brought into sharp relief at the time Misra is denounced as traitor: Askar's visceral memories of Misra as his cosmos are brought up hard against his knowledge of the

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65 He also refers to the Somalis in Kenya and the Ogaden as "unpersons": "they lack what makes the self strong and whole," that is, a defined nationality (167).

66 Farah, "A combining of gifts" 175-176, 186.

ambivalences built into her history.[67] The conflict is reflected in her name which, depending on regional pronunciation and spelling, could mean either 'foundation of the earth' or 'treason' (176-177). The resulting emotional devastation has repercussions for Askar's delicately composed sense of identity: he feels he is in "no-man's land" (178); the meanings upon which he has previously relied - trust, 'mother', self - are summarily deconstructed. It is indicative, however, that when Askar and Misra are reunited, he has a type of birth vision in which he sees himself passing through the equivalent of two birth canals, the second leading "northerly, bearing slightly to the east" (183) - this being the direction of the Somali seaboard and heartland from the point of view of the Ogaden. In a sense, he has realised his Somaliness -or his status as nationalist son - through being mothered by Misra, that is, through coming from elsewhere. However, the ambivalence of his loyalties, and the division of identity, as implied by his - albeit uneasy - reconciliation with Misra, cannot be long endured by the single-minded nationalism of the authorities. In a similar way, Misra, as 'foreign body' and Other, became, during a time of suspicion, a scapegoat and a scandalous presence to the Kallafo community that she called her people. Her plight leads Hilaal to

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[67] It is suspected that Misra, through her relations with an Ethiopian lover, betrayed five hundred Kallafo soldiers to the enemy. Again, it is a woman - the outsider - who is first thought to be the traitor in the ranks.

conclude that "a people can be sadly mistaken about themselves, their own position vis-à-vis the ideas which concern them" (187). Enforced conceptions of national unity can be the undoing of a nation.

In Maps, the signs of threat and coming doom are incrementally introduced. First Misra appears to Askar thinner, reduced (Somalia too has been 'reduced' during the final phases of the Ogaden War (184-185)). Then she undergoes a symbolic maiming operation, a mastectomy - "the many-nippled" mother figure (96) is further diminished. Around the same time Askar completes a picture featuring, amongst other elements, the figure of a woman, quartered, her body representing what appear to be different phases in Askar's and also Somali national history. Next to her appears the Somali five-pointed star, with only three of its points showing - presumably the Ogaden and Somali territories in Kenya are missing (210). The latter image recurs in one of Askar's last visionary dreams, as does that of a woman, identified now as Misra. She is standing at the sea's edge, motherly, loving, the sea about her "large as a womb" (214), but also, implicitly, an image of cohesive Somaliness (the Eastern seaboard again representing undisputed Somali territory). A little earlier, in yet another birth-like dream, Askar feels himself floating eastwards to the sea, in purgatorial though redemptive dark waters (205-207). The dreams, like the

operation and like an earlier family outing to the beach, prove prophetic: in macabre fulfilment of her strange fascination with the sea and with sharks, Misra is found washed up on the shore, "black as dead shark" (241), with her heart cut out, presumably a victim of a Western Somali Liberation Front purge.

It is soon after this that Askar is called in for questioning by the Somali police. Yet in contrast to the authorities' anticipated hard-line response, Askar's own outlook, as figured most vividly in his dreams, has become more expansive and tolerant during the time of Misra's disappearance and death. Though he may not have fully assimilated his dream perceptions, he has learned, both through his own experience and through Hilaal's instruction, that a unanimistic nationalism denies the differences out of which national identity is in fact built. A purist Somali nationalism, at one time Askar's defining ideology, could not allow his intimacy with Misra, an Ethiopian. In this sense Misra represents not a pre-conscious reality, or a primary earth-connection, but difference, the strange - she is "real as the border" (127). The reconciliation of the opposition she represents is conceivable only were nationalism to open itself to the problems of its own artifice, the contradictions of selfhood and the heterogeneity of community. There is no guarantee, however, that this is possible, given nationalism's

present defining codes. "[L]ife is blood," Askar then concludes, "and the shedding of one's blood for a cause and for one's country [Farah's emphasis]" (244). But, as the first 'and' suggests, the definition is not exclusive - this blood can also be the blood of birth, and of Misra's menstruation, which Askar once shared and still senses, in other words, the fluid not of sacrifice but of regeneration and bodily connection.[68] Then, too, not to neglect the importance of Misra's own national background, the underlying blood relationship with her may be political as well as metaphorical/biographical. If Ethiopia represents the African heartland of Pan-African myth, reunion with Misra could suggest a move beyond ethnic or state-nationhood. This move would accord with Farah's own expressed ideals.

In spite of the fact that Askar does not abjure nationalism at the end of his tale - as Hilaal would agree, Somali allegiance creates identity - he does come to see Misra in his dreams as a woman beautified. The mother of his childhood memories appears to him transfigured: she is woman of the sea (214), seer (237, 244), and fertility figure who, as in life, presents him with an egg drawn from a "dead fowl's inside" (244). The dream images are cryptic, but they do seem to signify not only the magnification of Misra in her role as

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68 Water, another birth fluid, is as important as blood in Askar's dreams.

regenerative mother, but also, through the denial of her status as stranger and threat, the expansion of national identity. "Truth," Hilaal at one point asserts, "is body" (224): Misra's body, not only in its later dismemberment, but also in the full-blooded reality it represented for the young Askar, dramatises more convincingly than anything else he has experienced the so-called national truths of bonding and unity.

What is one to conclude from this: that the best way to proceed, as Hilaal might suggest, is through developing a qualified nationalism, one sensitive to historical change and geographical difference, but nonetheless precise and dependable in bestowing and cultivating identity? Through its exposure of the fictive and the conflictive in nationalism, Farah makes of Maps a study with variations on the legends that make up nationalist belief, and, as an inevitable corollary, a searching criticism of dogmatic and fanatical nationalism - that, for example of the Somali Front, but also, more implicitly, that of the Somali state, which has mobilised nationalism to the greater glory of its dictatorial leader, Siyad Barre.[69] Yet Farah's point also seems to be that nationalism need not exist only in its present interpretations. The value of the ideology may reside not in its imposed securities of unity and identity, but in its

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[69] "Why I write?" 1596-1599.

fictiveness, its malleability; its forms are not fixed, and may be adapted to local contexts and the vagaries of history. Though its post-independence history has made of African nationalism a travesty and a scandal, Farah's implication seem to be that, where African people find themselves bewildered and decimated (80), it may be advisable to adapt nationalism to build alternative polities, rather than to scrap the ideology altogether. Neither in Maps, therefore, nor in his non-fictional statements do we find Farah rejecting greater Somali claims. Quite the contrary, he has suggested that Somali attempts to redraw colonial boundaries provide a model for wider African federationalism:[70]

> I think that the Somalis are probably too early for their time in the African context. One possible way of dealing with not only the Somali crisis, but the crises in which so many peoples are caught in different parts of Africa, is for larger federations to be formed of areas in Africa where people are linguistically and ethnically close....the time will come when what Nkrumah spoke about will somehow be brought into being by politicians and people alike: African unity and regional unities.[71]

This view of an expanded nationalism co-ordinates with Farah's conviction (shared with Achebe) that cures to Africa's ailments may be found in the adaptation of existing, local resources, what people already have to hand. Only in this way

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70 This places yet another gloss upon the Misra/Ethiopia and Askar/Ogaden/Somalia relationship. What they share is more true or more whole than the national status quo.

71 "A combining of gifts" 176.

can one create a "body politic whose sinewed muscles, strong as pillars, [embody] the collective strength to which every member of the community [contributes]."[72] Yet, even with the new attention to pan-nationalism, the initial Somali-centredness of the idea retains a suggestion of nationalist pride. Nationalist thought continues for Farah to define certain categories of experience, such as when, for example, he addresses the Somalis as a national family or defines the writer, in the Sixties manner, as "the depository of the nation's wishes and the custodian of the people's views."[73] Despite his intense vigilance with respect to the nuances of nationalist ideas, and his own self-awareness as a writer, does Farah, like Hilaal, wish to hold on to aspects of nationalism, not insofar as these are useful fictions, but as beliefs? Some insight into this apparent paradox might be indicated by that, literally, fundamental metaphor to the maps fiction, the "fusional,"[74] earth-bound body of Misra, more real to Askar than any boundary construction, yet, as symbol, as 'unreal' as any nationalist fiction.

For a substantial part of Maps, the character of Uncle Hilaal functions as a type of gloss on the many metonymic

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72 "Why I write?" 1597.

73 Farah, "A combining of gifts" 187, but see also, "Why I write?" 1599.

74 Jean-Pierre Durix, review of Maps, "Re-mapping the motherland," TWQ 10.4 (October 1988): 1629.

link-ups the narrative composes: of identity-nation; nation-maps; maps-truth. But there are moments, in particular during Askar's childhood and in his dream visions, when the text's multiplication of significations leads to an overloading that Hilaal cannot, and indeed does not, elucidate. It is the figure of Misra that dominates these points of overproduction of meaning. Misra represents, as suggested, both difference and identity, the strange and the familiar, sea and earth, the past (childhood) and the future (of Askar's revelatory dreams). She is plenitude of being, completeness; she contains and to an extent resolves contradiction. If Askar is condemned to self-division and change, as expressed in the fictiveness and temporality of his narrative medium, Misra in contrast is associated with pre- and unconsciousness, and therefore with a certain totality of being, like the insentient presences of the earth and the sea.[75] Inhabiting the timelessness of memory and of dream vision, she stands at a still point of Askar's existence, unitary and indivisible. When he concludes that life is love and sacrifice, we are aware that Misra has represented both - it would not be wrong to see her as embodying the essence of his identity, just as he was her "extended self" (75). Yet we also know that the various qualities that constitute the Misra trope also go to

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[75] Unlike Askar, Misra is very present to herself, "she [knows] who she [is]" (26). In accordance with the old stereotypes of women, her identity is related to her body-sense, her biology: she is not burdened by self-consciousness.

make up national identity. Askar's search for meaning in Somaliness is in fact a long process of rediscovering her importance in his life. Wholeness, earth, sea, selfhood, vision, are associated with Misra as they are with an implied new nationhood. More specifically, as Somali mother who is also Ethiopian, fusion with Misra may signify the commitment to a greater Somalia, a widened motherland.

One is tempted to conclude from this that, ultimately, despite his questioning, Farah wants to retain a basic sense of nationalist belonging - a sense so fundamental and visceral that its imagery is coterminous with the archetype of elemental Woman. In accordance with his feeling that representing a country as motherland is reasonable and natural,[76] the true Somali homeland, whether actual or ideal, is figured as female. In Farah as in Achebe, therefore, Woman is the figure of redeemed future, the custodian of a nation transformed: "Woman in her supremacy...[descends]" (Anthills 98). And yet, because a conclusion of this kind reads rather simplistically and unfairly as a final pronouncement on the elaborate symbolic cartography of Maps, a few last words of qualification are required. The idea of a more fluid national belonging which Farah introduces with the story of Askar and Misra, represents a very real difference, politically and symbolically, from the nationalism which urges

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76 "A combining of gifts" 180.

nationals to overcome internal differences and to recognise pre-existing boundaries, state structures, and a distinct identity. On a symbolic level, the idea of the self as constituted in narrative, and, therefore, of national identity as synthesised, is a far remove from the conventional belief in national essences, while, politically, the shift out to a wider continental stage is a way of disintegrating the unfortunate Sixties legacy of African state-nationalism. The latter change is signalled by a subtle change in Misra's status as emblem. It is not only that she stands for more than a country, or for another country - at once foreign land and new nation. As symbol in Askar's dreams, she is also consistently pictured <u>alongside</u> other images representing, qualifying, and embellishing Somaliness. If these dreams, like the novel that contains them, are to be seen as opening into the future, it is surely significant that, as woman, as generative body, Misra also appears as metonym, as a representative <u>part</u> of a new national canvas, not merely as a metaphoric embodiment of the whole. The play of contradictions around Misra's symbolic status is not easily resolved - nor is it intended to be. It reflects Farah's own uneasy progression towards a renegotiated nationalism - or, to suggest a new concept, a 'nationalness' - where the retention of certain national principles and imagery, coupled with an awareness of their artifice, is a way of keeping in touch with the present in the act of inscribing a utopian future.

CHAPTER SIX

Clamorous Music:
Narratives of a New Generation
of African Writers

'Even our seas have gone mad,' she said, referring to the items of sacrifice that had been washed up on the beach like rejected prayers.
'These are new times,' Ede remembered saying. 'We need new stories to cope. New songs.'
'We need new nervous systems,' she had added, laughing.[1]

but there is something else: the faith
of those despised and endangered

that they are not merely the sum
of damages done to them:

have kept beyond violence the knowledge
arranged in patterns like kente-cloth

unexpected as in batik
recurrent as bitter herbs and unleavened bread

of being a connective link
in a long continuous way

of ordering hunger, weather, death, desire
and the nearness of chaos.[2]

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[1] Ben Okri, "When the Lights Return," Stars of the New Curfew (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988) 166.

[2] Adrienne Rich, "XV," Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems (London: W.W. Norton, 1986) 17.

1. Ben Okri

A Nigerian Londoner, his cultural loyalties strung between two worlds, Ben Okri has found a pre-eminent narrative medium in the noisy congruence of disparate aesthetic forces which constitutes the cosmopolitan post-colonial condition. That quality of the visionary or the nightmarish, which emerges out of a dislocated history in Achebe and Farah is a distinguishing feature also of his work. This is particularly true of the two collections of short stories he has most recently published, which, thus far, constitute his mature work.[3] Points of connection, however, also show up areas of marked difference. As a writer aware of his second-generation position in relation to his African literary fathers, Okri is at once opposed to and empowered by the legacy of Achebe, Soyinka, and, especially, the poet Christopher Okigbo.[4] Categorising the early post-independence African novel as social and mythological in its focus, and as restrictively bound to documentary and nationalist subject formulae, Okri proposes an advance towards what he terms "meta-ethical" writing, that which will go beyond the prescriptively authentic, the negatively doctrinal. "Reality," he finds, is "too much" for the writer: "It is difficult to embrace all of

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[3] Incidents at the Shrine (London: Fontana, 1986) and Stars of the New Curfew.

[4] Conversation, ICA, 21 July 1988. Okigbo epigraphs open both collections of short stories.

it and then to hold it."[5] As was the case with Farah, but perhaps more obviously so, while social issues are confronted, fictionality must be maintained.

Okri's commitment to the aesthetic and the story - or, as he would term it, "truth" - is achieved and enacted through his fascination with incongruous conjunctions and remarkable happenings. In the phantasmagoric landscape of the neo-colonial city, Okri seeks out heterogeneity, intersections of the real and the fantastic, the mundane and the cultic: vivid signs of an African reality which can no longer be negatively defined as 'post-independence' or even conventionally 'post-colonial' because it can no longer be described as derivative, a mere continuation, or a simple binary conflict. Okri has taken the corrupt world of depraved national consciousness which was first described by Fanon as his own. Yet, unlike Fanon, it is not by way of a revolutionary social vision but within the interstices of that teeming world that Okri finds revisionary potential - this interest is the main imprint in his work of the new African aesthetic. As a recent essay showed, he is concerned to abandon the Manichean paradigm of victim and victor and to reveal "the inescapable interconnectedness" of all things.[6] Or as Wilson Harris has

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ben Okri, "Redreaming the world: An essay for Chinua Achebe," The Guardian (9 August 1990): 23.

put it, the "complex counterpoint between partial origins" which marks a society colonised, recolonised and then abandoned to its fate, allows, despite the depredations, new "numinous proportions," "far-flung, regenerative, cross-cultural possibility."[7]

In evoking a visionary (as also a revisionary) hybridity, Okri appears to have been to some extent influenced by the magic realist style championed by Latin American writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Carlos Fuentes, but also as practised in the Anglophone and especially post-colonial literary arena, in particular perhaps by Salman Rushdie, another expatriate and a Londoner. Though Rushdie shows more explicit fabulistic or parodic political intent than Okri, the latter's work is clearly indebted to his contemporary's celebration of the hybridity which characterises the post-colonial migrant condition, his delight in "new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs.... [in] [m]élange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that."[8] This influence, reinforced by the alienated or estranged vision of the exile, has worked, like his generational perspective, to turn Okri's writing away from that of his literary fathers. He has become

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7 Wilson Harris, "The Fabric of the Imagination," TWQ 12.1 (January 1990): 176-177.

8 Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith," The Independent on Sunday (4 February 1990): 18.

part of the international elite of cosmopolitan Third World writers of which Rushdie, as also Caryl Phillips, Nuruddin Farah, and the Latin Americans, are members. Writers such as these, promoting the view of "a single, if not exactly unified, world," have on occasion been critically described as undercutting "the project of national culture" through their alleged political cynicisms, distanced perspective and parodies. Employing so-called modernist techniques of defamiliarisation and linguistic obscurity, they are said to have neglected the development of indigenous traditions and identities in favour of catering to the demands of a world market for literary exotica.[9]

Against this, however, and apart from the fact that this kind of critique ignores the social and political exigencies that govern writers' relations to their home-nations, the strength of so-called cosmopolitan writing would seem to lie precisely in the attempt to move away from a narrow and at

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[9] For the critique of modernist "cosmopolitans" from which this précis is derived, see Tim Brennan, "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities," Race and Class 31.1 (July-September 1989): 1-19, especially 4 and 7. His account of "Third World Writing" is more generous in "The national longing for form," Nation and Narration 60-67. It is important to note that the term 'modernist' is not a title that Rushdie, for one, would want to forswear. Of his spiritual and aesthetic development he has commented: "I was drawn towards the great creative possibilities offered by surrealism, modernism and their successors, those philosophies and aesthetics born of the realization that, as Karl Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'." Salman Rushdie, Is Nothing Sacred? (Cambridge: Granta, 1990) 4.

times prescriptive focus on the authentic or the typical. This shift, far from repressing origins, is on the contrary radically recreative of "lost antecedents,"[10] as also of inherited traditions. As this chapter will attempt to show, a neo-modernist technique favouring syncretic imagery and unexpected stylistic connections might well enrich representations of locale - in Okri, the Third World Nigerian city - as well as offering new forms of perception.

Bearing in mind Soyinka's metaphor of the transitional gulf of Ogun, that regenerative space where the states of being, usually separate, are in flux, Okri, at least potentially, may be characterised as a transformative writer: he is intrigued by points of conjuncture and conflict; he invites new beginnings; he breaks open the rigid identity codes bequeathed by Sixties nationalism.[11] It is possible to say of Okri what a critic remarked of the writing of his Ghanaian contemporary B. Kojo Laing, that in his work "ethics

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[10] Harris 176.

[11] It must be admitted that Okri has yet to write the full length novel that will fulfill the promise figured in his short stories. Though The Landscapes Within (Harlow: Longman, 1981), an early kunstlerroman in the style of Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, shows sharp insights into artistic development, this and his earlier novel, Flowers and Shadows (Harlow: Longman, 1980), were burdened by the narrative gaucheries of a new writer. It was between The Landscapes Within and Incidents at the Shrine that Okri discovered the capacity for the regenerative hybridity that has focussed his imagery while also firming and maturing his style.

of self-realisation" are recognised as being as much spiritual (and, one might add, aesthetic) as they are political, that, rather than being imposed from above, they should emerge from below and from within.[12] The comparison with Laing, as another of the second-generation African writers, is illuminating and, in another context, would be worth expanding. Perhaps even more than Okri, Laing is interested in carefully-wrought aesthetic effects, in fictionality, or tropism, that draws attention to itself. In his novels, the recent Woman of the Aeroplanes (1988), but especially Search Sweet Country (1986), plot being rudimentary or residual, the narrative, such as it is, is structured by relations between characters, and between characters and their environment, which are rendered mainly through metaphor.[13] Not only the interactions between characters, but also their thoughts and emotional responses, are evoked in an embossed figural language, composed in the main of complex, allusive, and compacted metaphors, and dense with unexpected neologisms, and vernacular and transposed words. Audaciously 'high profile', the text thus points constantly to its own artifice; metaphor, in one sense, becomes its subject.

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[12] Robert Fraser, review of Search Sweet Country, "The politics of the soul," TWQ 10.2 (April 1988): 978-980.

[13] B. Kojo Laing, Search Sweet Country (London: Pan, 1987), and Woman of the Aeroplanes (London: Pan, 1989).

In Okri, the heterogeneous, the "bit of Chaos" he carries about him, is balanced and facilitated by the precision of his observations and his style. Hallucinogenic effects, therefore, need not occasion confused or obscure narrative. Structurally, his stories operate more through description and image juxtaposition than they do through chronological narrative, more through visual contiguity than through a causal continuity. His syncretic displays are evoked both by means of a reiterative baldness of statement and through a disarming lucidity of vision. Such clarity prevents an overloading of the visual sense, that Rimbaudean dérèglement des sens which certain of Okri's 'hellish' aesthetic effects might invite.[14] He is seemingly intrigued by phenomena; objects as such, hard, precise, draw him, even while he explores the same as potential indices of the irrational or the deranged. The resulting sharpness or singleness of focus of his writing is emphasised by his short, simple, and often structurally repetitive sentences. Each, as it were, enshrines or illumines a bright, material fact. The following description of the night soil collector's room in "Masquerades" (IS 67-80) is typical:

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[14] In particular, Okri's evocation of urban alienation and anomie through nightmarish and synecdochic effects, recalls French Symbolism, both Rimbaud and Beaudelaire, and also T. S. Eliot, who transposed their style into English poetry. In rendering his own 'cityscapes within', might Okri either consciously or unconsciously have drawn on such influences?

> The room was cool as mint. When he lit the lamp she looked round and drew her breath. It was as if she had materialized in the splendour of a curious slum paradise. The walls were blue. A plastic chandelier hung down from the ceiling....There were Correspondence Courses littering the floor. There were two glass cabinets in the room: one contained plates, cutlery and plastic flowers; the other had glittering modest stereo equipment. Taking up most of the space was a family-sized bed. Mosquito nettings trailed down and had been tucked neatly under the mattress. There was a Benin mask above the door; next to it was a picture of Jesus Christ (IS 72).

On occasion, in the evocation of visual objects which are eye-catching and particular, the two strains in Okri's writing intersect - the attention to facticity and the fascination with the fantastic. Insentient objects acquire a vibrancy so alive as to seem threatening; phenomena present an obscure menace and the visual turns paranoid:

> [Anderson] wandered among the hibiscus and bougainvillea. He didn't look at the ancestral stoneworks in the museum field. Then he went home, dazed, confused by objects, convinced that he saw many fingers pointing at him (IS 53).

Or:

> It was dark inside. He smelt animal blood, stale palm wine, and excellent cooking. When his eyes got used to the darkness he saw shelves on which were candles, bones, bundles of spiders' webs, jars, bottles, snake-skins. Something brushed against his galoshes and he screamed, jumping backwards. It was a turtle (IS 124-125).

In the unfolding of narratives, too, with their inconsequential developments and cruel reversals, the effect is of irrational contingency (see the erratic dream-like progression of "Worlds that Flourish," SC 11-33). With his

characters obsessed with futures and destiny, reality in Okri turns chaotic and mysterious. Anything can happen; one must seek protection in amulets and auguries. Belief in portents, at least, invests the inconsequential with meaning.

Yet Okri's visual imagination, while lending itself to pictorial effects, is important also for what it reveals about the social world his characters inhabit. To him, that world - which is unmistakably Nigeria, or more particularly, the urban environment of Lagos - is very present, immediate and accessible to perception. It is to be had, in a sense, for the seeing: that is, it is not translated by way of glossary or anthropological allusion but is instead approached as coherent in itself, as a self-validating social landscape. Though certain scenes may tend to the bizarre and the nightmarish, such distortion is situated in relation to what is taken as standard or predictable. Read in this light, the odd casts into relief the accessibility and commonplace realness of the urban world. It is accepted that, for example, August is the month of dry winds (IS 10), or that one goes home to one's rural village for strength and purification (IS 65). These facts point to an important narrative assumption which Okri shares with other of the so-called second generation of African writers, whether cosmopolitan or nationalist in orientation. For them, the African reality is not only stripped of its colonial veneer of the exotic and the

forbidden, but it is also not, as it would have been in Sixties writing, seen always in relative terms, in contrast to Europe, as anthropological tropography, a store of indigenous symbols. Now, accepted as in itself valid, Africa is considered to contain these contrasts in itself - the exotic and the ordinary, derangement and mundanity.[15]

Okri's narratives are marked by their disregard for conventional nationalist preoccupations and for the social or political manifestos which in the past might have been attendant upon such representations. There is no question here either of vaunting or, for reasons of cultural inferiority, doubting the social reality or the authenticity of the presented urban world. The assumption is that people's circumstances are sufficient for the narrative: these and no others are the defining conditions of their existence. In particular through this concern with a particular cultural space, without the explicit overlay of national consciousness, Okri participates in and helps define the second moment in African fiction. Quite contrary to those critics who might want to accuse him of being alienated because cosmopolitan, or "weightless"[16] because migrant, one might rather argue that,

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[15] In contrast, one thinks of the Lagos of Anthills of the Savannah, in which the informed perspectives of the central characters still to some extent translate indigenous cultural signifiers.

[16] The term, quoted in Brennan 6, is Rushdie's.

as with B. Kojo Laing, his fascination with the multifarious present is a function of his interest in urban Africa as self-sufficient world. Far from being restricted, this vision has been enabled by his awareness of literary genealogy - specifically, by his sense of indebtedness to the nationalist representations of his forbears. He takes as prima facie, but has for that reason also gone beyond, the cataloging of traditional life and the fidelity to oral devices of writers like Achebe, Amadi, Nwankwo, or Nwapa, as well as Tutuola's exploitation of the fantastic and the anachronic in oracity.[17]

On the subject of genealogy, a further enabling device in Okri is provided by the cultural insights of theorists such as Fanon or Memmi, their characterisations of a post-colonial world, their call for the rupture of colonial dichotomies. Again, however, the filiation is not direct but slant, especially in his departure from the regular nationalist bifocal vision, featuring strict coloniser/colonised divisions. Okri's is a world of "global juxtapositions";[18] elements of both the former binary domains, the metropolitan and the peripheral, the technologised and the 'underdeveloped', the secular and the sacred (to follow

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[17] For a description of Okri as included in the "mythic" or "near-ecstatic" "School of Tutuola," see Robert Fraser, review of Incidents at the Shrine, "Incantatory beauty," TWQ 11.2 (April 1989): 181-183.

[18] Brennan 4.

through the stereotypes), are concatenated.[19] He believes that, while the coloniser is destined to lose elements of his culture to the colonised, the suffering of the colonised may be distilled into beautiful dreams, rage transmuted into "the highest creativity."[20] Okri's "mongrelisation" can be read as a debunking of cultural hierarchies, a challenge to the universals of English or metropolitan writing, in particular its assumptions of centrality. In certain instances, too, Okri has the temerity to probe 'unimaginable' negativities even within the centre's urban spaces. In the tales "Disparities" (IS 37-51) and "A Hidden History" (IS 81-90), he depicts scenes of dereliction and decomposition in the great colonial metropolis itself, using the same techniques of object-by-object enumeration and sharp visual focus that characterise his Lagos landscapes. Centre and periphery meet in syncretic fusion as metropolitan underclasses and the poor world are drawn together in a common lot.

Contrary to dark implications expressed by critics like Brennan or Biodun Jeyifo,[21] Okri's narratives, for all that they lack the 'committed' bent, cannot be called apolitical or

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19 See, for a very apposite example, the highly syncretic decor of the hero's room in "Masquerades" (IS 72).

20 "Redreaming the world" 23.

21 Biodun Jeyifo, "Ben Okri," Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700-The Present, vol. 2, ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi (Lagos: Guardian Books, 1988) 281. In the same collection, see also Tejumola Olaniyan, "Festus Iyayi" 303-304.

superficial. This pertains even at the rudimentary level of documentation. Elaborating Fanon's evocations of the colonial city,[22] Okri records the condition of Africa's burgeoning urban underclass and lumpen-proletariat: he observes their anomie, their distractions, their manipulation at the hands of corrupt overlords. His protagonists, vagrants and small-time charlatans, the unemployed, "dream-vendors"[23] and night soil collectors, are very far removed from the elite of been-tos where Achebe's Obi Okonkwo or Beatrice Okoh belong. Agodi, in "Converging City" (IS 23-36), is a small shopkeeper who becomes a local prophet; Arthur of "Stars of the New Curfew" (SC 81-144) attempts, to no avail, to make his fortunes as a mountebank. As will be made more clear in the discussion of individual stories, such delineations of urban characters are not so much typical in themselves, as that they form part of wider scenarios and tableaux which might be termed symptomatic or representative of neo-colonial circumstance. Okri's Lagos is the trashed land of the African Third World, dumping ground of the world's refuse, as also of its vices and errors in social organisation and ideological imposition. "Quack chemists" stock "curved syringes" and bogus medicines (IS 55); elections by definition involve "political fevers and riggings" (IS 107); city godfathers spray counterfeit money at crowds of "supporters" ("Stars of the New Curfew"); wars of

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22 See Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 30, 40-43, 64.

23 "The Dream-vendor's August," IS 105-136.

identity create irrational enmities ("Laughter Beneath the Bridge" (IS 1-22); "In the Shadow of War" (SC 1-9)). In "When the Lights Return" (SC 147-180), the city's chronic power failures not only shape the action, but also supply a motif for the characters' powerlessness before structures that control their lives (see in particular 161-162, 17-18, and IS 67).

"Laughter Beneath the Bridge," the first story in Incidents at the Shrine, is illustrative of a number of these techniques and concerns. The tale represents the writer's main attempt to address the vengeful history of Biafra, which he does through a partial occlusion of its horrors and through the imaginative heightening of a representative experience. The disturbing incident which ends the tale is set against the narrative's generally phlegmatic account of the war's unrealities. War inspissates the diurnal ritual and routine with trauma and agony, but routine continues nonetheless. This approach shows strong similarities both in setting and in narrative situation with a later story, "In the Shadow of War," which opens Stars of the New Curfew. Here, too, where war is seen to superimpose the grotesque upon the banal, the distortions of everyday reality are, paradoxically, naturalised and so made strange.[24] Bloated corpses float

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[24] Landmarks of war may be incorporated into village geography. In the tale "Incidents at the Shrine," an obeche tree is identified as the place "where, during the war,

grotesquely on the river while the radio announcer, burdened by yawns, struggles through a list of the day's casualties (SC 6). Like that of the radio announcer, the disaffected, or, even more, nonplussed tone of the stories is a way of coping and of coming to terms. It is therefore in some way reminiscent of Second World War poetry - most notably, of the work of Keith Douglas - both in its refusal to plead or to declaim, and in its clinical eye for bizarre detail. So we find that in "Laughter Beneath the Bridge," when the outbreak of war leaves three boarders stranded at their Catholic school, they scavenge for food, yet also experience "a beautiful time," crowded with the erotic memories and fantasies of early puberty. As correlates and confirmations of such fantasies, supernatural signs appear: the boys hear ghosts; the altar in the abandoned chapel collapses (3-5).

A second phase in "Laughter Beneath the Bridge" begins with the narrator's journey home with his mother as part of a vast exodus of people moving to their respective group territories. The unemotive, documentary tone is continued, yet, as can happen in Okri, at the same time particular incidents become laden with a more resonant, prophetic meaning. The travellers' transport vehicle is stopped so that they may be questioned as to their origins - "they shoot people who can't speak their language" (9). Location, speech,

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soldiers had shot a woman thought to be a spy" (56).

identity, are objectified and defamiliarised. The boy-narrator is struck dumb at this: for a moment, he cannot remember a word of his father's language (of his ostensible place of origin). His mother (presumably Igbo), aware that the soldiers lack proficiency in her husband's language, takes liberties with it: she curses the men to their face. Language, even when controlled at pain of death, multiplies its meanings. Yet verbal counter-abuse cannot prevent the physical wounding to which the hegemonic exclusion of languages is linked. The incident between the mother and the soldiers stands as foreground and gloss to the rape of a woman by soldiers which the young narrator observes in the forest. The text merges the two events through the narrator's memory of Monica, the object of his childhood fantasies:

> The soldiers asked mother where she came from in the country and I thought of Monica as the soldiers, a short way up, struggled with and finally subdued the woman. They shouted to mother to recite the paternoster in the language of the place she claimed to come from: and mother hesitated as the woman's legs were forced apart (7).

The scene will prove prophetic: Monica, in her strangeness, her difference, will become, like this woman, a figure for the forbidden and so for the abused.

The longest, post-homecoming phase of the tale presents the narrator's re-encounter with a hardened and more insolent,

but as independent and "peppery" (12) Monica. She is caught up in the tension in town caused by the many corpses of war dead clogging up the boundary river. These corpses hold a strange fascination for her - her brother came to the same end. On the day the corpses are finally cleared, she gives vent to her emotion. For many years she has been fascinated by the Egungun masquerades, though sexual taboos have prevented her from participating (as a girl she once broke the community's taboos by "dancing" an Egungun mask (2)). Now, in the war situation, where enshrined values are called into question, Monica exploits the prevailing mood of anxiety and incertitude by transforming the Egungun into an instrument of outrage and defiance. She hijacks a mask, dances until apprehended by soldiers, and then, to compound the outrage, confesses her identity as an Easterner. By her action, she enacts the desecration of value that is part of war, especially perhaps of a civil conflict, where the backyard becomes battleground and graveyard. Speaking the wrong language, wearing a ceremonious male mask, Monica in her flagrant death dance breaks official and traditional sanctions. Tradition thus becomes powerfully contemporary, an assertion of vitality against the pervasive atmosphere of death and brutal control.

It would be overextravagant and premature to say that the figure of Monica forms part of a new moment in the

representation of woman in Nigerian literature. Her role remains highly emblematic: her rather gratuitous self-sacrifice is not unlike that of Grace in Achebe's "Girls at War." Yet, her defiant and highly-coloured display also represents a powerful compounding of contraventions. Affronting both a traditional and a modern military patriarchy, denouncing a destructive politics, Monica first enacts the forbidden. Then, "[jabbering]" (21) her own language, she goes on to declare her own forbidden identity: a woman, and of the wrong tribe, she refuses to obey and 'to mean' under the present status quo. Punished for speaking the wrong language, she confirms that link between linguistic/cultural prejudice and physical abuse which the narrator earlier perceived in the forest. It would probably skew Okri's narrative intentions to read into Monica's final statement an intentioned indictment of the specific agonistics of nationalist or intra-nationalist conflict, or, indeed, of the stereotyping of heroines. Yet, much like the action of the woman in "In the Shadow of War" who is killed by soldiers for giving aid to a war refugee camp, it is clear that Monica's defiance of authority is in the name of a humanity and a spirit which the powers waging war would deny. But not only that. For her action is doubly subversive. The way she refuses war and its present propagators is by violating a tradition of male power. Both symbolic and actual, her death dance becomes an audacious reinterpretation of custom: she

prefigures what could evolve into a creative mode of resistance whether to patriarchy per se or to a male-dominated politics.

The discussion of re-interpreted custom in Okri as this applies to women, however, must end at this point: there are few other positive representations of womanhood in his stories. His protagonists are usually male; the women who present themselves for attention are by and large prostitutes, hot and wet for naira love, in the style of a popular writing strongly influenced by James Hadley Chase and Harold Robbins.[25] In reporting on the cut-throat world of urban survival, little opportunity presents itself for a re-evaluation of woman. Yet the multi-levelled symbolism of Monica's act does give a clear idea how Okri's narratives work: his spare, laconic approach gestures, at times inspite of itself, at possible - if tangled - networks of significance that might link disparate phenomena. This sense of unspoken and perhaps illogical connection, whether through madness or chaos, is clearly demonstrated in what are arguably Okri's most achieved tales - the two long stories which dominate the second collection, "In the City of Red Dust" (SC 35-79), and the eponymous "Stars of the New Curfew" (SC 81-144).

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[25] See footnote 41.

Beginning with an ironic epigraphic gesture at Saint Matthew 25:29, "For unto every one that hath shall be given..." (36), "In the City" uncovers the destitution suffered by Nigeria's burgeoning urban underclass - a destitution Okri silently but eloquently juxtaposes with the flamboyance of the military governor's birthday celebrations. For much of the story, as planes spin and cavort in the empyrean, raining down birthday messages like confetti, the ghetto below pullulates with people, disease, and flies. As in B. Kojo Laing, such florid incongruities are built up into grand tropes of political cynicism. The predominant atmosphere is not so much one of despair as of cynicism or befuddled resignation. How are these profligate contrasts, these disparities to be reconciled - the implication runs - other than in nightmare and superstition, through self-inflicted states of mental vacuity, in the imitations of greater corruption offered by petty crime, or, the way Okri has chosen, in narrative?

Having said this, Okri's criticism of unscrupulous powermongering in this tale is perhaps more explicit than usual. City buildings tell their tale of corruption:

> They passed the bank of which it was rumoured that the governor was a major shareholder. Along the Ekenwa Road they passed the chain of supermarkets which the newspapers had said belonged to the governor, but in the name of a non-existent son (43).

Such comments look forward to Festus Iyayi's exposure of the rulers' underhand practices during the Biafran war. "In the City" makes a similar, seemingly incidental indictment when, at the birthday rally, a "frothing man" (who seems himself to be fairly well-to-do) accuses the governor, though out of earshot:

> Pompous blighter! Fat like an ox! Full of the people's food. And to think that he robbed one of our banks during the war. We are mad. All of us who condone this nonsense are mad! (53)[26]

In a predatory society, the madness of extortion spreads: Emokhai, the chief protagonist, will soon pickpocket this speaker. Where the present moment is the outcome of a long history of irrationality and cruelty, the chain of exploitation becomes ineluctable. The nature of this history is represented in synchronic fashion in the city square:

> The statues were often of ferocious ancient figures: kings, queens, tyrants, rulers who were slave-traders and who wreaked terror on their people, and who sealed the terror with incredible nets of superstitions and dread rituals (51).[27]

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[26] Kole Omotoso, Just Before Dawn (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1988), a non-fictional account of the Seventies period in Nigerian politics, focusses points in Okri's representation. For example, Omotoso reports Head of State Gowon as saying in 1970: "We use our positions to embezzle. We parade ourselves as saints and prophets although we are unfit for their abode" (30). He also quotes the off-the-record comment by the Military Governor of the late Seventies, Obasanjo: "Now, the only way to make money and survive is to know someone in a contract, to get a brewery allocation, to get something for nothing" (30).

[27] Compare Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 40.

Ironically marking his participation in this tableau, the governor today unveils "a bronze statue of himself, which would stand beside all the others" (55): it is a confirmatory display of "an empire stifled in [its] history" (61).[28]

In a world dominated by the powerful few, the poor, who are many, rely on games of luck, superstitions and mysticisms, and on the temporary derangements of hunger, drug-induced stupor and physical weakness to survive. Their madness is an expression of a more general lawlessness. A summary of the chief protagonist Emokhai's life resembles a list of people's opiates: once he made a living "gambling at poker and on the pools," but since running out of luck, "[dabbles] now with the prophecies of Nostradamus and the mysticism of Lobsang Rampa" (40). To live is a game of chance and 'futures', a wager for survival that brings its own excitements. Similarly, his friend Marjomi's room is littered with books on "magic, alchemy, letter-writing,...fortune-telling, on how to communicate with spirits, a complete guide to palmistry, and the sixteen lessons of a correspondence course called Turning Experience Into Gold" (78). But the real edge of excitement - and of indictment - in this particular tale emerges when, a little later, Emokhai's new vocation, in addition to

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[28] Significantly, Okri's linking of the past of slavery with more recent colonial depredations and his recognition that the old rulers may have abetted slavery, is very far removed from African literature's earlier nostalgia for a pre-colonial Eden.

pickpocketing, is revealed: he and Marjomi sell their blood to the hospital for a living. This is yet another derangement, though on a different level: what is elsewhere a donation has become for the two friends a source of regular income. Their matter-of-fact approach is a foil to the desperation of the deed: "This is less than what a prostitute gets," comments Marjomi, on being paid for his blood (46). Okri has observed: "The oppressors need the blood of the oppressed for the rejuvenation of their spirits. The spirits of all become weirder."[29]

Okri's cultic cities are worlds of incipient chaos: extremes, held in tenuous opposition, at every moment threaten to collide; extremities whether of the body or the mind bring on states of (at times visionary) frenzy or disaster. Later on the day of celebrations, a plane performing in the governor's special birthday fly-over, gets into trouble and crashes into the ghetto. Bringing destruction and confusion, and also the disruptive mania of the soldiers sent in to impose order and damage-control,[30] the plane comes to represent a type of nemesis, the irruption of the malign fate that gambling and mysticisms are intended to forestall. It is one of those moments in Okri when a higher order reality

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[29] "Redreaming the world" 23.

[30] This evocation is strongly reminiscent of the "electric frenzy" of soldiers (the phrase is repeated) in "When the Lights Return" (SC 157, 158).

breaks into the quotidian anomie. One begins to perceive that chaos and the regime are not so much in opposition as implicated in one another: chaos is the governor's "chief opponent" which "he [has] created in order to rule" (75), while the poor, to survive, make up their own rules of managing chaos, inventing strategies that, ultimately, prove more damaging than they are helpful. Marjomi, maddened by drink after his blood donation, talks himself into a "feverish state" (66), "a heated nightmare" (68), which, as with the frothing man, is the only state in which the fear and exploitation of the society can be exposed. Confusion literally represents truth. He calls the military governor "a thief and all the citizens of the state cowards" (67), "members of pox-ridden fraternities, ghouls and ghosts, corrupt citizens, selfish and greedy, morons, pimps, slave-traders, arse-lickers" (68).

Yet, after the confusion and the disgust, the final scene of the tale introduces a mood of benediction (78-79), appropriately subdued and understated, in which Marjomi and Emokhai's friendship is confirmed. The marijuana which Emokhai has procured "from the governor's secret farms" brings on good dreams and forgetfulness. Once again, Okri registers the reliance of the populace on opiates and distractions. More than anything, this lapse into forgetfulness may be read as an admission of powerlessness: where there is nothing to be

done, no change to be effected, the implication seems to be, a wakeful consciousness is not important. Yet the moment can also be interpreted as a start to the oppressed's "redreaming," the transformation of suffering into beauty. The escapism is also not without its political significance: the marijuana, a pleasure claimed from the governor's lands, represents, in effect, a redistribution of the rulers' loot. Though the action hardly displays the organised thrust of Iyayi's "third army" in Heroes, yet the reclamation, a pilfering at the illicit stockpile, even if random and one-off in a manner that befits a disorderly world, represents not only a defiance of authority, but, in a modest way, an informal attempt at resisting injustice.

As with "In the City," the narrative of "Stars of the New Curfew" resolves itself into a number of symbolic, not to say parabolic tableaux, or, as was already suggested, grand tropes, again augmented by the pictorial effects of Okri's writing. The narrator of the story is a quintessential representative of the modern African urban condition: small-time charlatan and seller of quack medicines, left without a family or a home after the Civil War, Arthur has joined forces with the pedlars of people's opiates: mountebanks, minor spiritualists, degraded masquerade performers. His life presents itself as a chapter in the recent history of Nigeria (87), while his more immediate experiences as a drug hawker

may be seen as an animation, now cartoonic, now nightmarish, of the people's quest for and dependency on magical "cures."[31] Selling "cures" to desperate and gullible crowds, depending always on the amplitude of his performance rather than on the quality of the medicines, the vocation of the mountebank can be regarded as a parable for the actions of Africa's saviours and seers, the proponents of Ikem's "orthodoxies of deliverance." This is especially the case where the so-called medicines either cause or aggravate existing diseases: "[T]he more they set out to cure, the more problems they seemed to create" (89, and 87-88).

But the profit to be had from disease breeds its own psychological deserts. When the narrator-salesman, under orders from his new boss, begins himself to take the medicines he sells, nightmares invade his sleep. He dreams that the sky and then his body are being sold off to a cabal of the rich, "acutely wise and callous about the resources and costs of power," who, he notes with some significance, "belong to one country" (93-94). His nightmare is a fantasia of the Third World or neo-colonial condition worthy of Ngugi's Devil on the Cross, and the experiments in salesmanship that follow offer a further chapter on the same theme. Arthur's boss comes up with a new potion, a "POWER-DRUG" billed to salve and cure all

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[31] See also the surrealistic parade of dream-vendors in "When the Lights Return" (SC 156, 158, 161).

"the illnesses and afflictions of the poor" (98). If this aphrodisiac panacea may be interpreted as a complete kit to salvation, a national cure-all such as has been marketed by nationalists, capitalists, and revolutionary materialists alike, the logo on the package may be seen as an index to that illusionary promise. It features the triad of the African national family already familiar from other contexts: a strong-arm wrestler as patriarchal figure, "a generalised face of a beautiful African woman," and a (significantly genderless) child (98). As was suggested earlier, Africa's second generation writers, as represented here by Okri, would seem to have grown wise to its fictions, to the grand illusions packaged as cures.

As before, the only law that appears to govern Okri's Africa involves the ceaseless repetition of chaos. In what becomes uncannily familiar as a type of mad economy of sacrifice, Power-Drug brings power only to its chief agents, at the expense of general confusion and pain. Echoing the observations in "In the City," the protagonist of the story immediately following "Stars" rightfully comments: "When chaos is the god of an era, clamorous music [meaning here 'opiate'] is the deity's chief instrument" (165). The salesman plagued by nightmares comes himself to inflict nightmares, and in this way, in an inescapable cycle, again visits nightmares upon himself. The driver of the bus in which the narrator is

selling his wares, on becoming crazed, like his passengers, by Power-Drug, drives off a bridge. The narrator barely escapes the accident; his boss, we presume, is untouched by the trouble. Bearing in mind Okri's obvious scepticism with respect to cures - whether medicinal, mystical, or ideological - a significant detail is added to the tableau. On board the bus is a Rastafarian, a "nationalist" (102), who denounces the betrayal of African independence, but to no avail. He is openly mocked and then, at the height of the crisis, is revealed as a fraud - his dreadlocks are false. Such antics register the level of Okri's cynicism: nothing is so real as hallucination, unless it is the power of those who manufacture and peddle delusion and chaos.

The climax in the national nightmare comes in the second half of the story, in which a place (the narrator's home town of 'W') rather than a practice becomes emblematic of the society's derangement. From contemporary moral and economic decentredness, the narrator glances back at the past as a determining force, both in his own life, and in the life of the town. As in "In the City" once again, history is seen to impose an inescapable repeat-pattern of violence and despoilation upon events: the "bad dreams" (111) inherited from a slave-trading past, have been transmitted to the present as oil-boom madness, in which the rich "manufacture" (124) or "administer" (134) reality in their favour. Theirs

is the power to declare curfews in order that their gangs and cults might compete. 'W' becomes a microcosm of Nigerian society during the oil-rich years, a time when "everybody [made] their money with a broad touch of the criminal" (115) while small men, like the narrator, sold themselves to rival financial overlords, so running the risk of double retribution.[32] Where even money, as currency, is devalued as part of the ostentatious wealth contest between the town's rival godfathers, other social value is set at nought. As in "Laughter Beneath the Bridge," masquerade cults, too, are stripped of their ritual significance, being enlisted in the same drama of combative display. The graft and hallucination of the first half of the story is repeated as what might be termed hypertrophic grotesquerie. In the narrator's drugged and paranoid eyes, nightmare appears embodied:

> It seemed as if the unleashing of ritual forces had released trapped spirits. Nightmares, riding on two-headed dogs, their faces worm-eaten, rampaged through the town destroying cars and buildings. They attacked the roads, they created pits at the end of streets for unwary driver to sink into (129).

As the demonic procession brings with it the curse of his past, hallucination becomes nemesis:

> the door caved in and I saw the rush of an undammed river, a flowing black mirror, with lightning flashing all over it. Odeh's father [one of the godfathers], eyes wide open, was on the crest of the water. Behind him his followers, covered in antimony, held in their hands a

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[32] See Omotoso 28 for another corroborative note.

> miniature of the molue that had crashed into the lagoon. The flood tide poured over me and I sank into the nightmare of drowning (132).

Soon after this climax of horror, the narrator reaches a moment of insight which, for Okri, is unusually explicit. At the long-awaited power contest between the town's godfathers, he realises with chilling clarity that the "administrators" of nightmare live beyond any law of responsibility to the starving. Through various unscrupulous means they have found a place "on the right side, the strongest side"; they are impervious to nightmares of "women eaten by ringworm, or children bursting with stomach worms" (135). Histories of power and governance follow a ceaseless circular course in which destruction breeds destruction and, ironically, chaos alone is regenerative. Arthur's boss, to whom he returns to work, is again emblematic:

> Where will it end? Like most of our leaders, he creates a problem, then creates another problem to deal with the first one - on and on, endlessly fertile, always creatively spiralling to greater chaos (143).

Out of this vision of confusion, in part resigned, and in part morbidly fascinated, Okri has created a narrative art of, in Fanon's words, the "zone of occult instability where people dwell."[33] Abandoning prophecies of salvation, crossing documentary clarity with surrealistic distortion, he has opened up a new creative space on the terrain of African

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[33] Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 183.

fiction. In this space, symbolic panorama of futility and anarchy carry a force of savage social indictment. Nightmare is at once a grand trope, and the governing condition of being (SC 144).

2. Festus Iyayi

As a believer in the clear and inevitable logic of history, Festus Iyayi's narrative art is appropriately more restrained and orderly, and also less experimental than Okri's. Relying on conventional narrative devices and imagery, Iyayi to some extent, therefore, resists a revisionary reading, according to the definitions given earlier. Where Okri's protagonists have recourse to the fantasies of their overheated brains, or to the brief fascinations of the body, Festus Iyayi's hero in his novel Heroes (1986), rather than depending on the help of various opiates, seeks to organise active resistance against those who maintain the status quo.[34] On the basis of this concern with the "alterability" of the social malaise,[35] as well as of his plain journalistic style and class awareness (expressed both in Heroes and in the earlier novels, Violence (1979) and The Contract (1982)), Iyayi has been categorised as a social realist writer, along with his compatriots Niyi Osundare, Kole

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[34] Festus Iyayi, Heroes (London: Longman, 1986).

[35] Tejumola Olaniyan, "Festus Iyayi," Perspectives on Nigerian Literature 309.

Omotoso, and Femi Osofisan.[36] If Okri, then, as Fraser suggests, shows affinities with the mythic and fantastical "School of Tutuola" in Nigerian fiction, Festus Iyayi may be said to form part of a socially-focussed group, related more closely to Achebe's general narrative approach.[37]

These distinctions are very rough, as the earlier references to Okri's literary or filial debts might also have suggested. Then, too, though their 'ideological styles' differ, the narratives of both writers intersect in their preoccupation with the powerlessness of Nigeria's masses and their revulsion at the rank corruption of its leaders. Yet, perhaps especially in the light of these similarities, Iyayi's work, as more socially and historically rooted, emerges as an effective counterpoint to Okri's stories, pointing up what might be called the visionary expansiveness of the latter, but also the relative absence of explicit social analysis. If the London-based Okri treats problems of national definition and loyalty circumspectly and symbolically, Iyayi approaches his subject matter from a self-consciously Nigerian and proletarian angle, and is without Okri's cynicism regarding 'true' (that is, non-bourgeois) national issues. Okri distanced himself from the difficulties represented by Biafra

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36 Festus Iyayi, The Contract (Harlow: Longman, 1982), and Violence (Harlow: Longman, 1987).

37 Fraser, "Incantatory beauty" 182.

and settled for metropolitan exile; Iyayi chose the committed nationalist response. A consideration of Iyayi's art, set alongside Okri's, therefore, will demonstrate divergent responses to the national situation, to narrative, and to questions of representation in the writing of the second generation.

Heroes, which won him the Commonwealth Writers' Fiction prize in 1988, is Iyayi's most achieved work. The novel, the action of which revolves around an important Federal set-back at Onitsha, participates in the national project of redeeming in literature a painful history of fratricide. As was seen also with Emecheta's Destination Biafra, Iyayi's novel shows that the Civil War acted, in a certain sense paradoxically, as a catalyst of nationalist feeling in Nigeria. The conflict laid bare problems of elite and tribalist politics and highlighted the need for some form of social or political transformation. Its aftermath, therefore, brought new, and, latterly, radical ideological questions, and introduced, at the least, a nationalist pragmatism. Certainly in the literature of a younger generation of writers (to whom 'independence' was a more remote historical moment), the war experience has dominated interest, leading, in the words of Abiola Irele, to "a quest...for a new and more harmonious social order":

> [The Civil War] touched directly upon an issue that has remained with us ever since,...that of

> the nature and complexion of the human society that we intend to create within the framework of the political entity that we have accepted as a common reference, as a bounding context.[38]

Throughout Heroes, in a way reminiscent of other war fiction, Iyayi's journalist hero, Osimi Iyere, is at some pains to point out that the Civil War should be viewed not as a conflict in itself, but the symptom of a much more vicious state of violence besetting the whole society - the same violence of economic and social exploitation which Iyayi indexed with the title of his first novel.

> [T]his war is part of [a] whole business enterprise. And that means it must yield profits....It was in the expectation of profit that the business community fanned the flames of the war, why the politicians fed canned meat to the dogs of war, why the bishop offered prayers for the war....This whole war is nothing but one huge cry for money and power (148).

This political understanding, obsessively repeated, often in the same words, dominates Osime's frequent first-person meditations, becoming a type of refrain, a way of ceaselessly foregrounding what are seen as the real dynamics of the war situation. It is a struggle in which the masses, inevitably, are the victims: "the people get manipulated into a war and their daughters get raped, and their sons get shot" (64). The gender division here - even if introduced as a commonplace signifier of war - typifies Iyayi's scrupulous Manichean

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[38] Abiola Irele, "Ken Saro-Wiwa," Perspectives on Nigerian Literature 334.

vision. In every instance the rank and file, the true heroes, lose out against the pseudo-heroes, the generals and those who support them. Class is the most basic social determinant and shapes national interest:

> [T]he present war is a war that arises from the greed of a few men. No principles are involved here because even if the country remains one or is divided, nothing really changes (64).[39]

In a situation where class oppression is not only dominant, but operates also across strict binary divisions, it follows that a motivating ideal such as nationalism becomes in large part a ruse for exploiters' plotting. National slogans are a way of rousing people to participate in conflicts that will make more profit, but boundaries in fact mean nothing to the people (132).

> Behind the pogrom [of the Igbo] then are the rich and powerful. The victims of the pogrom themselves do not say to themselves, we are being killed because we are not Nigerians....The rich and powerful Ibo man puts out the word. The Ibo man needs his own country....The Ibo man must fight for a Biafra (168).

Exposing the sham of a self-interest which masquerades as nationalism, Iyayi appears to participate in what might be called a post-Sixties rethinking of nationalist dreams and rewards. And yet, though the nation in Heroes is for the moment either an unreality or a hoax and thus invisible - as it was in Okri and, at moments, in Farah - it remains for

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[39] See 110, 147, and 176.

Iyayi at least potentially an ideal, as it does for Fanon in his socialist criticism of the national bourgeoisie. Though the cynical manipulation of the few jeopardises a nationalist politics, at the same time Iyayi considers a true "national mood" as being the property of the working class. Its emergence or reassertion, therefore, would be a means of resisting the rulers (214-215). The consequence of this, as in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's later writing, is that the concept of frustrated national being is collapsed into the wider scenario of social and economic oppression. Reciprocally, too, the people's struggle for social justice is identified as the one truly authentic nationalist movement. For Iyayi, therefore, in contrast with Okri, disaffection with the present situation does not lead to cynicism.

Within the strict dualisms of victim and oppressor, nation and national exploiter, Iyayi's gender stereotyping in depicting the unequal conflict takes on the look of the inevitable (though its obviousness is probably also in part a function of his general reliance on cliché, especially in the interior monologue sections[40]). For a war situation, one which conventionally lends itself to a dichotomous representation of gender, Iyayi has chosen to deploy versions of the much-handled slut/saint stereotype to reinforce his

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[40] See the references, for example, to "dying a little with each death that occurs to you" (72), or to individuals' lives as resembling "little rivers" (75-76).

point about the victimisation of a population. Both the positive and the negative categories of the stereotype come into play. "This war" is not only said to be "a prostitute, a harlot" (85), "a bitch" (87), and "like a woman, deadly" (99) - and that within a limited number of pages - but the rape of women is also consistently used as an image of war damage, and the ravaging of peoples (for example, 63, 71, 113, 132, 167). Ultimately, in a neat conjuncture of dichotomies, female war captives turned prostitutes become the image of "a defeated, captured people" (182). Thus far, however, this gendered imagery is notable chiefly for its predictability. Yet what makes Iyayi's representations perhaps more 'innocent' and therefore more insidious than the symbols used by the older generation of writers, is that his gendered images most frequently appear embedded in the idiom of his characters, whether in the form of expletives and curses, or in Osime's journalistic reportage. This linguistic embedding can no doubt be in part attributed to the influence on Iyayi of pulp adventure fiction, in which the reliance on masculine codes whether in characterisation or in speech is notorious.[41] Yet

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[41] As was to a certain extent clear also with Okri, the influence of popular (crime, adventure, or romance) fiction on the more literary African novel maps out a potentially rich area of intertextuality. Aside from the Onitsha market phenomenon, which is generally taken as exceptional, such influences are probably more prevalent in the writing of the second generation, than in that of the first, the former group being less self-consciously elitist, academic/literary, or oriented to tradition. Socio-economic factors in the Eighties, in particular the constraints upon book distribution and buying, also come into play. Little systematic work has

it may be marked as a significant shift in Iyayi that images of women are interpellated not so much in the form of metaphors or 'higher order' symbols, dominating a narrative, or encapsulating important significances, as they are metonymically dispersed in his text. Gender difference is confirmed and entrenched as part of a post-colonial literary language and its represented world.[42]

The subplot in the novel, that involving Osime Iyere's love affairs, too, prominently features gender stereotyping. Osime's longing and loyalties, now for the significantly named Salome, wife of a Federal general, now for the modest Ndudi, a Nyanmiri or Biafran, again fall into virago/virgin or slut/saint categories. Osimi has pledged himself to Ndudi, who has long suffered his emotional vacillations: she is, by implication, the kind of sincere, though not "particularly

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been done in this area, but useful pointers may be found in (amongst others) Virginia Coulon, "Onitsha Goes National: Nigerian Writing in Macmillan's Pacesetter Series," RAL 18.3 (Fall 1987): 304-319; David Maughan-Brown, Land, Freedom and Fiction; Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture, tradition and society in the West African novel; F.E.M.K. Senkoro, The Prostitute in African Literature (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam UP, 1982); Frank Okwu Ugboajah (ed), Mass Communication, Culture and Society in West Africa (Munich: Hans Zell, 1985) - the last for sociolinguistic and mass media background. Salient features of writing derived from popular culture would be a prevalence of stereotypes, a gangster or tough guy idiom, and a facility with urban and criminal accoutrements - cars, guns, imported or contract goods.

[42] One might here compare Farah, whose metonymic displacement of the woman signifier is neither as idiomatic nor as stereotypically gender-bound as that of Iyayi.

beautiful...woman that," Osimi comments, "the majority of men really wanted to marry" (219). Yet he continues to feel tempted by the seductive and extremely beautiful Salome. As with the idioms of bitch and victim, the contrast between the two women gives point to the novel's class divisions and betrayals. By marrying, Salome has plotted to become one of the ruling class and in so doing has dishonoured Osime's love and his ideals. Significantly, her husband is the brigadier who deserts his troops in the thick of the Onitsha battle to attend a decoration ceremony in Lagos in honour of Yakubu Gowon's marriage. As Soyinka confirms in his The Man Died, victory in battle at this time was indeed planned and styled as a wedding present for the Head of State.[43] Salome, thinking, like her husband, only of her own self-interest, also betrays. When she no longer needs him for her own designs, she is reluctant to help a beleaguered Osime.

Quite opposite to Salome, Osime's lover and bride-to-be, Ndudi, is closely identified with the oppressed Nigerian people: she suffers the loss of her father to Federal brutality and, much later, at the time of her reunion with Osime, is serially raped, first by Biafran and then by Federal troops. The incident is uncannily reminiscent of Debbie Ogedemgbe's rape in Emecheta's Destination Biafra, which also

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[43] Compare 182-183 with Soyinka, The Man Died 232-240, especially 235.

featured a symbolic mingling of enemy sperm. Iyayi makes clear, however, that, Ndudi's experience represents not the barbarism of men as a gender, or of humanity, but the brutality produced by class oppression. This is in marked contradistinction to Emecheta's characterisation of Debbie's situation where: "the male sex becomes the natural enemy of women. The brutalities committed are unprovoked."[44] Yet it is interesting that both writers continue to rely on highly conventional images of woman - whether as vessel or as ravaged - in order to signify a commonality amongst men and their tendency to bond in spite of war. As was noted of Emecheta's novel, woman remains victim, is still symbol of a plundered land.

A window is opened onto the symbolic rationale behind these dichotomies in Heroes once the theme of the "third army" is introduced. One is almost tempted to say that the binaries of the narrative are set up in order to clear a space for this other force. For though there seem to be only two sides in the war, the Nigerian and the Biafran, there is in fact, as Osime tirelessly argues, a "third side" - the side of the massed working classes of Nigeria (169). To this side, Osime matches his dream of "an organised third army" (215), which will lead the masses of the ruled and take the various corrupt

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[44] Marie Umeh, "The Poetics of Thwarted Sensitivity," Critical Theory and African Literature 202.

rulers as its "raw material," in the same way as "the soldiers from the working people are the raw material in this war" (166). Again, Soyinka's account of the Biafran War is illuminating: Osime's third army is consciously modelled on the ideal of Colonel Victor Banjo who, in Soyinka's words, "publicly declared his invading force against the Eastern secession" (See Heroes 170-171).[45] Yet, significantly, though the third force in Heroes is to overthrow the present system of power, it will, in so doing, follow old patterns of national unity, thus giving true expression to the "national mood." Soyinka noted, however, that the Nigerian nation may be a product of imagining only, especially at a time of Civil War.[46] By implication, the coming together of Nigeria's exploited classes under a national banner should be a project of careful strategy and synthesis. In a novel which represents less than a week in Osime's life, and in which he does not give much attention to planning, it is not made clear how that dream might be actualised. Osime has described his vision to two people only, one of whom, "the man Jato," a journalist, dies in battle. Thus the oscillation of the narrative between third-person accounts and first-person musings, the real and the imaginary, can be seen as anticipating the postponement of Osime's ambition. The third space, where the tale of the third army might be told and the

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[45] Soyinka 174.

[46] Ibid.

reconciliation of dream and practice effected, has yet to be filled.

This lack in the text points the way to other ambiguities. Just as Iyayi holds suspended in his narrative the various dichotomies of military force, class, gender, and narrative structure, so he also leaves unresolved the question of power differentials in the third army, the obvious hierarchical gap that will exist between the command and the rank and file. One is led to suspect that two third armies are in fact envisaged: first, the ideal marching force comprising the oppressed workers of Nigeria, but then also its partially unadmitted shadow, a petit-bourgeois vanguard of revolutionary fighters made up of upstanding journalists and sympathetic officers, all of them male. Before the battle with which the novel ends, Sergeant Kesh Kesh, whom Osime has conscientised, instructs his soldiers in third force perception: "[R]emember from now on that the Biafran soldiers are not our enemies really. We go to these villages not to kill them but to persuade them. We go there to persuade them to lay down their arms" (243). This speech may represent something of a personal coup for Osime, yet, even if rudimentary and preliminary, this first move towards fraternal bonding with the 'enemy' is patently elite-led. There is no answer from the men; Osime, standing near, cannot see their faces. It would appear that significant similarities in

authority structure will exist between the envisaged new dispensation under the third army and the old. This confirms Firinne ni Chréachain's reading of Heroes as a type of committed novel mangué, one that sets out to tell of Civil War soldiering, the experience of ordinary men, but remains locked in a petit-bourgeois consciousness and endorses petit-bourgeois leadership.[47]

Yet the problem may go further than this. Thinking back to the comparison with Okri with which this account began, Iyayi's work is marked by a relative absence of that revisionary openness which tests and breaks down old divisions and hierarchies. More specifically, where social injustice in war is viewed, as it is in Iyayi, as a single-issue problem - that of nepotistic bourgeois rule - narrative representation will be intentionally more formulaic, less multifarious. Again, history represents the unilinear coming-into-being of a new social order. In consequence, other forms of hegemony will either be ignored or underplayed - whether these be male-domination, or a nationalism grounded in patriarchy and centralised bureaucratic structures, or the domination of certain military groups. In Iyayi, as in Achebe, nationalism is consciously and uncritically accepted as a viable rallying ideology, though it is shown to be temporarily debauched by

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[47] Firinne ni Chréachain, paper, "Festus Iyayi's Heroes," ACLALS Conference, Canterbury, 30 August 1989.

race traitors and class villains.[48] A people, Osime observes, must have "ambition to be great, to fulfil themselves" (224). To this uncritical acceptance are coupled the masculinist trappings of Iyayi's nationalist imaginings. Despite references to the inclusion of all working people, men and women, under a third force dispensation (247), conventional gender images remain in place as the chief means of representing the nation. Men - soldiers, thinkers, journalists - continue as national brokers; women, ravaged and also remarkably silent and long-suffering (245-246), represent the national state of being. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Iyayi draws upon a highly conventional vocabulary of nationalism when the much-abused soldiers, said to be "firmly rooted" (143) in Nigerian soil, are described after the Onitsha massacre as "the flowers, of our motherland...petals dripping blood" (196).

It was not, of course, in any way incumbent upon Iyayi to marry war fiction to 'New Woman' writing. Yet one cannot miss noticing that, in its dogged confirmation of inherited stereotypes, he has not only failed, as Firinne ni Chréachain has argued, to produce the committed class novel he set out to write, but, loading his grievances onto the single factor of

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[48] Iyayi's conception of corruption as "beginning from the top" recalls the thesis of The Trouble with Nigeria: "An irresponsible, undisciplined ruling class produces an irresponsible undisciplined ruled class" (TN 142).

conventional class oppression, he has also missed the potentially liberating hybridity of a 'rank and file' tale, a tale not of one voice only. His gender representation bears the clear mark of this restriction, as the final scene of Ndudi's rape confirms. While Osime reflects that the sort of brutality inflicted upon her may, like everything else, be laid at the door of the class oppressors, Sergeant Kesh-Kesh is, for no apparent reason, allowed in the house to hear Ndudi's report and, presumably, to scrutinise her injuries (245-246). The figures of the new authority stand masterfully around the body of the abused woman whose own tale is buried in indirect speech and beneath a remarkably non-committal narrative tone. Women's experience is dismissed from the novel: of Ndudi's rape Osime observes that "it did not really matter" (246).

In this subscription to a limited vocabulary of subversive change and a single-stranded conception of history, Heroes - that is, the novel as it now stands, not in its potential form as proletarian narrative - fits in with an earlier period in African writing. Certainly, from a gendered point of view, it is more dated than Achebe's Anthills. If no alliance can yet be imagined between the dissident military leaders and the private soldiers in the third army, Iyayi certainly does not anticipate a place either here or under a new social dispensation for a Beatrice Okoh or

a Debbie Ogedemgbe. Falling back on the hope of elite-led revolution, he relies also on the conventional concept of a national liberation struggle directed by male leaders: the one lapse mimes and exposes the other.

3. Tsitsi Dangarembga

If, at first sight, Nervous Conditions (1988) appears to be stylistically more conventional than the narratives of Ben Okri and B. Kojo Laing, yet Tsitsi Dangarembga's first novel shows similarities to their writing in its sensitivity to the thick textures of narrative language, the crossing of different discourses.[49] As well as questioning inherited meanings - of the traditional and the modern, of the good and the "sinful" - by way of its heroine's cogitations, the narrative also dramatises such conflicting meanings in the lives of its characters, especially in so far as these ambiguities pivot around gender. In the terms of a women's rewriting set out in Chapter Four, therefore, Dangarembga works 'temporally' and 'textually': she tells of the Seventies decade in Zimbabwean history, and does this by evoking the points of view of a diverse group of women characters, crossing their registers, plotting out their different experiences of exclusion and survival. Nervous Conditions may be said to occupy a central place in the emergence of a new

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[49] Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nervous Conditions (London: The Women's Press, 1988).

writing in Africa: it embeds revisionary or so-called post-modern concepts of multi-textuality and the dispersed self firmly in the area of African women's representation.

How might this conjuncture of 'women's' and 'new' writing be more exactly described? How is Dangarembga's narrative to be distinguished from those of an earlier generation of women writers, and how is she set apart from her male counterparts? Nervous Conditions is a novel about women, their language, self-articulation and failures at achieving wholeness: Dangarembga builds on a legacy of African women's writing, its concern with the validity and fullness of women's lives. Yet, with her interest in doublings and displacements - whether of language or of self - and in a fractured history and a self-conscious fictionality, she also goes beyond that legacy. This does not mean, however, that her concern with women is diminished as a result. If, in Achebe or in Farah, women characters functioned prominently as metaphorical vehicles for political themes, or as the signs of an attempted functional shift, in Dangarembga, on the contrary, they act as the defining subjects of that displacement; they are the proponents of conflicting languages and perspectives. Relative to this focus upon women, public, national (male) concerns appear reduced in importance (as in the writing of the earlier generation of women): colonialism is confronted as linguistic or textual ambiguity, not as war or as nationalist

mission. In the context of UDI Rhodesia, one of the novel's heroines lives out, or writes into her own existence Fanon's findings on cultural alienation. History becomes the inscription of women's subjecthood in the clamorous space of defining image and identity. Moreover, by projecting the much-celebrated multivocality of the women's gossip circle onto this ontological ground, Nervous Conditions also attends to a crucial concept in the politics of difference - namely that the return or reassertion of the oppressed in no way requires univocality, or the denial of internal difference.

Nervous Conditions is in the first instance a Bildungsroman, the tale of the transformation of a young Shona girl from a peasant into a scholarship student (191). Moving from her family homestead and traditional upbringing, she "progresses" (147) via the halfway station of a mission school, the domain of her patriarchal uncle, to the hallowed white precincts of the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart. At the same time, however, the narrative is equally the province of the four women who massively surround and inform Tambudzai's existence. Their travail, conflicts and silences, the ways in which they position themselves against an entrenched and self-righteous patriarchy, unfold as implicit commentaries and choric glosses on the young Tambudzai's growth. Dynamic, counterposed, mutually challenging, the meanings of 'woman' and of women's roles and

positions, whether as mother, wife, student or daughter, avoid both the stasis and the status or authority which would transform them into dominant signifiers of a distinct and unitary womanhood.

Far from being monochromatically characterised as victim or oppressed, Dangarembga deliberately situates her women as, quoting Benita Parry, "diverse agents...effecting multiple situations and relations"; as "differential, variously positioned".[50] She allows herself the proviso, however, that difference is not constructive when imposed from without. The older Tambudzai, the narrator, notes that "the sensitive images that the [older] women [have] of themselves" in patriarchal culture, are unproductively divisive:

> the women had been taught to recognise these reflections as self and it was frightening now to even begin to think that, the very facts which set them apart as a group, as women, as a certain kind of person, were only myths; frightening to acknowledge that generations of threat and assault and neglect had battered these myths into the extreme, dividing reality they faced (138).

As though to protest this "dividing reality", Lucia, Tambudzai's indomitable aunt, confronts a meeting of the household fathers, convened to "plan and construct the family's future" (135-137), and in particular, to discuss Lucia's sexual affairs. Not only does Lucia therefore refuse

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50 Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," OLR 9.1-2 (1987): 29.

the traditional attitude both of silent submission and of sexual compliance required by the fathers, but, defying authoritative meaning, she also bridges the gendered separation of social space - that which was earlier described by Nwapa and Head.[51] Overpowering her offending lover, she asks the company: "[I]s this a man? Can it be a man that talks such nonsense? A man should talk sense, isn't it? So what can this be?" (144).

Lucia's intercession is triumphal, but it is also deeply qualified, split by ambivalence. Lacking independent resources and an organised plan of escape, she returns to her lover Takesure's bed when Babamukuru, the family head, has left. She does not succeed in saving her sister from that abject state in which her mind is said to "belong to...her husband" (153). In another, less obvious sense, too, the meanings of this moment are bifurcated. After being attacked, Takesure calls Lucia "vicious and unnatural....uncontrollable" (145); she has been confirmed in the role of witch with which he earlier branded her (143), subjected to the archetypal accusation levelled at unruly women. Yet that same night Tambudzai's mother used this term to censure Maiguru, Tambudzai's aunt, for "stealing" her children in the name of

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[51] See also 3, 40, and 133 for references to separate gender areas and activities: hard labour, in particular, whether in the kitchen or on the land, is regarded as women's business (once again as in Head).

education (140).[52] As with Bâ's Aunty Nabou, women are shown to adopt the gendered images which the patriarchy favours.

Name-calling denotes subjection, yet also demonstrates that women may reinterpret the significations assigned to them. Meanings emerge from different points within the women's group in a number of agonistic and conflictual ways. While for Tambudzai women's education means progress, and for her aunt Lucia a primary mode of self-assertion, for her mother it has come to signify the loss of her children, and for Nyasha, displacement, the stress of never feeling at home. Significantly, too, Tambudzai's mother emphasises that being uneducated is not to be inarticulate: "I am poor and ignorant, that's me, but I have a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won't keep quiet" (140). Again, if a religious marriage is for Babamukuru and Maiguru a sign of respectability, and for Nyasha something of a comedy, for Tambudzai and also her mother represents humiliation (184). Similar strategies or responses, too, can disguise widely differing attitudes and desires. To express her fear at her daughter's going to a white school and to protest the consequent loss of parental control, Tambudzai's mother goes into a decline, eating less and less (184). Yet the technique of the hunger-strike, of

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[52] Yet, as an example of how meanings in the novel shift, the mother at a later stage uses the power of taboo buried in this image in quite the opposite way: to condemn Babamukuru for the theft of her children she wishes she were a witch, the more effectively to curse him (184).

obtaining power through an exaggeration of weakness, is one which Nyasha also uses, though in its more middle-class form, to proclaim and protest her own unhappiness (147). Nyasha, imprisoned by contradictions, refuses to eat, then becomes bulimic and almost kills herself (200-202). She is the primary embodiment in the text of the "nervous condition" described by Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks, the neurosis of identity bifurcated or denied. Her experience of pathological displacement is also reminiscent of the mental state of Head's Elizabeth in A Question of Power. The condition of both characters is one of multiple and traumatic exclusion, which is thus distinguished from the hallucinatory derangement of slum living found in Okri.[53]

But the primary source of the flux or variability of meanings in the novel is probably attributable not so much to its interest in forms of marginalisation, as to its radical dissolution of binary distinctions: between the traditional and the modern, past and present, and also between men and women. In this Dangarembga's work is markedly distinguished from that of Iyayi; as with Okri, her interest is in a wide range of difference and opposition. Though her narrative is concerned with the doubling or tripling of negation in the

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[53] Psychological distress and nervous guilt as symptoms of the colonised condition figure prominently in the post-colonial African novel and warrant more extended treatment. See Angela Smith, review of Nervous Conditions, "The Condition of Native," TWQ 10.4 (October 1988): 1633-1635.

lives of colonised women (see, for example, 153), these women are never presented as a bloc-entity, nor does the intersection necessarily involve simple reinforcement. Dangarembga is interested in particular conjunctions of power in individual women's lives, and the traumas rising out of these. As the plight of estrangement suffered by Tambudzai's anglicised cousin Nyasha shows, the modern can be as oppressive as traditional existence; so too, the submissiveness of Nyasha's mother Maiguru reveals that equal education guarantees neither equality of status, nor the possibility of independent action. The opposition, patriarchal authority, is also not unitary, though the figure of Babamukuru, Tambudzai's considerate yet highly autocratic uncle, does dominate. The other males in Tambu's life (her father, her uncle, and, early on, her brother) share his assumptions of authority, yet they are themselves in awe of Babamukuru and controlled by him (143, 183). By contrast, the women such as Lucia, Nyasha and Tambudzai herself are considerably bolder and more decisive in their responses.

If Nervous Conditions is a novel about compromise and capitulation, as represented by Maiguru and Tambudzai's mother, it is also about courage, spirit and conviction, as enacted by Lucia, the healthy Nyasha and also Tambudzai, who, though in her own pragmatic and careful way, follows her example. Yet, far from being discrete and single, the

particular positions occupied by these women are themselves split, divided, contradictory. Thus the irrepressible Lucia backs down before her own social powerlessness, the quick-witted and flexible Nyasha loses her equanimity, while, on the other side, Tambudzai's mother, though downtrodden, is not afraid to give loud voice to her opinions, and Maiguru expresses her domestic grievances by (temporarily) leaving home. Such variousness among the women would seem to suggest that options for reaction-formation against social and, in particular, patriarchal dominance have diversified. The women's strength therefore emerges both out of the solidarity of their friendships, the ways in which they combine forces - Lucia's collaboration with her downtrodden sister, the friendship of Nyasha and Tambudzai - and out of the autonomy and individuality of their responses. The implication is that difference can act as a cohesive force <u>within</u> gender and age alliances. As is especially the case with Nyasha and Tambudzai, friendship or gender solidarity is soldered by debate and the exchange of opinion. Difference is a primary way of resisting the sameness of stereotyping and the suppression of contestation embodied in patriarchal myth (the stigma of the witch image) as well as in fatherly law (the autocratic rule of Babamukuru).

At the levels of plot and of narrative structure, therefore, the variously-positioned women characters who

encircle and encourage Tambudzai's development create a broad plexus of intersecting relationships and divergent perspectives against which she may stake out her course. This differential subject positioning is reflected also in language. The patriarchal power of instruction and command wielded by Babamukuru is a clear example of the way in which social authority may be welded to discourse. Added to this, the mastery of writing, and of the English language and its literature, also gives status in the community. However, a lack of literary or literate proficiency does not necessarily mean silence or powerlessness. Rather, in the spirit of Tambudzai's early attempt to school herself, the condition of being trapped by "the poverty of blackness" and "the weight of womanhood" (16) stimulates acts of resistance. For the central group of women characters, these take the form of doublings, deformations and, at times, recreative substitutions of authoritative meaning. Dangarembga shows that those denied direct access to an dominant speaking position may, through the manipulation and distortion of language, achieve at least a muted self-representation. The educated Maiguru, who has had to choose between "self and security" (101), has developed a babyish babble, a way of excusing or forswearing her power and status while at the same time quietly retaining hold of, at least, her knowledge. In a very different way, Tambudzai's mother relies on the power of

cursing and denunciation to make her opinion known, vaunting women's time-honoured loquacity.

Aware at an early age of the travail and refusal involved in being female, Tambudzai incarnates doubleness. When her elder brother Nhamo dies, and she is granted the privilege of education in his stead, she becomes in fact a substitute, a kind of re-statement of a situation. So from the beginning of her narrative, she commands a double position or vision: that of her early powerlessness and that of being newly empowered; what she is and what she might have been. The time of settling in at the mission she describes as a reincarnation (92). Such doubleness of perspective facilitates a fluidity and perspicacity in language use, a 'bilinguality' or hybrid discourse that cross-cuts race, gender and class lines. In the following description of Nhamo's alienation from his people, she mediates between his thinly-veiled judgement of 'primitive' life at the homestead, and glancing pastiche evocations of the perfect modern mission home:

> Thus Nhamo was forced once a year to return to his squalid homestead, where he washed in cold water in an enamel basin or a flowing river, not in a bathtub with taps gushing hot water and cold; where he ate sadza regularly with his fingers and meat hardly at all, never with a knife and fork; where there was no light beyond the flickering yellow of candles and home-made paraffin lamps (6).

Later, when her own moment of reconciling mission and homestead comes, Tambudzai is able to express both her naive wonder and her estrangement in a ironic set-piece description of domestic chores. She interpellates her own more rudimentary knowledge of cleaning processes with the hard-sell phraseology of the marketplace:

> What dirt that could be removed from the lino was removed regularly by thorough scrubbing with a strong ammonia cleaner, which was efficient but chapped your hands much more roughly than ash dissolved in water from Nyamirira [the river at the homestead] ever did. The enamel of the cooker and the plastic of the fridge, although not shining, were white, and the kitchen sink gleamed greyly. This lack of brilliance was due, I discovered years later when television came to the mission, to the use of scouring powders which, though they sterilised 99 per cent of a household, were harsh and scratched fine surfaces (67).

In such subtly dialogic or double-voiced descriptions, Dangarembga relies on the technique of ironic citation, combining the occasional intentioned 'mis-reading' or subversive mimicry of a master's discourse, as Homi Bhabha might have it, with, at other moments, a knowing conjunction of dissimilar languages, often involving a disingenuous juxtaposition of different vocabularies. But, in addition to direct mimicry,[54] Dangarembga also allows a type of interference in her text, an admixture of her narrator's and other perspectives or voices. Such double-voicedness

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[54] She quotes parodically from the racist creed of White Rhodesian bureaucracy and from its medical lore (13, 201).

includes her use of Shona words or transliterations, or a Shona English idiom, in particular in direct speech, but extends also to the mingling of linguistic styles. The history of Tambudzai's family, for example, which is told in story-form, using folkloric imagery, is presented as though partially informed by the consciousness of her grandmother, the family's historian:

> Wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land....[They] were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less land for the people (18).

To quote another example, while Babamukuru remains Tambudzai's mentor and hero, he is addressed in terms reminiscent of traditional praising, yet, as the narrative unfolds, this type of adulation becomes, in the mouth of his grateful young protégée, conspicuously excessive and in the end seriously compromising: "We used to marvel at how benevolent [his] divinity was. Babamukuru was good. We all agreed on this. More significantly still, Babamukuru was right" (87).[55]

Both as narrator and as character, Tambudzai inhabits a type of linguistic palimpsest. It is a manifestation of her people's multi-layered and conflictual history of oppression, one to which Nyasha opens her eyes (63). Tambu's narrative demonstrates that voices and vocabularies are superimposed upon one another; the one language exists not by rights but in

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[55] See also 50 and 158-159.

lieu of another - historical circumstance has favoured its predominance. As a haunting image of her old home might be taken to suggest, Tambudzai's world is peopled by such historical ghosts or disembodied presences. The mirrors at the homestead "had now grown so cloudy with age that they threatened to show you images of artful and ancient spirits when you looked into them, instead of your own face" (62). By enacting this kind of double textual awareness, Dangarembga's narrative closely corresponds to Kristevan evocations of transgressive language, that is, as occupying boundaries, as mediating gaps. Nervous Conditions is a self-consciously transitional novel, balanced between historical periods, and different narrative and gender perspectives. It interrogates singleness, the authoritative voice, whether of the present black patriarch, as represented by Babamukuru, or the absent, but equally commanding white rulers of the land.

The transitional or double perspective of the marginalised, though it may allow subversive insights, also represents instability, and can therefore be highly self-destructive. Transitional figures may either gravitate to a more secure single position, or find themselves struggling to survive the self-splitting that doubleness can entail. Nhamo, who, even when back at the homestead, "forgets" his Shona, and so distances himself from his own family and culture, is representative of the first position; Nyasha, who seeks to

look both ways, favouring English, and yet retaining a strong sense of the loss of her people's culture, enacts the second. Disruptive hybridity turns inward on its proponent. The symbolism of these two characters in the novel is confirmed and fulfilled when Nhamo, the self-denier, dies, and Nyasha, the culturally schizophrenic, falls severely ill.

Nyasha's situation, because of her experience of double allegiance and double exclusion, is especially important. In her case, bilinguality is strongly weighted in favour of English, not simply because it is the language of cultural sophistication, or the one she has grown up with, but also because it has become the medium of the individualism she has acquired in Europe. It was by way of English that she first developed a vocabulary of human rights, and of feminist self-assertion (83, 96, 115, 174). It is not only her lack of fluency in Shona, therefore, but also her refusal to submit to custom, or to a subservient female role, that alienates her family and relatives, who interpret this behaviour as impoliteness and disobedience. Language, again, is the medium for this resistance: Tambudzai points out that "in three years [Nyasha] had still not learnt the correct way of greeting her elders": she "grunted a greeting with a sad lack of technique" (99).

Always a little ahead of Tambudzai both in her uncompromising interrogation of modes of power and submission, and in her rejection of half-truths and dissembling, Nyasha in Nervous Conditions is a questing figure. Stirred by an "obstinate idealism" (179), her desire is to go on "moving and striving towards some state that she had seen and accepted a long time ago" (152). Her difficulty is that, opposed to 'traditional' injustices and domination, she also entertains a strong sense of the cultural ambivalence to which her Western-style individualism and Sixties feminist rhetoric commit her. Though she may repeatedly resist submitting to her father's stern rule (112-116; 158-159), she also comprehends the problems of being a "hybrid" (78 - the phrase is her own), of the emotional distress and self-hatred that comes with "progress". If she is insolently vocal with her father, her cultural insecurity or lack of know-how silence her in the presence of her family. Just as Tambudzai must learn new social forms in coming to the mission, Nyasha, during visits, carefully watches her homestead relatives: "She said little, but sometimes her lips would move to rehearse the words when someone used complicated language" (52).

With her sense of split cultural allegiance, it is given to Nyasha to issue what must be one of the most informed and forceful feminist statements in African women's writing. Very soon after Tambudzai observes that the conflicts involving

Nyasha all "[come] back to this question of femaleness" (116), Nyasha delivers the following justification:

> [W]hen you've seen things differently you want to be sure you're adjusting to the right thing. You can't go on all the time being whatever's necessary. You've got to have some conviction, and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You're trapped (117).

She realises both how important it is to have the power of self-determination, and yet, with the example of her mother and her aunts before her, she sees that the "underdog" position may appear right because either habitual and normal or more secure (101-102). Though the depth of her conviction does not allow her to admit to the position of cultural orphan, earlier incidents have shown that included in the idea of "being whatever's necessary" is that of a communal belonging and duty which her own individualism denies her. The same resistance to subordination, qualified by a double cultural and ethical awareness, inform Nyasha's protest of her second-class status as colonised and black. On the one hand her distance even from her peers is of her own creation; she has worked at maintaining her English accent at the cost of her Shona. But she also feels that: "It's bad enough...when a country gets colonised, but when the people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (147).

For Nyasha, this difficult double-bind does lead to a near-ending when her self-imposed starvation results in breakdown. Significantly, her form of protest is conventionally middle-class or Western, but the rhetoric at her moment of collapse expresses a Fanonesque anger at loss of self. Again, the language here, with its mimicry and double-voicing, and also its contusion of pronouns, embodies the breakages and ambivalences of exclusion:

> 'I don't want to do it, Tambu, really I don't, but it's coming, I feel it coming.' Her eyes dilated. 'They've done it to me....It's not their fault. They did it to them too. You know they did,' she whispered. 'To both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it's not his fault, he's good.' Her voice took on a Rhodesian accent. 'He's a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir.... Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Takesure. All of us. They've deprived you of him, him of him, ourselves of each other (200).

But, though history has her locked in contradictions, Nyasha refuses to grovel. In her fit of delirious rage and defiance, she avenges herself upon her history book, attempting to destroy this sign of the white man's power, inscribed in his words. The imagery she uses is again of trapping: "They've trapped us. They've trapped us. But I'm not a good girl. I won't be trapped" (201).

If this is Nyasha's fate, how is it that her cousin and historical equal, Tambudzai, manages to avoid the same trauma? Though she may be more diffident and, at first, more naive, Tambu, too, receives the whiteman's education, learns his

language, and is required to submit to Babamukuru's authoritative word. When Nyasha shows Tambu that "there [are] other directions to be taken" (152), she discovers unimagined possibilities for self-expression and self-making. She stands up to Babamukuru over the question of her parents' wedding, and moves steadily further away from the way of life at the homestead, her mother's apathy and the abdication of will that this represents (120 and 123). She also becomes aware of the self-division to which her education and chosen mode of development commit her, of both its exhilarations and its dangers. At the time of her "reincarnation" in Babamukuru's home:

> I was meeting, outside myself, many things that I had thought about ambiguously...things that had made my mother wonder whether I was quite myself, or whether I was carrying some other presence in me (93).

These ambiguities of experience are expressed in an appropriately oppositional way, as at once an absolute gain in and as a loss of power: "It was a centripetal time, with me at the centre, everything gravitating towards me. It was a time of sublimation with me as the sublimate" (93). Yet doubleness can lead to intense discomfort. Over the issue of the wedding:

> my mind raced and spun and ended up splitting into two disconnected entities that had long frightening arguments with each other, very vocally, there in my head, about what ought to be done, the one half maniacally insisting on going,

> the other half equally maniacally refusing to consider it (167).

Like Nyasha, though less ferociously, and, characteristically, more in the interests of social accommodation, Tambudzai also turns her transitional awareness against herself. To fit in at the mission, and to avoid thinking through the "treacherous mazes" of "self-confrontation," Tambu takes on the part of the "poor female relative" (116).

It may be that Tambu is spared Nyasha's anguish precisely because of her palimpsestic personal history. Nyasha rages against a history of deprivation and self-denial; Tambu has not lived the same lack. Her experience has been genuinely multi-layered, transitional and hybrid. Of Nyasha she observes:

> Nyasha knew nothing about leaving....She did not know what essential parts of you stayed behind no matter how violently you tried to dislodge them in order to take them with you (173).

Where Nyasha intellectually appreciates the value of cultural continuity, and the worth of the indigenous, for Tambu these are part of her actual experience. Her cultural alienation and quest for the white man's education, though bringing with it problems of divided allegiance, may be characterised as a departure but not a denial, a willed moving away from, but certainly not, as it is in Nyasha's case, an helpless discovery of personal emptiness. Witness to her brother's cultural impoverishment, for Tambu growth is not the

cancellation of past history but an accretion of layers of experience which remain coincident with one another: knowing Shona, yet mastering English; remembering her grandmother's narratives, yet reading Enid Blyton. This experience of doubleness is as much part of the condition of native as is psychological trauma. Dangarembga's perceptions here are again aligned with those of Okri: to be mastered is to mediate between two kinds of perception, two or more languages. Yet the actively transitional position is one which, though perhaps requiring of its proponents certain compromises, as it does of Tambu, also holds scope for greater self-sufficiency and control. In a context of self-loss and dispossession, to live out one's choices, yet to retain a sense of alternatives, is, as Tambu herself puts it, to find the loopholes that make things easier (179), or the most equitable ways of enacting Nyasha's ideal, that of "transmuting the present into the possible" (178).

The dialogic or interactive nature of Nervous Conditions is confirmed in its responsiveness to other literary discourses or, half-remembering Wilson Harris, its susceptibility to textual interference. In this it demonstrates one of the defining features of new post-colonial writing: the sense of experience as deeply textual, or indeed literary; and also the text's awareness of its status as construct, as text. Labels to this textuality are provided in

the literary titles with which Dangarembga indexes her narrative. Nyasha is introduced into the narrative bearing Lady Chatterley's Lover, an appropriately literary novel, as she points out, but one which she uses as a placard to inaugurate her own tale of defiance (75 and 81). The reference to Tambu's Grade Seven test on Louisa M. Alcott's Little Women ironically posits the normative world-view or 'set text' against which Dangarembga implacably writes her own account, "the story of the four women whom I loved" (204), women whose stature is far from endearingly "little" or decorously subordinate. Already with these single literary signifiers, as with her title and epigraph, Dangarembga demonstrates her discursive percipience, an awareness of the "condition of native" (as in the epigraph) as highly textual, as inscribed and reinscribed in the homilies and histories of the coloniser, composed via his literary topoi. The Africa of Nervous Conditions is no pristine world, untouched by 'man', or unscripted, an oral domain only. If colonialism was in many ways a taxonomic and cartographic enterprise, the object of which was to name, chart, catalogue and so contain the unknown and unruly, Dangarembga's response is to wedge her own narrative in between the existing meanings, rehearsing the given forms in order to change them. She would write a Bildungsroman, following the growth of one individual, but instead of a single protagonist she selects as her main actors sets of doubles. She points out that the biography of one

must needs be predicated upon the story of the group: Tambu's narrative is also, as she recognises, the "story of four women," while the account of their failures and fortitude equally includes a portrait of the patriarch, Babamukuru.

Yet the textual attentiveness of Nervous Conditions is perhaps most clearly displayed in its being offered, in a way as a whole utterance, in a literary 'conversation' with another writer, Dangarembga's compatriot and close peer, Dambudzo Marechera. Dangarembga's narrative can be read as resonant with responses and references to Marechera's most well-known publication, the collection of sketches and short stories, The House of Hunger (1978).[56] Like Dangarembga, though preceding her by some years, Marechera chronicles, in semi-autobiographical form (in particular in the long, eponymous "The House of Hunger") adolescent black life in UDI Rhodesia of the Seventies. More urban, more working-class than Dangarembga, he gives more vehement expression to the gut-deep disgust or spleen characteristic of that time. His perspective also stands apart from hers in its self-conscious maleness: not only spleen but memories of sexual rejection are given vent in evocations of women prominently marked by anger or clinical distaste. Violence, too, actively aggressive or self-inflicted, born of madness, despair, or black rage,

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[56] Dambudzo Marechera, The House of Hunger (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989).

predominates (perhaps most disturbingly in the cat-killing incident in "The Writer's Grain" (HH 109-111)). However, as the symbol contained in his title suggests, Marechera's site of growing-up, his mother's home with its emblematic enclosures, strictures, and suffering, in several ways corresponds to the crucial areas of Dangarembga's mission account, the containment and constriction of Nyasha's spirit. Dangarembga, too, describes houses, both homestead and mission, as places of familial stress and political distress, the forcing grounds of a vicious history (HH 1, 3, 7).[57]

Especially significant in the interchange that Dangarembga seeks with Marechera is his self-conscious literariness: she has chosen a correspondent whose perception of reality as saturated by literature, in particular that of the colonial school and university canon, is perhaps even more intense and vigilant than her own. This perception coincides in both writers with an awareness of the intersecting oppressions of the colonised condition, the contradictions of which irrupt in the ambivalent assimilation of the white man's education. More extravagantly than Dangarembga, Marechera everywhere tags his narratives with literary allusions ranging

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[57] For Marechera the House of Hunger becomes an emblem of the oppressed and disturbed mind while for Dangarembga the disturbance in the house is, more literally, Nyasha's 'artificial' hunger.

from Homer to T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence.[58] He presents himself as chief exhibit in a demonstration that textuality shapes the condition of native. Yet this display, as with Nyasha's perfect English and endless reading, forms a protective skin of bravado covering an inner insecurity and cultural confusion.

In Marechera and Dangarembga metaphors of pain and leit-motifs of literariness point to more substantial conjunctions - correspondences which are perhaps underlined in their both quoting from Fanon in titles (See Marechera's "Black Skin, What Mask," HH 93-99). They make of his defining complexes, diagnostic narrative. As in Nyasha's case, the first-person narrator of "House of Hunger" perceives that speaking English severs connections with family and culture. His mother's response is as blunt and uncompromising as that of Tambu's:

> "How dare you speak in English to me," she said crossly. "You know I don't understand it, and if you think because you're educated..."
> She hit me again.
> "I'm not speaking in Eng- " I began, but stopped as I suddenly realised that I was talking to her in English (HH 13).

And his reaction repeats Nyasha's desperate attempt to destroy the salient emblems of the white culture that has her in its thrall:

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[58] HH 15, 17, 27, 36, 56, 58 give a rough sampling. As was discovered also in Chapter Three, given that literary knowledge is presented as influential, the domination of male authors in the canon no doubt helped to form Marechera's perception of himself as unambiguously a male author.

> I was trying not to cry. I jumped up and rushed back into the room, and dragging my box from under the bed took out my English exercise-books and began to tear them up with a great childish violence (HH 13-14).

As the narrator of another tale puts it: "I had nothing but books inside my head, and they were burning me" ("Thought tracks in the snow," HH 144).

As with Nyasha, things come to a head at the time of exams, when the successful assimilation of white knowledge must displayed and tested. In both cases, medical help is required: as Fanon so cogently pointed out, the colonised's attempts to acquire a 'true' normative self, produce neurosis and mental breakdown. Marechera's narrator experiences classic symptoms of self-splitting - incoherence, paranoia and guilt - tellingly expressed once again as a collision of languages. Pivoting as it does around a conflict of voices, his description of the time of neurosis is worth quoting at some length:

> It seemed to me something was taking over my body; the images and symbols I had for so long taken for granted had taken upon themselves a strange hue; and I was losing my grasp of simple speech. I began to ramble, incoherently, in a disconnected manner. I was being severed from my own voice. I would listen to it as a still, small voice coming from the huge distances of the mind. It was like this: English is my second language, Shona my first. When I talked it was in the form of an interminable argument, one side of which was always in Shona. At the same time I would be aware of myself as something indistinct but separate from both cultures (HH 30).

This image of an argument recurs in Tambu's description of inner turmoil in Nervous Conditions. Her sense of elusive hauntings - literal reflections of wayward and forbidden selves - appears, though more vividly, as a manifestation of paranoia in "Burning in the Rain," with the ape-image in the mirror (HH 83-87), and in the doppelganger experience of "The Writer's Grain" (HH 100-115).[59]

For Dangarembga, as for Marechera, not only language, but history is a troubled area of contest and denial, a "burnt-out place", as Marechera puts it, littered with the destroyed or suppressed remains of "the stories of black heroes among whom my story was merely one more skinlightening pain" (HH 25). His laments over the absence of such chronicles sound like a refrain throughout "House of Hunger." However, at the significant point of historical interpretation, similarities begin to give pre-eminence to important differences. It is an obvious contrast with Dangarembga and one that illustrates a dominant theme of this thesis, that Marechera, to redeem a lost black past, looks to the experience of male heroes as definitive. In doing so he is clearly influenced by Civil Rights and Black Consciousness ideas, yet for all his Armah-like cynical disaffection

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[59] Other correspondences with Nervous Conditions lie in the evocation of spleen through images of unnatural ingestion (HH 118-120, 139), and through the attempt to make the self over (HH 83-87).

regarding the politics of a new Zimbabwean nation (HH 44, 45, 59, 75, 144), the redemptive efforts of heroic men - the metonymic actors in the historical arena - remain sacrosanct. As with Soyinka, a disconnection from national affairs per se is coupled with a reiteration of male and female national stereotypes. Marechera, too, casts the majority of the women he describes in the one-dimensional roles either of victims or of bitches/sluts: he embodies his disapprobation regarding the Rhodesian state in the image of a whore (HH 49).[60]

In the light of these differences, one can say that Dangarembga, in her concern to match her text to Marechera's - so grounding her narrative and enlarging her meanings - is intent also to 'cover' and displace Marechera's writings, to rework his text. The one response, the matching or quotation, situates and enables the other, the revision. Both writers assemble on their pages a variety of significant styles - the literary and the oral, the languages of the crazed and of disseverance. Marechera is iconoclastic in using hybridity to defy literary and other orthodoxies (of black or Zimbabwean nationalism, of the national themes of African literature), yet Dangarembga, if anything, further develops the potentialities of partiality and dissent. She attempts, in the first instance, like her female predecessors, to unlock

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60 Such evocations in Marechera are tempered by his awareness of the multiple exclusion of women in nationalist politics (44).

women's experiences from stereotype and silence, dismantling the gender dichotomies which constrain Marechera's evocations. Yet, in so doing, she also shows that women's articulation, precisely because multiple and vari-coloured, is also conflictual, often radically divisive, involving defeat and limited victory.

It may seem problematic that, for Dangarembga, the representation of difference demands in part an acceptance of compromise: Nervous Conditions ends with Nyasha's display of "kamikazi [sic] behaviour" (201), and Tambu's mother's warning, "It's the Englishness....It'll kill them all." Tambu looks forward to a slow, unobstrusive growth of awareness, not a victorious vindication of womanhood or the African past (203-204). Yet compromise, a partial retreat, the scaling down of hope, can be interpreted as an expression of that more sober, pragmatic response to history and national politics which Dangarembga shares with other writers of the second moment of liberation. Also, less pessimistically, her interest in difference, compounded by her strong awareness of textuality - its malleability, palimpsestic thickness and rich alchemy of meanings - commits her to full and in the main realist representation: Lucia must balance Maiguru, Tambu Nyasha. That her tale is not involved with public male politics is related to this interest in difference, though it is also a manifestation, as it was with her foremothers, of an

involvement in the everyday, the so-called mundane, the existence of Africa's women - that "most unknown (or rather unsought)...of all concerns."[61] In an apposite gesture, then, Dangarembga names the most nearly legitimate child of Tambu's parents, Dambudzo (183 - he is born just before the wedding). By contrast, it is the 'illegitimate', 'unimportant', womanly experience of Tambudzai and the other women which makes up her own story.

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[61] Ama Ata Aidoo, "To be an African Woman Writer," Criticism and Ideology 156.

CONCLUSION

Echoing earlier words from Gayatri Spivak and Chinua Achebe, Frederic Jameson has spoken of literature as a "process of form-giving," a way of shaping circumstance or of fashioning confused phenomena into comprehensible narrative: "plot falls into history."[1] At the time of African independence, to speak very generally once again, nationalism, its own organising concepts cross-hatched out of myth and historical legend, served as an authoritative and persuasive source of such analytic fictions. Within the proscenium of the national drama, national inheritors and literary sons, composing heroic epics of their people's spirit, and paeans to the National Mother, incarnation of that spirit, won identities as saviours, seers, and spokesmen of their nation. Yet where, as time went on, the plots of these dramas did not always seem to match present history, and where tellers appeared more interested in their own self-making than in the redeemed souls of their peoples, certain of nationalism's fictions lost their power to convince. Such developments did not, however, undermine the power of story or indeed disqualify nationalist plots, in particular those involving the emergence of the soul of the oppressed. What happened

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[1] Frederic Jameson, "Figural Relativism," and "Criticism in History," Situations of Theory 155, 127.

instead was that the styles, symbols, and configurations of characters in the older tales were modified or changed. As the Old Man from Abazon observed: "the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior....the story owns and directs us."[2] Where one group of towncriers falls silent, others are possessed by visions of hope and speak in their place. The narratives discussed in Chapters Five and Six offered different 'forms' - plots and tropes - through which a post-independence African reality might be interpreted: Farah's fragmented and recovered bodies politic, Okri's "urban occult" - conquerors as "transplanters" of cultural influence and the oppressed as "farmers of dreams"[3]; Achebe's own idea of the mundane infused with Mystery; Dangarembga's self-conscious tale of entrapment by plot and text; and, though more conventional because visibly part of a Marxist compendium of narratives, Iyayi's projection of the third force that might resist a Third World oppression.

Such form-giving is not uniform. As comparisons made in the discussion of the various exemplars of the revisionary novel might have intimated, two broad strains or trends can be distinguished in contemporary African fiction, that of 'metamorphosis' or transgression (literally dérèglement) broadly represented by Farah, Okri, and Dangarembga, and that

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[2] Achebe, Anthills of the Savannah 124.

[3] Okri, "Redreaming the world."

of 'mimesis' or realism, which is the way of Iyayi, and, to a certain extent, Achebe. A subsidiary trend is perhaps manifested in the textual self-awareness of Dangarembga, Farah, and Marechera. The distinctions between these two categories is very fine: the belief in the introjection of spirit which marks Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah is aligned with the dream-fascinations of the first group of writers, while Dangarembga's documentation of the experience of growing up under colonialism and patriarchy is in certain respects (probably intentionally) close to the realist style of Iyayi. There is also nothing very novel in the groupings. The basic contrast between the two trends would seem to embody the conventional distinction between a view of fiction as reproducing reality - in so far as that is deemed possible - and that of narrative as surpassing reality. 'Symbolists' have long been seen as opposed to 'realists', iconoclasts to traditionalists, and, depending on perspective, 'liars' to 'truth-seekers'. The contrast between the two kinds of writing was foreshadowed in Chapter Three, in the opposition between Soyinka's crafted language and mythic constructions, and the plainer style of the ideologues he criticises. It also subtended the analysis of women writers in Chapter Four, the emphasis there being on a writing paradoxically iconoclastic or 'unlawful' for its conversational and quotidian representations of 'women's time'.

Yet, in a somewhat contradictory way, what does seem to distinguish the division of categories is that both kinds of writing are granted a validity or adequacy of response, despite differential assessments. With the unravelling of the idealisms and dogmas of the time of independence, it is no longer so much the case that style or genre be prescriptively bound up with judgements regarding their authenticity, ideological position, or indeed nationalist commitment. Ideas of displacement and heterogeneity, incorporated into criticism, suggest that reality may be justly and evocatively represented from a variety of different perspectives. It is true that with the foregoing analysis weighted heavily in favour of revisioning and the new hermeneutic of story, the distinction between categories may appear determined and value-laden. To a certain extent this charge cannot be denied: this thesis sought ways of rescripting nationalist plots, of replacing the monologic with the plural. Yet, at the same time, criteria should not be confused. Though the conflation can easily be made, realism need not signify the reproduction of correct ideological responses or inherited wisdoms, nor does it disallow the questioning of political categories and identities, such as those bequeathed by nationalism, and including those inscribed by gender.

The idea upon which the discussion of contemporary African writing was predicated, one which in general has

governed the thesis, was that revisioning is purposive and open-ended. What the stories of the Eighties attempt to do, and in this the two groups of writers concur, is to find other ways of imaging society, new paradigms where those used to invent independence have proved unfeasible. It is this general quest, too, which is changing the criteria of aesthetic judgement. In a fundamental way, for both groups of writers, the nation-state as conceived in the Fifties and Sixties has become a difficult term. The status of the existing African nation as true or as right is questioned: the subject of its constructedness, its composition by a number of men working at a particular time, is broached; unresolved and unrecorded history, that which lay outside the rubric of national narrative, comes into prominence. Hence the dominant motivation - which is also a conceit - governing this writing is that of rewriting: Dangarembga, Marechera and, to an extent, Okri were seen as reworking or adapting Fanon, the exponent of Sixties revolutionary nationalism; Farah's hero Askar reinscribes maps, that is, images and records of history; Iyayi seeks to write the history of Biafra from a different ideological perspective; and Achebe rewrites his own novel of the nationalist Sixties, A Man of the People. As was seen in Chapter Four, writers like Flora Nwapa and Bessie Head, representing the 'silent'/oral lives of women, composed new texts of experience and challenged the authoritative subject positions assumed by early nationalist spokesmen.

Given similarities such as these, the main difference of approach between the two groups of writers is perhaps that for the second, the realists, the nation remains a practical and present 'fact', though one that may be modified with a change in economic/political structure or thought, whereas for the first, though the nation may remain 'out there' as a bounding reality, the quest for "new stories", "new nervous systems", is pursued in 'non-national' spaces - dream, personal lives, "unhistoric acts," vision. In general, therefore, if nationalist literary discourse as handed down from an earlier generation of writers is starting to undergo fundamental changes, then change is interpreted differently, on the one hand signifying single, determined displacements, on the other, dramatic dispersion or more fundamental transmutation.

As this characterisation might suggest, realist writing, such as that of Achebe, is also not inimical to the subversion of gender biases. Indeed, in the category of transformative writing, Okri's stories were noted for their relative absence of gender awareness. For both groups, a sensitivity to gender stereotyping or the ironic citation of conventional signs of gender difference, can signify a search for new political understanding, or mark the inauguration of that search. With interest in post-colonial literature generally turning to the redemption of marginality, to the petits récits of multifarious lives, to the idea that the

centre is everywhere, New Woman figures, self-determining, fully-realised, signifying the reclamation of the Other, challenge univocal aesthetics and hieratic social forms. Women as subject selves, proud, strong and complex characters like Tambudzai, Misra, Monica, Beatrice, stand as indices of revisioning, or again of the desire to effect the same. The danger here, as was perceived in the writing of Achebe and, to a certain extent, Farah, despite its significant advances, is that women figures continue to serve as the metaphoric ground of a discursive shift, and do not fully escape the emblematic role that nationalism allotted to them. These difficulties are compounded where Pan-Africanist ideals and icons are brought back into fiction as ways of conceiving a new politics for Africa. The gender commonplaces of nationalist language, long taken for granted, are left in place. Though in less obvious and offensive ways than before, Woman may still be invoked as the incarnation of the renewed body politic, or its spiritual prefigurement.

The difficulty seems to be that the various discursive displacements - whether of nationalist representation, or of gender iconography - are generally still seen as discrete, or as unrelated, whereas they are in fact tightly bound up in one another. Gender and nation have long functioned as mutually dependent symbolic constructions; gender has furnished imaginative vehicles for nationalism; Pan-Africanist

nationalism has embedded the bedrock icon of the continental mother. It is no doubt because revisioning is not seen as commensurate with 'regendering' that neither Okri nor Iyayi, as writers of a second moment, appear overly concerned with the portrayal of female characters. What this would seem to suggest is that a thorough rewriting of old fiction is most resonantly effected through coupling textual self-awareness with a political sense of history as contest, complexity and exclusion. It is this sort of awareness that is evinced by Farah in his canny allegories of nationalist allegory, or by Head and Bâ, for example, whose personal histories of exclusion of their own accord, as it were, displace accepted forms of political representation. It is this awareness, too, that distinguishes Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions with its split subjects, gestures of reinscription, and multiple representations of gender. Yet Dangarembga, too has her silences. The nation, or larger body politic, is the absent signifier of her narrative.

It was pointed out in the discussion of Flora Nwapa that "style", whether transformative or realist, can be described as a middle-class phenomenon. Textual self-awareness, as a narrative mode, a source of revisionary story, might be spoken of in the same manner. Like realism, it depends for its existence on an economics of literariness, requiring not simply literacy and seclusion, but sufficient literary

knowledge to create the interwoven textures of a thick complex narrative. It is inviting to speculate about fiction as supplying, in a self-reflexive way, new historical plots in place of national dramas, or to see narrative as assuming a central place in re-imagining political identity. At the same time, however, Third World realities - poverty, leadership crises, disputed national borders - do not disappear. Rather, where fiction would become paradigmatic or visionary, the space between text and reality gapes wider, being further reinforced by the class and geographical distances that may exist between writers and their Third World societies. The estrangement between writers and "80 per cent of the African people who enjoy no literacy," which Lewis Nkosi once described in terms of an intense, literal anxiety of authorship, persists.[4] Story that would govern as well as simply escorting us exists purely on its own terms, and within strictly textual boundaries. However wildly recreative, it cannot bring complete deliverance. Fictional revisioning can only ever be partial.

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[4] Lewis Nkosi, "The Language Crisis," Tasks and Masks 1.

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